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Countup...

As of today, 754 days have passed since March 8, when CCUSD Supt. Dr. Laura McGaughey received a letter from the County D.A. declaring three current School Board members had received excessive medical premium payments in the following amounts:
Bubar: \$36,951
Wolkowitz: \$16,155
Russell: \$8761

Drucker Waving Goodbye to Allied Trains — Next: Say 'Cheese' for Samy's Camera



Written by Ari L. Noonan
Wednesday, March 21, 2007

Exclusive

A golden era for the niche hobby of model trains and for Culver City will chug to a mutually satisfying stop in the coming weeks with owner Allen Drucker's sale of his business and the leasing of his signature property to separate parties.

Allied Trains is a child's paradise, which has an up side and a down side.



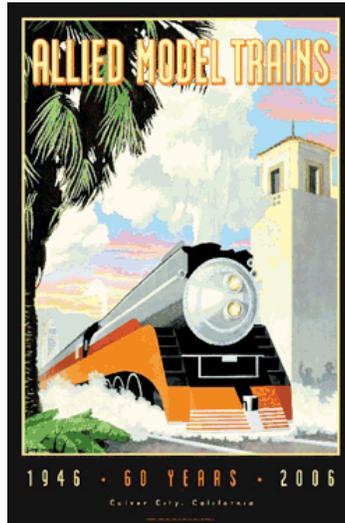
Making History and Magic

Happily and playfully housed within its instantly recognizable whitewashed building at the corner of Sepulveda Boulevard and Braddock Drive, Allied Trains is one of Culver City's most magical and famous businesses.

For decades, Allied Trains has telegraphed Culver City's presence and significance to the outside world.

Model train aficionados came to associate their favorite pastime with Culver City and Mr. Drucker, who surely knows all.





Samy's of Culver City

Samy's Camera, which has become the best-known camera store in the Southland in the last 30 years, is scheduled to move into the high-volume corner property the first of June.

Mr. Drucker estimated that Samy's Camera — headquartered in the Fairfax District, with stores in Venice, Santa Barbara, Santa Ana and Pasadena — will open for business some weeks later.

Approaching the final stages of negotiating the long-anticipated sale of his beloved business, Mr. Drucker expects to reach denouement and be free of all trappings by mid-May.

A Time to be Tired

"I have done this for 32 years, and now I am tired of it," Mr. Drucker said this morning.

The owner's attitude has been, he loved the business but it is time to go.

He has been seeking a prospective buyer on eBay.

"It is not a done deal yet," he said.

Short Move

Once the acquisition is official, a downsized version of Allied Trains will re-open nearby, on a Drucker property at 4371 Sepulveda.

Enthusiastically, Mr. Drucker is anticipating the coming stage of his life.

By no means is he entering retirement.

"I have never really had a vacation during the last 32 years," he said. "Never for more than one week."

He explained why.

"I can't leave the business and not worry about it," he said.

His Second Career

Plenty vigorous at this juncture in his late 50s, Mr. Drucker nevertheless is fatigued by the long run he has enjoyed as a captain of the model train industry and by the shifting vagaries of his specialized business.

Times have changed.

He is eager to adapt to a new drumbeat and a new schedule.

He is clearly ready to move on from What Was to What Will Be.

In the late spring, Mr. Drucker anticipates striding across a bridge. His destination will be a very different career.

Over the years, he has fallen in love with Orange County.

But the Drive...

Driving to the Westside from the coastal area of Orange County, fighting through slow, thick traffic, has worn him down.

He won't miss making those exhausting trips.

Seven years ago, with professional assistance, he built a home in Newport Beach.

Mr. Drucker has been preparing to build a second home.

"If that goes well," he said, "I would like to build another."

In the meantime, "rental income will support me," he told the newspaper.

A Pause for a Salute

At this point, there should be a pause for the sake of historicity.

Mr. Drucker's departure will mark a monumental moment in Culver City annals.

For more than three decades, he has been the ultimate trainologist, the quintessential master of everything anyone on earth ever has needed to know about model trains.

Afternoon of Reflections

On a winter's afternoon a few Fridays ago, Mr. Drucker, who would be equally relaxed in repose or in crisis, took a seat in the majestic train station/office setting one floor above his business.

At length, he ruminated about his imminent prospects and his fulfilled past.

The owner of what is arguably Culver City's most unique business still was at an indefinite stage, looking for someone to make him an offer for his business.

Setting Made the Difference

Mr. Drucker's sentiments about the immediate future might have wafted away if he had uttered them while standing on a street corner.

But the solemnity of the setting changed everything.

The solemnity applied a more polished, meaningful sheen to his words.

