

THE *Art* OF MAKING



In addition to dentistry, Dental Depot is known for its trains. And it's the outside trains that people notice first. The first outdoor train was built in the mid-1980s by Ashmore family friend, Dave Piette, in his backyard, but was so large it had to be crane-lifted over the fence in order to move it to its permanent home in front of the Central OKC office.

Then, in 2000, Piette built a second train featuring a larger locomotive engine than the first, and a caboose, to display at the new South OKC office. But, creating trains regularly as the business began to grow, that was a major undertaking

without much of a blueprint to help along the way.

John Argo, a welder and now a Dental Depot veteran of a decade, had never built a train before, but when Dr. Glenn asked if he could do it, he thought, "Well, I guess I could."

and used those to help design and build the new train.

"Part of the challenge from the beginning has been [figuring out] what makes a train, a train. What do you absolutely need and what don't you need," said Nick Richardson, director of facilities and construction.

The redesigned trains are based off of the 4-4-0 American type trains, so named for the wheel arrangement — four leading wheels, four drive wheels and zero trailing wheels — and their country of origin.

This style dates back to 1836, but flourished throughout the 19th century as it allowed for larger, heavier loads and helped the U.S. expand westward.

Our trains don't always follow the 4-4-0 wheel placement, but they are adapted from the popular body design of the 19th century American style.

"It's kind of like a big recycled art project. Anything is fair game as long as it looks like it could be part of a train," Argo said.

In fact, most people don't realize that not a single Dental Depot train is the same. Partly

“ It's kind of like a big recycled art project. ”

"I didn't know, I was just trying to copy something," Argo said of his first attempt at building a Dental Depot train.

"I had to go measure the train at 104th."

The first train that Argo built now sits outside of the Dallas office, but it is the Edmond train that holds the title of the first "modern" Dental Depot train.

"Edmond was the first re-designed train," Argo said. "We took the fireboxes out of my parent's coal burning furnace — a 1928 home near the Beta house in Norman —



Depot trains are based on 4-4-0 engines like the Central Pacific #63 Leviathan.

DENTAL DEPOT'S TRAINS

because the process has been adjusted and refined with each project, but also because the materials used are all donated or found, and stockpiled for later use.

“**The two biggest trains we ever built were Yukon and Tulsa Sheridan.**”

“Every train has been hand crafted. None of them are the same,” Richardson said. “They all have their own story, like the offices themselves.”

“The two biggest trains we ever built were Yukon and Tulsa Sheridan,” Argo said. “42-foot tanks instead of 36-foot tanks, and six drive wheels on those. [Dr.] Glenn kept saying, ‘go bigger.’”

Over the years, the team has developed a more streamlined way of creating the trains. Still, they say that they run into hiccups during the process, many times because the technology

changes and they need to innovate new ways of doing things.

Today, the frames, including the cab and the pressure tank, are made by Caliber Steel. The pressure tanks are provided by Shady Nook, a well company. Everything else is completed by the construction team and includes some very creative building materials, such as smoker lids, which are used to make the steam domes. And the round things you see on top of the domes, those were once trailer hitch balls.

“The cowcatcher took some figuring,” Argo said. “I thought, there must be some formula you could use. We finally figured out to use a template. What used to take about three days is now about three hours.”

The next thing on the team’s list is to find an inverted funnel to help make the smoke stack – one of the most difficult parts of the train to create.

In the beginning, the team would bend a sheet of steel by standing on it. They also tried a hand roller that requires two people to crank it. Eventually, they were able to find a company to make the cones for them, but ideally, they would like to find a piece that can be upcycled as part of the trains.

Still, every project remains something special, a labor of

Dental Depot TRAIN TRIVIA



700 Hours

Time it takes to make a train and coal car.



On Track

Edmond, South OKC, Dallas and Midwest City all have actual railway tracks set into the concrete.



Listen Up

The Norman train has a real train bell!



John Argo working on one of Dental Depot's coal cars.

creativity and love. And each year, the Dental Depot booth at the state fair shows off a finished piece. Although visitors may not realize it, they are the first people to have the opportunity to experience these unique pieces of art. It is never the same train, and usually the train that displays at the fair is the same train that will be installed at the next new office.

How well do you know your office’s train? Can you spot what features make your train unique?