Pennypacker Mills Presents

The Magic of Lionel: The Story of Joshua Lionel Cowan & the Lionel Company

Schwenksville, PA (August 28, 2012) – Step back in time and relive the golden era of toy trains. Hear the fascinating story of Joshua Lionel Cowan, the founder and creative genius of the Lionel Company. Visit Pennypacker Mills on Saturday, September 15 at 6:30pm for a one-man performance, outdoors on the mansion lawn.

To understand this creative inventor, we must go back in time to post-Civil War New York City. Cowan’s immigrant family arrived here as railroads were quite literally America’s engines of progress. He grew up with real trains, amid dizzying change. Around the time he founded Lionel in 1900, passenger lines like the peerless Twentieth Century Limited symbolized American technology and sophistication. These marvels of technology and power were his inspiration for a new invention…the toy train!

Cowan was already a successful inventor when he created his first toy train, the Electric Express. This train was not intended for sale to consumers, but rather as a storefront display. According to Lionel Company history, when this train was delivered in 1901, it ran on a brass track and was powered by a battery and a motor. Cowan originally intended to use in an electric fan. Cowan hoped to use the public’s fascination with railroads and electricity to capture their attention with the window display and draw them into the store. Members of the public started approaching store owners about buying the trains instead, prompting Lionel to begin making toy trains for the general public. Lionel ended up selling 12 examples of the Electric Express.

The Electric Express and many other toy train models created a market for which Cowan would spend a lifetime stoking America’s imagination with the romance of the rails. With growing prosperity, Lionel train layouts cropped up in living rooms across the country, especially at Christmas. Before mid-
century, railroads were an integral part of America’s economic lifeblood, as well as cultural icons - but it was not to last.

So take a ride into the past and relive the Lionel story, an iconic company of the early 1900s! This program is FREE. Attendees should bring folding chairs or a blanket to sit on. Why not plan to arrive early and have a picnic dinner?!

Pennypacker Mills is located at 5 Haldeman Road, Schwenksville, PA 19473. For information and directions please call 610-287-9349 or visit the website at: http://www.pennypackermills.montcopa.org, Pennypacker Mills is operated by the Montgomery County Department of Assets & Infrastructure, Parks & Heritage Services Division. The site offers year-round guided tours, education programs, changing exhibits, seasonal events, and craft workshops.

All images provided by Pennypacker Mills:

Actor Neill Hartley brings to life the story of Joshua Lionel Cowan at Pennypacker Mills.
Historic Pennypacker Mills is the setting for this outdoor, early evening performance about the Lionel Company and one of the iconic American success stories.