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## Eiteljorg offering Jingle Rails, even during pandemic

By Taylor Wooten TheStatehouseFile.com

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The Jingle Rails exhibit at the Eiteljorg runs through Jan. 11. (Taylor Wooten / TheStatehouseFile.com)

INDIANAPOLIS — The nine trains featured at Eiteljorg Museum’s Jingle Rails exhibition chug on in spite of COVID-19 that continues to spread across the state.

The annual exhibit is entering its 11th year with some big changes, including reserved time slots for all visitors, a one-way, socially-distanced path and Plexiglass shields separating people. The trains and their all-natural settings will be available to view through Jan. 18 in 15-minute visits.

Jingle Rails: The Great Western Adventure showcases the G-scale model trains as they whirl past familiar landmarks both in nearby downtown Indianapolis and in the western United States. The attraction, created by Applied Imagination in Alexandria, Kentucky, is meant to remind visitors of past family vacations or feel the joy of traveling, said Bryan Corbin, public relations manager of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art.

The scenery is crafted from all-natural materials such as bark, tree roots, pinecones, acorns, seed pods and honeycomb. The trains run on 1,200 feet of track for seven hours a day, except for Sunday when they run for five. The hardworking miniature trains require frequent maintenance by a team of knowledgeable volunteers.

Mike Davis is one of these volunteers and has been for the last eight years. He said his love of trains began when he was young, but was more recently rekindled.

"I grew up in that generation where, your Christmas at about seven or eight years old, you got a model train and it stayed a big part of your life until about the time you get your driver's license," Davis said. "The trains go back in a box at mom and dad's house and they stay there, and mine did for about 40 years. And then we took them out, and that was just kind of like opening Pandora's box."

Davis said he enjoys pointing out very small details that the artists from Applied Imagination included in the piece, like tiny cooking fires in areas depicting Native American life.

The trains go through a lot of wear and tear, Davis said, because the models aren't meant to be moving for several hours a day. There are also larger incidents on occasion.

"I came in and I heard a mother say, 'Oh Billy, don't do that,'" Davis said. "And I looked and the train was going through the covered bridge. I didn't see anything wrong."

Davis said the child had detached the caboose from the rest of the train while it was going through the covered bridge, and he didn't notice until the front end of the train collided with the caboose in the tunnel.

Often, visitors return to see the exhibit for many years and notice the changes made, Davis said. For example, this year a display of Mesa Verde National Park will be lit up along with several hot air balloons constructed from leaves.

"I've seen every year for eight years that I've been here," Davis said. "And of course, the kids are growing now. Some older adults come back in year after year, and they can always pick up on the things that are new this year."

Applied Imagination touts 16 similar displays in libraries, museums and other locations across the U.S.

Tickets for the event are free for members, \$15 for adults, \$8 for ages 5 to 17, and free for children ages 4 and under and can be purchased at [www.Eiteljorg.org/JingleRails](http://www.Eiteljorg.org/JingleRails). Everyone, members included, need to schedule a time to see the trains.

Jingle Rails tickets also provide admission to the rest of the Eiteljorg Museum. Though Jingle Rails attendees may only spend 15 minutes at the exhibit, there is no time limit set for the rest of the museum.

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