

Cedar Crest photographer's lifelong love of trains

By Ellen Burgess

"There is something magic about trains," commented Martin Matlack regarding his fascination with photographing trains and rail travel. "Trains go to incredible places you don't see from any other mode of transportation."

Matlack's color and black and white photographs are on display through July 5 at Watermelon Gallery in Cedar Crest. Matlack said he realized he had a treasure trove of negatives, and it took him nearly a year to organize, scan and select the images for the show. Many photos displayed were taken nearly 45 years ago.

One black and white image from June 1969 is of the Santa Fe Chief crossing the bridge over the Galisteo River at Apache Canyon east of Lamy. Matlack's father used to take the family on Sunday drives out to Lamy to watch the trains.

Another image shows a deserted station and track at Lamy in 1974. Dark trees are silhouetted against the cloudy sky. Matlack said some of those structures are no longer there.

"Black and white is my favorite medium," Matlack said, adding, "You have to train yourself to see in black and white." He thinks the contrasts are more dramatic in creating a mood, whether it's nature or people, and said he thinks it captures people's inner emotion and expression.

Matlack shoots with a Mamiya C220 medium format camera. He used to develop and print images in his own wet lab but now has an "electronic darkroom," utilizing a high end scanner and computer for negative enhancing and printing. He sends his film to a lab in Colorado to be developed.

Matlack and his wife Priscilla have lived in Cedar Crest for 20 years. Many residents may recognize him as their child's school bus driver; he drives students from kindergarten through 8th grade.

After graduating from Los Alamos High School, Matlack attended the University of New Mexico. He said, "On Friday afternoons when other students were getting ready to go out partying, I would walk downtown to the train station with my camera gear." He said he is a people-watcher, and he likes thinking of the stories behind each person getting off the train or buying a ticket to ride.

His image "Alvarado Ticket Office 1969" captures



Santa Fe Chief crossing the Galisteo River at Apache Canyon east of Lamy, above, an image from 1969. Below, a photo called "Arriving at Cumbres Station." Photos by Martin Matlack.



a moment in time, showing people of various ages and ethnicities milling around the ticket office in Albuquerque. Only one of the 20 or so people is looking at the camera.

Matlack commented, "You can't hide a large camera like mine, so I learned to turn my camera and attention at a point the same distance away to focus and get the lighting right. Then I would turn and take the photo so people relaxed. In that particular image I didn't fool that little girl; she looked right at me."

Matlack said he sees art as an "outward expression of how you see the world. Everyone is different, and that's the beauty." He said he is grateful for the opportunity to showcase his work, and at the same time to raise awareness of trains as an "incredible part of our transportation system."

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