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PEOPLE

THE CITIZEN

Model of memories

Train layout by Auburn native, scientist captures city in 1950s

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You can take a man out of Auburn, but you can't take Auburn out of a man.

That is the case for Dr. Robert Vince, who described himself as very nostalgic. A native of the city, he now spends his time in the upper Midwest, hopping between his home in Minnesota and his 350-acre farm in Wisconsin. But he keeps Auburn with him at the farm – in the form of a sprawling model train layout that features the Hunter Dinerant, the "Genesee Beer" sign and other local landmarks.

The 40-by-60-foot layout also includes the Phoenix Building and its clock tower, Auburn Correctional Facility, the now-demolished Palace Theater and Marian Margaret's, a popular ice cream shop where Vince once worked. He and his team of model builders created the stroll down memory lane to not only capture the city of his childhood, but to pay homage to life in the 1950s at large.

"I love everything about the past," Vince, 83, told The Citizen. "A lot of these places aren't here anymore."

Vince, who graduated from East High School in 1958 and last visited the area six years ago for a class reunion, doesn't hesitate to stroll down memory lane himself. He reminisced about working as a school crossing guard, and at Dickman Farms in Owasco. He was still wearing his crossing guard uniform, he said with a laugh, when he went to the garden center asking for a summer job.

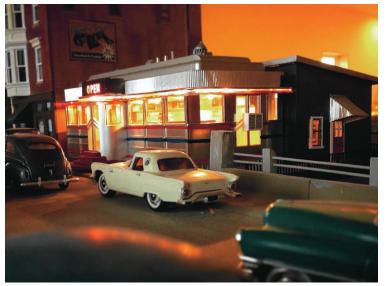
"I was a small guy and they called me 'Sheriff," he said. "Everyone was called by their nickname. They'd say, 'C'mon, Sheriff," and I'd go and collect my earnings for the day. They paid 60 cents per hour."

After graduating high school, Vince spent a year at what's now to a childhood Christmas in Au-Cayuga Community College and burn. went on to SUNY Buffalo, study-



Downtown Auburn is featured in a sprawling model train setup in Wisconsin by Auburn native Robert Vince.

PROVIDED PHOTOS



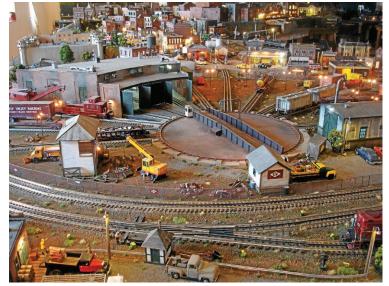
The Hunter Dinerant is featured in a sprawling model train setup in Wisconsin by Auburn native Robert Vince.

"I had a model train, which was





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ing medicinal chemistry. He and kept in the attic. It was nothing his high school sweetheart wife, Maureen (Ramsey), then headed west so he could teach at the University of Minnesota, where he's been since 1967. He has been the director of its Center for Drug Design since establishing it in 2002. ing to produce a children's show

While at Minnesota Vince co-developed several drugs, namely HIV drug abacavir (Ziagen) during the AIDS epidemic of to help them with what became the 1980s. He even has a molecule a 35-episode series that can be named after him, Vince lactam. His many honors include his induction into the Medicinal Chemistry Hall of Fame of the American Vince as executive producer. Chemical Society in 2007 and his induction into the Minnesota Inventors Hall of Fame in 2010.

Throughout his prolific scien-

sophisticated," he said. "My parents got rid of it when I was away at college. Things disappear when you're gone."

At the University of Minnesota, Vince met a group of actors tryabout trains called "The Choo Choo Bob Show," named after a model train store. He offered viewed on YouTube and other streaming services. It won several regional Emmys, including one for

In turn, "Choo Choo Bob Show" crew members Bryan Axell, Chris reality. Using memories, pho-Hagen and Chad Kono helped Vince turn his idea for a model tific career, Vince maintained a train layout replicating 1950s Au-

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tographs and maps, they slowly populated the layout with imagery from the city's past. He's

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finished, but he's not ready to put what I'm doing. Why retire?" it behind him.

just going to keep working on it," passion for trains that dates back burn from a passion project into frequently asked when it will be he said. "I'm still working. I like christopher.malone@lee.net.

"It's never going to be done. I'm Staff writer Christopher Malone can be reached at (315) 282-2232 or

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