

# STEPPING OUT



A future train conductor checks in.



Visitors collaborate to repair Percy's wobbly wheels.



Explore the Island of Sodor for an adventure on the rails.

## “ON TRACK”

### with Thomas the Tank Engine

Go on an adventure on the rails at Long Island Children's Museum

By Danielle Schwab

**A**ll aboard! The lovable blue tank engine Thomas and his friends have rolled into Long Island. With a cargo full of interactive STEM activities for families to explore, Long Island Children's Museum staffers — and visitors — are excited to welcome back the returning exhibit, “Thomas & Friends: Explore the Rails.”

“Long Island Children's Museum had opened the exhibit in early 2020 to great audience reaction,” explains museum president Erika Floreska. “Then Covid happened and the museum shut down. The exhibit sat in our empty building for months, anticipating the return of visitors. By the time the museum was able to reopen, the exhibit had to move on to its next scheduled destination.”

At long last, everyone can board once again as the train fulfills its intended route.

In real life, the islands just off the English mainland near Barrow in Furness, in Cumbria, has been home to the engines of industry — submarine manufacturing plant, undersea coal mining, petrochemicals and a hotly contested nuclear energy plant.

But for generations — baby boomers who read the Rev. Wilbert Awdry's Railway Series books and the children of the '80s who experienced those stories, too, on a popular television series — the only island that counts in the gleaming distances of the Irish Sea is Sodor.

Sodor — home to Thomas the Tank Engine, that is, where the trains are as busy as ever.

“You're stepping into another world, visiting Knapford Station on the Island of Sodor,” says Long Island Children's Museum education director Ashley Niver.

Awdry originally created the beloved trains in the early 1940s as stories for his son, Christopher. The fictional tank locomotive has since captivated families worldwide.

While the look of trains has changed since Thomas first came to be, the message is clear: trains don't lose their appeal.

“There is something super magical and enticing about playing with toy trains. It seems to triumph over any other vehicle,” Niver says. “When you see a train, it's like, ‘Wow, that's a special trip.’”

The traveling exhibit, created by the award-winning Minnesota Children's Museum in partnership with Mattel's Fisher-Price, rolled into the museum in late May and will continue to charm families through Sept. 8.

Targeted especially for kids between 2 and 7, the exhibit incorporates foundational STEM learning that can perhaps inspire the next generation of scientists, engineers and physicists.

Through engaging play, families arrive at creative solutions to problem-solving using mathematical thinking and experimentation as they respond to challenges.

“Kids are learning how to engineer together,” Niver says. “It's a really nice area where you can let your kids roam free. They can explore, and there's a lot of socialization happening too.”

First, look inside a Sodor train.

“You're welcomed with a bright, shiny Thomas, a giant life-size one which the kids can board,” Niver says. “Some levers and parts create train noises, whistles and steam.”

Then, help out the green train, Percy, repair a wobbly wheel. Continue on to move coal into Percy's coal box and fill his tank with water. Also load luggage,



- Now through Sept. 8, Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
- \$17 museum admission, \$16 seniors 65 and older; additional fees for theater programming
- View the events calendar at LICM.org for additional information or call (516) 224-5800
- Long Island Children's Museum, Museum Row, Garden City.

livestock and additional cargo into two train cars.

Even become part of Thomas' world by suiting up as a conductor, exchanging money, and selling tickets to passengers.

And naturally, it wouldn't be a “Thomas & Friends” experience without some toy trains.

Families can play at an oversized Thomas wooden railway table, bringing people through all Sodor's iconic destinations such as Tidmouth Sheds, Brendam Docks, and the Sodor Search and Rescue Station.

While in actuality trains connect us to various places both familiar and new, the “connection” here is an emotional one.

“What's really important about Thomas is that he is super hard-working,” Niver says. “He's the smallest train, but he never gives up, and he always tries to help people learn to work

together, to cooperate, to be kind to one another.

