

# The Local

A PUBLICATION OF THE MID-EASTERN REGION OF THE NMRA



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Number 4

## Modeling Trees: A Grave Undertaking

By John Pursell

**I**'M CHEAP. I ADMIT IT. I'm always looking to pinch a penny wherever I can, including in my hobby.

Modeling the Lehigh Valley Railroad, an eastern line means I'm going to need trees—lots and lots of trees. While a number of manufacturers make beautiful trees, covering a large layout with them becomes cost prohibitive, at least to my miserly way of thought. So I have learned to make trees from a plant called Baby's Breath. Tape a few sprigs together, hit them with dark green spray paint and sprinkle on some ground foam—*voila*, a nice tree, good enough for background use.

But even Baby's Breath isn't cheap and a lot of it is waste. What I needed was a steady supply of the stuff really cheap, or maybe even free. Then it hit me. Most of my career has been as a Military Bugler, sounding *Taps* at veterans' funerals. Currently, I work for the State of Maryland in that capacity and I'm assigned to one particular veterans' cemetery several times a week. The superintendent and I have become pretty good friends. One day I happened to notice that many of the floral displays brought for the funerals used Baby's Breath—lots of it. Baby's Breath is especially popular in the funeral arrangements that use red roses. A quick request to the super allowed me to visit the brush pile where the grounds crew disposed of the displays after they became unsightly.

A gold mine of Baby's Breath! I quickly filled an entire trash bag with the stuff and took it home to produce trees. I have since collected from that trash pile many times and made dozens and dozens of trees almost for free.

Now, I assure you (and my wife, who calls me a grave-rober) I would never take flowers off an "active" grave. I always wait until the grounds crew has removed and disposed of them. And while I don't know for certain, but I think that many families might appreciate the idea that the flowers from a loved one's funeral are reused and not simply trashed.

So, when looking to model on the cheap, leave no stone unturned. Materials may show up when you least expect it!

**JOHN PURSELL** *lives in the South Mountain Division where he models HO Scale.* 🏠

### NOTICE TO ALL MER MEMBERS: ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of MER members will be held on Sunday morning, October 19, in conjunction with the MER Fall Convention in Reston, VA. The exact time, and the location within the convention hotel, will be posted at the convention.

*Roger L. Cason, MMR.  
MER Secretary*

# Keeping In Touch...

By Fred Miller, MMR  
MER Business Manager

TO DATE, THE MER has subsidized 118 NMRA RailPass memberships. We have lost 28 members and 45 are still within their 6-month trial period. But the good news is 45 members have renewed as regular NMRA members. The program is still active so get your friends to apply. And we hope those current 45 RailPass members will acknowledge the benefits of NMRA membership and renew at regular membership rates.

Some comments on *Keeping in Touch...* Over fifteen hundred MER members and other out-of-region **Local** subscribers have provided us with their e-mail addresses. That's about half of all membership and subscribers. Almost three hundred modelers receive the electronic version (**eLocal**) of the newsletter. The e-mail addresses are also used for NMRA membership expiration warnings and other correspondence. However, on occasion our electronic correspondence is blocked because the members have put a filter of some sort on their e-mail service. If you have done that please specifically set **merbusmgr@aol.com** as an accepted correspondent.

It's summer time and I need to repeat last year's plea: If you move to a summer home or other temporary address and elect to have your regular mail forwarded by the Post Office, be aware that our Postal Permit for mailing this newsletter does not pay for that forwarding. As a result **The Local's** are returned to me marked "Temporarily Away" with a charge of one dollar (new postal rates). And if I resend those newsletters it now costs another \$1.17. All of this is presented to the membership in the hopes that you will forward a request to me to hold your issues while you are away. I would be glad to send your back issues when you are ready. If that "summer retreat" provides you with Internet Access, you can always read the current, or past issues of **The Local** on our website. The website address is: <http://www.mer-nmra.org>.

As always *Keep in Touch* with any questions or changes in your subscriptions or addresses. A current address on file saves the MER some money.

