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Retired Professors Get Their Friendship “On Track”

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- How do two retired longtime Cedarville University faculty colleagues keep their friendship on track? Without driving each other loco(motive)? Can you guess where all these railroad puns are heading?

[Dr. Dennis Sullivan](#) is a former practicing surgeon and missionary who taught human biology, bioethics, pharmacy ethics and pharmacy law courses and served as director of the Center for Bioethics until 2019. [Dr. Charles Clevenger](#) retired in 2017. He is a watercolorist and retired concert pianist who taught watercolor and piano courses and created the Introduction to the Humanities course that all of the university’s undergraduate students take. They were friends while teaching together, but their commitments to career, family and church left little time to explore shared interests or spend time outside the university. “The only way I knew Dennis was as a professor,” Clevenger said. “Our disciplines had nothing to do with one another, and we didn’t have any free time.”

That changed in 2019, when Clevenger was attending a train show in Springfield, Ohio.

“I saw this kind of hefty dude with a beard from a distance,” Clevenger said. “I thought it’d be funny if I walked up to this guy and it was Dennis. He turned around, and there he stood.”

They learned they both enjoy working with N scale model trains. Their talents also complement one another. Clevenger is more familiar with the history of model trains and how to operate them, and he uses his artistic skills in designing sets. Sullivan comes with a background in woodworking and electronics.

Each professor has his own unique setup. Clevenger named his railroad the Scioto Valley System, and he modeled it after the railroads around the Ohio River in the late 1950s. He posts pictures of his set and others, including Sullivan’s, at facebook.com/RailRoadDoctors.

Sullivan’s railroad is called the Kanawha Valley Railroad, loosely modeled after locations in northern West Virginia.

While both enjoy model railroading, their shared hobby has also allowed Sullivan and Clevenger to grow closer in other ways. They work out together at the YMCA, discuss current events in their lives and pray with one another. Sullivan was able to use his medical expertise to help Clevenger develop a workout routine after a stroke, and Clevenger puts on musical performances for Sullivan.

“Our lives are richer than we thought they’d be, and it got this jump-start because of little model trains,” Clevenger said. “My life is better because I know him, but I only know him that way because we hobby together.”

Both Sullivan and Clevenger agreed that investing in their friendship has been worth it.

“I have discovered that what really matters most to me, and I think what matters for eternity, are people and relationships,” Sullivan said. “My friendship with Chuck is suddenly more precious.”

“If there’s something I could say to my colleagues, it would be, ‘Value your friendships and nurture them while you’re still working,’” Clevenger said. “I think there are a lot of people who are missing out on a lot of fun by having their nose to the grindstone all the time. Even though it’s Christian service, it can eat you up and life can be less entertaining and less fun than it ought to be.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,715 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit cedarville.edu.

Written by Bryson Durst.

Photo Cutlines:

Caption (A): Dr. Charles Clevenger and Dr. Dennis Sullivan have discovered a shared love for model railroads following retirement. Photo by Scott Huck, Cedarville University.

Caption (B): Dr. Charles Clevenger, a retired watercolor and piano instructor at Cedarville University. Photo by Scott Huck, Cedarville University.

Caption (C): Dr. Dennis Sullivan, a retired pharmacy professor and director of Cedarville University’s Center for Bioethics.