

GREG GARRETT'S RAILROAD ART



Chris Amundson

“Inspect trains for bad orders, unsafe operating conditions,”

Greg Garrett said of his job as a carman at the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway facility in Alliance. In some ways, Garrett’s story is typical of many Alliance residents: He grew up here, has worked for Burlington Northern for more than 30 years, is married and has three grown kids who all work for the railroad.

But Garrett is also an artist whose train-inspired work is good enough to earn the attention of the leaders of America’s second-largest railroad. He also creates safety posters for BNSF, amuses co-workers with his cartoons and caricatures, and even has done bronze sculpture. Look at your car’s bumper to see a bit of his creativity: He designed the current Nebraska auto license plate.

“I took a few art classes in school,” he said, “but mostly it’s just book stuff. A lot of trial and error.” Garrett carries a cam-

era with him at work, ready to shoot a photo if he sees something interesting. Some of his landscapes are imaginary; others are actual locations – such as the Sandhills scene above.

Garrett spends an average of a hundred hours on each “painting,” which is actually a composite of different media. He begins by sketching the scene on vellum paper. When satisfied with the design, “I’ll flip it over and retrace the whole drawing, then flip it back over and rub off the graphite onto my illustration board.” On the illustration board, he works with airbrush, colored pencils and sometimes gouache (a heavy, opaque watercolor). “I use erasers to scratch out highlights. Just keep building up, adding a little bit, taking off a little bit.”

Though he’d already been doing safety posters for the railroad, it took persistence to draw attention to the train paintings. After being told that BNSF wasn’t accepting new artwork, Garrett sent a picture to the railroad’s president in Fort Worth, Texas.



That did the trick. Now, “they have five of my originals down there,” Garrett said, though “I’ve never been there to see them.” Prints of his paintings hang in many BNSF offices, and are sometimes given to employees as awards. With the railroad’s permission, Garrett has created a website, www.glgexclusives.com, from which to sell his art prints.

But on working days, he’s still inspecting the thousands of coal cars that come

through Alliance, snapping pictures of trains and workers as they catch his eye. Some of the workers end up in safety posters, though occasionally with alterations.

“You know, these days you have to be politically correct with race, gender, etc.

Sometimes it’s hard to find the exact model or pose in time so I’ve had to change some of the guys into women. I don’t like to tell those guys, though,” Garrett said, laughing. 🐮

“Big Macs,” by Greg Garrett shows a BNSF train passing through the Sandhills east of Alliance. Below, Garrett’s warped sense of humor comes through in his cartoons.