# The Local

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A Tax-Exempt Organization

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**The Local** welcomes articles, photographs and model railroad related material as contributions to members' mutual enjoyment of the hobby. Materials should have a wide appeal. Editors will exercise all due care of submissions, but contributors should not send originals without having back-up copies of both articles and photographs. Editors, by definition, reserve the right—and have the responsibility—to make corrections, deletions and changes to accommodate space.

The MER website is [www.mer-nmra.org](http://www.mer-nmra.org)

# President's Column

By Clint Hyde, MER President.

I AM WINDING DOWN my time as the MER President and while I have enjoyed the ride, it has certainly been more than I expected. Your ballot should be arriving soon, with candidates for (my job) President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. Term limits are guaranteeing that three of those jobs have to change hands this time. I personally know all the candidates (see the names listed below), and they are great folks. Volunteering to help your organization is always a good time investment and the payoff is much greater than you realize in terms of whom you get to meet. Volunteering is also worth doing at the Division level because you will earn AP volunteer points. Volunteering at the Region level will earn you AP Official points.

There is no shortage of things you can do with your time these days. Make time for something new once in a while, and you will be surprised by something good. Examples include the many Division activities around our area and the other special events throughout the Region. Each Division is different from the others in terms of planned activities, and if you have something you would like to plan, I'm sure it can be accommodated. My guess is that your Division would be very happy for you to help plan a new activity. I hesitate to say what all the Potomac Division (my Division) does, but this is the DC area, full of Type A personalities so perhaps we are a bit more hyper.

It was recently announced that the NMRA challenge to a patent for DCC sound decoders is proceeding. I have gotten a bunch of e-mails about it, and you are able to read the official press release further in this issue. This often means an awarded patent will be voided, which in this case will keep all our costs down, as the sound manufacturers won't be paying a patent royalty. The NMRA is always watching out for all modelers.

I went to the Mid-Atlantic Narrow Gauge Guild in Kimberton, PA event again this year. You can check out their website at: <http://midatlanticng.railfan.net/>. While it is not as large or complex as the MER convention, I had a good time. There are a number of narrow gauge modular groups that show up. The big guys

this year had a train of flat cars all carrying old-time fire engines, and I managed NOT to take a photo of that. *Sigh*. Hopefully, we will see some new narrow gauge modules at the fall convention this year.

If you are planning on attending the MER convention this year and you have tried to register but they are "out of rooms", the hotel is not full! It simply means we have filled our contracted block for one of those nights. Please let me know, and I will talk to the hotel and get rooms added to our block, after which you can try again. Over the past several years, I have been gathering the stats about our conventions and hotel usage. While these stats aren't perfect it does improve future planning, and if I underestimate a little, it means we can have this particular problem. But it does have a simple solution. 

## Candidates on the 2008 Ballot

Ballot will be mailed to all MER members in August.

Roger Cason – President  
John Janosko – Vice President  
Bill Roman – Secretary  
Tom Buckingham – Treasurer

**CALLING ALL READERS:** We need to show our support for the NMRA and specifically the MER by producing the best and most informative newsletter possible, to do that I need your help. Our newsletter is called **The Local**, because local people benefit from reading it every time. Please write and submit any articles (with or without photos) to the editor via e-mail: [stevespressrr@yahoo.com](mailto:stevespressrr@yahoo.com) or via the snail mail address listed on page 2. Don't pass up this great opportunity to help out and earn AP points at the same time!! 

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03/09

# New Membership Recruitment Program

As an aid to membership recruitment, NMRA recently instituted a six month "Railpass" trial membership program which costs the applicant \$9.95. Building on this idea, the MER is instituting a program whereby it will pay the \$9.95 Railpass fee for interested applicants in the MER. In other words, we are making available FREE six month Railpass trial memberships to encourage recruitment of regular members.

## What's covered?

Same as Railpass—receive six issues of **Scale Rails**, three issues of **The Local**, eligibility to attend conventions and meets, eligibility to participate in contests.

