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THE GREAT TRAIN STORY ROLLS INTO MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY

Model railroad exhibit boasts more than 30 trains on 1,400 feet of track

CHICAGO— *The Great Train Story*—a permanent exhibit at the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago (MSI) that opened in 2002—boasts a 3,500 square foot layout that depicts the railroad’s winding journey between Chicago and Seattle, passing through the Midwest, the Plains States, the Rockies, the Cascades, and into the Pacific Northwest. Along the way, more than 30 trains are involved in industries as diverse as grain commodities, raw materials for manufacturing, consumer goods for import and export, lumber, apples and tourism.

With more than 1,400 feet of track, the new model train includes an excess of 500 scale structures; 192 custom-made buildings including a 14-foot Sears Tower; realistic terrain modeled from actual locations and dotted with thousands of trees and shrubs; 28 bridges over realistic waterways; as well as a number of interactive activities, including the opportunity to drive a Metra Train, open a drawbridge over the Chicago River, harvest timber in the Cascades Range and bore a tunnel through the Rocky Mountains!

How the Exhibit Was Created

It took 40 people over 12 months to build *The Great Train Story*. The project team included designers, painters, architects, copywriters, project managers and people from a spectrum of professions—all bringing their talents together.

Research began on the exhibit by watching visitors interact with the previous model railroad. Observational studies provided developers and designers insight into how visitors interact with a miniature railroad. They found that children liked to follow the train as it moved around the track. They also noted that it was difficult for our guests to see into the middle of the layout, making it hard to see all the action.

The design and development team then continued their research by taking an 11-day train trip across the country. They knew Chicago was “hub” for railroading in the United States, so it seemed logical to make it a trip between Chicago and another major city. At first Los Angeles was explored, but Seattle offered more picturesque scenery, and the benefit of being able to explain and explore intermodal harbor operations.

The team decided that the main theme of the exhibit would be the various ways that trains are used to haul materials. The stories they told in the layout would be elements of that theme: how trains haul passengers, grain and raw materials; and how trains are part of a larger, intermodal network of transportation systems.

After choosing the stories they would tell in the exhibit, the lead designer laid out the stories geographically. After 25 iterations, the final serpentine shape you see today was selected. This shape allows you to access the exhibition in ways that were not possible before. It also provides for varied changes in scenery, giving you the opportunity to turn a corner and see something completely new and exciting. Color renderings and 3-D models of the layout helped refine the design.

The scenery is interpreted by labels mounted to the handrail. Each label describes what is happening at every location on the layout and provides historical references, additional photos or facts about what you are viewing. The project team also wanted our guests to have the ability to interact with the layout. To do this, they added push buttons to many of the labels, allowing you to do things like move a container from a ship to a train.

Further location research helped the designers make the scenes on the railroad as realistic as possible. The sand dunes on the layout are modeled after the Indiana Dunes. The Red Line subway station at Chicago and State is

recreated brick for brick, and is populated to reflect the individuals who were waiting for the train at 1:56 pm on April 3, 2002.

The designers gathered their ideas and created drawings of each area on the layout as well as overall drawings of the entire layout. These drawings were turned into CAD (Computer Aided Design) drawings, which were shared with the exhibit's fabricators.

The History of Model Railroads at MSI

One of the smallest complete railroad systems, the Museum of Science and Industry's original model railroad was the largest of its kind in the world when it opened in 1941. The railroad covered 2,340 square feet of floor space and was built on O gauge 2 track, which is 1/48 scale. The various scenes on the model railroad illustrated the role of the railroad within U.S. industry and agriculture throughout the desert southwest. It included 1,000 feet of track and 40 switches operated by an automatic control board.

When it closed in May of 2002, our model railroad had been in service for over six decades, serving as one of the most well-known and beloved exhibits in the Museum. It had seen several enhancements over the years as new technologies helped railroads to operate more safely and efficiently. It was also one of the first railroads in the country to run "diesel" engines as they replaced steam engines.

Today, the Museum's railroad exhibit, *The Great Train Story*, once again tells the modern railroad story. The newer layout is 50 percent larger than the original railroad and has the ability to operate more than 30 trains, rather than the original 10.

The Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago (MSI) offers thousands of fun and interactive exhibits and one-of-a-kind, world-class experiences to inspire the inventive genius in everyone. Through its Center for the Advancement of Science Education, MSI also aspires to a larger vision: to inspire and motivate children to achieve their full potential in science, technology, medicine and engineering. Come visit and find *your* inspiration! MSI is open every day except December 25, and regular hours are 9:30 to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday. The Museum is supported in part through the generosity of the people of Chicago through the Chicago Park District. For more information, find MSI online at msichicago.org or call (773) 684-1414 or (800) GO-TO-MSI outside of the Chicago area.

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