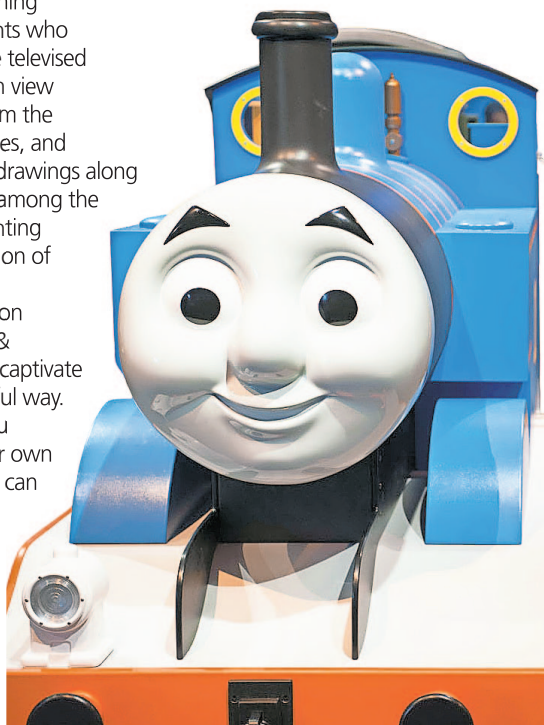
“Children find him really endearing and connect on a deep level with him.”

As North Western Railway Controller Sir Topham Hatt always says: “Thomas is a very useful engine.”

There's also something nostalgic for the parents who grew up watching the televised version of Thomas. On view are model engines from the original live-action series, and copies of the original drawings along with 75 manuscripts, among the memorabilia documenting the history and evolution of Thomas.

From one generation to another, “Thomas & Friends” continues to captivate audiences in a powerful way.

“Anything that you remember raising your own children with that you can then pass down is the coolest thing, to have that connectivity years,” Niver adds.



Photos courtesy Long Island Children's Museum

Thomas has chugged into the museum and invites families to stop on by.



### ‘And stars fill my dream...’

Get the Led Out rocks out with their tribute to what many consider rock 'n roll's greatest band, in ‘A Celebration of the Mighty Zep.’ From the bombastic and epic, to the folky and mystical, GTLO has captured the essence of the recorded music of Led Zeppelin and brought it to the concert stage. The six veteran musicians who make up the Philadelphia-based group deliver all passion these blues-soaked rock anthems deserve. GTLO re-creates songs, in all their depth and glory, with the studio overdubs that Zeppelin themselves never performed. No wigs or fake English accents, the band brings what the audience wants — a high-energy Zeppelin concert with honest, heart-thumping intensity with a strong focus on Led Zeppelin's pivotal early years.

Friday and Saturday, June 28-29, 8 p.m. \$75, \$45, \$30. The Paramount, 370 New York Ave., Huntington. Tickets available at [Ticketmaster.com](https://www.ticketmaster.com) or [ParamountNY.com](https://www.paramountny.com).



### Gilbert and Sullivan's ‘Iolanthe’

Mortals and immortals come face to face in the Gilbert & Sullivan Light Opera Company's of Long Island's production of Gilbert and Sullivan's classic ‘Iolanthe.’ The comic opera, which debuted in 1883, is one of the most beloved of all the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Its perfect balance of words and music, humor and drama, and political satire resonates to this day. The whimsical story involves a half fairy/half mortal shepherd lad who falls in love with wealthy heiress that sets up a conflict between the wily Lord Chancellor and the cosmically powerful Fairy Queen. Featuring some of Sullivan's most stunning music, including ‘Oh Foolish Fay,’ and what is popularly known as ‘The Nightmare Song,’ expect an evening of first class entertainment and riotous fun suitable for all ages.

Sunday, June 30, 3 p.m. \$30, \$25 seniors/children. Madison Theatre, Molloy University, 1000 Hempstead Ave., Rockville Centre. Tickets available at [MadisonTheatreNY.org](https://www.MadisonTheatreNY.org) or call (516) 323-4444.