## What's not covered?

Same as Railpass—applicants cannot vote or hold office, and will not receive the New Member Pak from national (it's rather expensive).

## Who can be recruited?

Anyone living within the MER who has not been a member of NMRA during the past thirty months.

## How will the recruitment process work?

(1) The prospective member fills out the MER trial membership application form which was sent to all division superintendents (not the standard NMRA Railpass form) (2) The "recruiter" should

also sign the form, and then forward it to: Fred Miller, MER Business Manager, 8960 Challis Hill Lane, Charlotte, NC 28226-2686. (3) Fred will record the information he needs in his data base, and will forward the application to the MER Treasurer. (4) The Treasurer will add the necessary check and forward the application and check to the national headquarters in Chattanooga.

## What happens after the member's six month trial period?

The Railpass trial member will receive a standard dues notice from national headquarters. We hope a substantial number of Railpass trial members will sign up to become regular members.

## Are there limits on the program?

The MER has allocated \$2,000 for this program. The program has been extended to the end of 2009, or when we have spent \$2,000 – whichever comes first. When and if we approach either limit, Division Superintendents and members of the MER Board of Directors will be notified. At that time, the program will be evaluated by the MER Board of Directors. If successful, we will try to continue it.

## For questions?

Contact Fred Miller, MER Business Manager (mailing address is above, 704-752-5138, [tractionfan@aol.com](mailto:tractionfan@aol.com)), or Roger L. Cason, MER Secretary (1125 Grinnell Road, Wilmington, DE, 19803-5125, 302-478-2550, [rogercason@juno.com](mailto:rogercason@juno.com)). 

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## National Model Railroad Association (NMRA) Mid-Eastern Region Application for Free "Railpass" Trial Membership

**YES**, please sign me up for a free six month Railpass trial membership in the NMRA—which includes membership in the Mid-Eastern Region, and in my local Division. During this six month period, I understand that I may attend conventions and meets, and participate in contests. I will receive **Scale Rails**, the monthly national magazine, and **The Local**, the bi-monthly regional newsletter. I will not be eligible to vote, hold office, or receive a New Member Pak.

I also understand that the \$9.95 cost of this six month Railpass trial membership is being paid by the Mid-Eastern Region. (Regardless of who pays, six month \$9.95 memberships are available only once to each person.)

At the end of the six months, I may join NMRA, paying the regular active member dues.

During the past thirty months, I have **not** been a member of NMRA.

=====

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Scale(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of "Recruiter": \_\_\_\_\_  
(A Regional or Divisional officer or board member)

=====

When this form is completed,  
mail it to:

**Fred Miller MMR**  
**MER Business Manager**  
**8960 Challis Hill Lane**  
**Charlotte, NC 28226-2686**

Do **not** mail it directly to MMRA  
headquarters in Chattanooga, TN.

Date of form: 1/31/07

# The Carolina Southern Division: Wade's Train Town Update

Article and photographs by and Gil Brauch

**I**T HAS BEEN A COUPLE of months since we last updated you on progress restoring Wade Warren's layout in Brookford, NC—just outside Hickory, NC. As we approach the second anniversary of the start of our restoration project, we have made significant progress. By the time you read this, we will have restored and updated about half of the scenes from the original layout. In our last update from the September-October 2007 issue, we shared some before and after photos of general scenic areas. This update shows some specific scene comparisons before and after restoration.