Changing History

Issuing his daunting pronouncement from behind a gigantic mahogany desk in his museum-like office at the top of his famous building on Sepulveda Boulevard, the words resonated with the chilling ring of history.

Train history.

Culver City history.

One man's terribly long, terribly passionate love affair with trains.

Everything external, and much that is internal, about Allied Trains, bespeaks tradition and history.

History and Magnetism

The signal store inside the whitewashed building is a shrine to what once was but may never be again.

Erect and slender in late middle age, Mr. Drucker could easily be taken for Mr. Rogers, the late idol of early morning children's television.

But then large chunks of Allied Trains could be mistaken for something or someplace you first saw many years ago.

Face to Face with History

As soon as you are ushered into his museum-quality office, you recognize that the magnificent room is a real-life history book, a miniature replica of Union Station, circa 1936.

"It has a bit of a streamlined modern touch to it," Mr. Drucker says. "But it really is Spanish colonial revival."

Time to snap back to the reality of contemporary commerce.

Target Audience

Since Mr. Drucker made a career move and acquired Allied Trains as a young man in his middle 20s in 1975, "model trains have been primarily a baby boomer business.

"Baby boomers were probably the last generation interested in model trains. This is not to say no younger people are involved.

"But very, very few post-baby boomer people get into this hobby.

Where Are People in Middle?

"We rarely see anyone younger than 40 years old in here. We do sell slot-racing cars, which appeal to a younger audience.

"A lot of children come in who are from a year old to 5 or 6 years old.

"Their parents will say, 'Look, Johnny, do you want a train?' Any kid would say, 'Yeah. Great.'

"So they buy him the train, take it home and set it up. He looks at the train running in a circle for 2 minutes. Then he goes plays with his video game."

Going Back to Boyhood

Allen Drucker's boyhood experience, when he was growing up in Westchester, was starkly, happily, different.

He flashed back to the early 1950s.

"When my parents and I would be driving around L.A., the crossing gates would come down, the lights would start to flash" — here his voice rose dramatically — "I was excited. I was beside myself.

I couldn't control myself."

Excitedly, Mr. Drucker was s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g out his words for effect. Every syllable seemed to be made of very flexible rubber.

"The train was coming. This was t-h-e most exciting thing in the word."

Departing from personal custom, he suddenly gunned his speaking pace from 20

to 80 miles an hour.

It Was Always Love

“When I saw electric toy trains, that was it. The love was instant.

“That was my favorite toy in the entire world.

“When I was a year old, in 1949, my father went out and bought an electric train to run around the Christmas tree.

“I was not allowed to touch that until I was 9 years old.

“After that, I wanted a train. birthday, Christmas, whatever.. That lasted every year up until my mid-teens.”

There Are Limits

The love affair never cooled.

“I don’t do much, personally, with it as a hobby anymore because I do it all day long. But I still love trains,” Mr. Drucker said.

What drew young Allen, and then older, mature Allen to trains is less clear. “There is something about the mechanical aspect of trains, the fact it is something you always want to add to — and no matter who you are or what it is you have, there always is another piece you want.”

A Journey of Joy

Mr. Drucker was all the way back into his childhood.

“I had American Flyer trains,” he said.

“When the catalogue came out — about September, when new cars came out — I would wear that thing out in a week.”

Following Mr. Drucker’s so-pleasantly exciting vocal gyrations was like trailing a perpetually bouncing ball down a sloping sidewalk.

As the trip back home crystallized, his energy revved up.

Wanting and Affording

“I mean, I would look at all the things that were available. I wanted every one of them.”

But Mr. Drucker was born into a lower middle class family.

“My father couldn’t afford to buy everything I wanted,” the son said.

“He was an optician. He worked for my uncle, and later he had his own business.

“So he would always buy something for a train for me.

“But naturally, I wanted more.

Making a Case

“I would say, ‘Look, Dad, here is a great big new deluxe set that’s only a hundred dollars.’

“Instead, I would get a little pair of electric switch-tracks for nine-ninety-five.

“But he gave me what he could. Still, there was always the desire to have more.

“I guess every little kid who liked trains wanted to recreate the entire real railroad network, in miniature.

"Their speed and attractiveness appealed to me.

"When it came to locomotives, it was their size. You wanted the biggest one you could have. It would smoke and whistle."

Big Trains

For all of his passion for trains, Mr. Drucker did not entertain a desire to participate, to be an engineer.

"A lot of kids did," he said, "but I never made the connection.

"I rode the train a few times with my parents when I was a kid.

"The rides were enjoyable. But that was as far as it went.

In Reality

"Answering this question might be the first time I have ever thought about it.

"I never really put real trains and model trains together, even though I love real trains."

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