

Train Station "At-tracks" Customers

Customers of May's Flowers & Gifts, St. George, Utah, are on the right track — in more ways than one. In addition to enjoying the shop's flowers and novelty items, they receive special "passes" to Carolyn and Walder May's "Railroad Museum."

People come from throughout the area to see the model train museum, built in the attic of the May house, which adjoins the shop. The two-room museum is ringed with tracks, dotted with trains, and decorated with a lively collection of antique railroad paraphernalia. For example, there's a life-sized train station ticket booth suspended outside one of the attic windows, with a mannequin ticket seller inside the booth. Above the train tracks, flashing lights — some are real cobalt ones from the Santa Fe line — and ringing bells add more touches of realism.

"Station Master" Walder May has incorporated modern technology into the old-fashioned train display. All the lights and track switches are controlled by mechanisms he adapted from pinball machines. Another modern idea: he rigged the system to run for 20 minutes on a quarter, then turn itself off. That way, the florist can run downstairs to wait on customers without having to worry about turning off the train set. Also, because the trains run automatically, he can admonish youngsters to keep "hands off."

"Quite a few of our station visitors are children," May observes. "We see a lot of youth groups, such as Scout troops and pre-school classes. Because there isn't an actual railroad line through the town, some of the youngsters have never seen a train, so my station is a real thrill for them."

The train museum's popularity has helped the florist's business indirectly, he reports. Many mothers and other potential floral customers hear of May's Flowers from children who've visited the museum. Also, future buyers come into the shop to browse while their youngsters remain upstairs, enthralled by the model trains.

The Mays' two children are happy to be involved with the attic railroad display. "Conductor" David helps run the trains, while daughter Heather provides period entertainment with antique marionettes.

"Our trains and marionette show are fun for people of all ages to see," May states. "If any Teleflorists happen to pass by — the shop is on the road between Las Vegas and Salt Lake City — they should be sure to drop in." •

PHOTO MONTAGE: 1) Railroad crossing decorations attract passersby to train museum; 2) "Train Conductor" David May watches the action; and 3) "Station Master" Walder May keeps system running smoothly.