Wade Warren's method of building that has not been discussed before was dictated



**Rexall Drugstore before restoration...**



**...and after being restored by Jim Allen.**



**Cemetery scene before restoration...**



**...and after being restored by Gil Brauch.**

by his handicap—he was a double amputee—and he built most of the layout from his wheelchair. He would put together the building at his workbench and then assemble the scene on a 10" x 10" piece of plastic or more commonly metal flashing. When the scene was finished, he would wheel over to the layout and with the help of a friend put it in place. Sometimes he would use his creeper and wheel himself under the layout into one of the three 'pop up' holes so he could work on scenery in the middle of the layout. Since most of the scenes are mounted in this way, restoration is a little bit easier. We have been able to 'farm out' whole scenes for work to some of our support membership who just can't make it all the way up to Hickory for our regular Thursday night work sessions (which begins at 6:30 PM—hint, hint...). Jim Allen has done some

excellent scene restoration for us in this way. The Pizza Hut scene and Rexall Drugs are just two examples of his work shown here.

We are continuing with our monthly open house series on the second Saturday of each month (open from 10 AM until 4 PM). Attendance is irregular, but we typically see between 30 and 50 folks each month. Since we began, well over 1,200 folks have come to visit us and marvel at Wade's work.

As mentioned above, we continue to hold weekly restoration sessions on Thursday evenings from 6:30 PM until we get



**Pizza Hut scene before...**



**...and after being restored by Jim Allen.**

continued on page 6



Yard sale scene before...

tired and go home (usually about 9 PM or so). If you have some free time on a Saturday, just contact Rick Knight, Superintendent of the Carolina Southern Division at [rghkiii@adelphia.net](mailto:rghkiii@adelphia.net), or the Division Webmaster, Gil Brauch at [csdweb@charter.net](mailto:csdweb@charter.net), and we will arrange for a Saturday work session (except on open house days). Regular monthly updates on our progress can be seen on the Carolina Southern Division website <http://www.bytedesign.com/CSDiv/updates.htm>. 



...and after being restored by Gil Brauch.

## Real Rail Effects Fails to Respond to NMRA DCC-sound Patent Challenge

*Update from NMRA Membership Services & Promotion Department*

**T**HE DEADLINE FOR Real Rail Effects, Ltd. (RRE) to respond to an NMRA patent challenge has passed, with no response from RRE.

RRE was granted a patent by the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) based upon a claim that the technology for using sound with DCC was invented by RRE. The NMRA, with the technical and financial support of a number of DCC manufacturers and hobbyists around the world, filed a challenge to the RRE patent.

The NMRA filed the challenge because we believe that the claims in the RRE patent application were not supported by the facts. The NMRA was aware that prior art and other evidence existed which negated RRE's patent.

The NMRA felt that, should it remain in force, the RRE patent posed a threat to modelers and manufacturers of DCC equipment because it would both increase the costs to modelers and unfairly restrict manufacturers who provide decoders with sound. Therefore, the NMRA coordinated an industry- and hobby-wide effort

to have the patent overturned. The NMRA submitted evidence from a number of sources raising substantial questions about the validity of the patent.

On February 11, 2008, the USPTO issued a ruling granting the NMRA's patent re-examination request. The examiner stated in the ruling that there was a substantial likelihood that a reasonable examiner would consider the prior art important in determining the patent ability of the application of RRE.

After the examiner at the USPTO determined that the position of the NMRA had merit and compelled a new analysis of the patent, RRE had two months to respond to the re-examination request. The deadline for a response has come and gone, and RRE made no reply. The NMRA is now very hopeful that a favorable decision will be announced and that the position of the NMRA and its supporters will be vindicated.

The NMRA considers this a clear triumph for the modeler and the model railroad industry. We are proud to have led the challenge team that has made this victory possible. 

## The 3rd Annual NC RailRun

THE 3RD ANNUAL NC RAILRUN will be held on Labor Day weekend from Friday, August 29th through Sunday, August 31st.

You will "Op 'till you drop" on layouts in 4 different time slots during the 3-day NC RailRun.

For those of you who want even more operations, we're featuring the return of our very popular "early bird" special session this year. There are a limited number of slots available, so please register early. Registration deadline is August 9th. The weekend was sold out last year, and a waiting list for this year's NC RailRun is anticipated. See the registration form on the next page.

If you enjoy model railroad operations, or want a chance to learn more about the fun of operating, then you'll want to register for this weekend!

Beginning with the 2008 event, NC RailRun will be held every other year in even-numbered years. The next NC RailRun will be held in 2010.

Visit [www.ncrailrun.org](http://www.ncrailrun.org) more information and to read all the latest information on the layouts, the schedule, hotel information and frequently asked questions. 



**We are presenting an OpSig Regional: NC rail run August 29 – August 31, 2008**

You are invited to attend the third “Op ‘till you drop” operating weekend in North Carolina. We have eight excellent operating railroads available for your enjoyment. You will operate a railroad on Friday night, Saturday morning, Saturday night, and Sunday morning. If you enjoy operation, or wish to learn it better, this is the weekend for you.

If you can’t get enough operating, there will also be 1 layout you can operate on Friday morning at 9am. This is the early bird special. Please indicate below if you are interested in operating in this time slot. This would give you 5 different layouts you can operate on over the weekend.

Fill out the enclosed application and return it to the registrar at the address listed below (snail-mail or email). Please print all information neatly.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_ Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Please list your preferences for railroads:

Preference (1-8)	scale	Operating Railroad Name	Owner
	N	ACL	David Koss
	HO	Brandywine Valley	Dil Huey
	HO	Carolina Western	Steve Benezra
	N	Charleston, Roanoke & Eastern	Marcus Neubacher
	HO	Monon Route	Jack Frame
	N	Penn-Central-Lehigh & Delaware division	Mike Pennie
	HO	PRR – Eno Valley division	Ed Dougherty
	HO	PRR – Philadelphia, West Chester & Eastern	Dick Buchan

I am interested in attending the Friday morning early bird special (circle choice)    yes                      no

Special Requests (e.g., assigned with): \_\_\_\_\_

Travel arrangements (Car available? Car pooling?) \_\_\_\_\_

Previous operations experience / jobs handled: \_\_\_\_\_

We will try to honor your preferences. However, the first priority is properly manning the layouts and getting carpools organized.

For additional information, go to the web site [www.ncrailrun.org](http://www.ncrailrun.org) or e-mail Mike Pennie at [penniemichael@yahoo.com](mailto:penniemichael@yahoo.com). Or call Mike at 336-393-0552. The registration form should be mailed to Michael Pennie, 4907 Golden Acres Road, Oak ridge, NC 27310, along with a check payable to the NMRA Mid East Region.

The layouts use various combinations of FRS radios and DCC by Digitrax, Wangrow and NCE. If you have equipment of this type, please bring it along. Most of the layouts should have enough equipment, but it’s useful to have spares.

# Come on in ... to the Contest Room!

*By Martin Brechbiel  
MER General Contest Chairman*

**I** WOULD LIKE TO TAKE this opportunity to put on my official Contest Chairman hat right now and encourage you all to seriously consider bringing one of your models along to the upcoming convention **POTOMAC JUNCTION 2008 – Crossroads of the MER**, October 16-19th, and to enter it into any one of the contest categories! In addition to the standard Contest Room categories and awards, there are a number of Special Awards. I

have found that I enjoy challenging myself to see what I can build, so I hope that some of you will pick the gauntlet, bring in your models and see what you can achieve, particularly on a few of the Special Awards.

On a related note, a number of the standard Contest Room categories are always underrepresented – in the recent past: Steam, Diesel, Traction, and even Passenger car categories

have seen minimal entry numbers. In some years, awards have not been made for these categories and even some of the Special Awards have not been awarded. Just to remind many of you – there is even a Special Award for the top scored first time modeler entry.

Bring in your models and fill out that paperwork and you just might stand a decent chance of taking home a plaque for your wall! Oh yes, now I have heard that there is a mountain of paperwork and forms to fill out. Well, all of the forms just happen to be on the NMRA web site in both pdf and Word format. Visit [www.nmra.org/education/achievement/apforms.html](http://www.nmra.org/education/achievement/apforms.html), and you can just type up your entries directly.

I sincerely do hope to see a good number of entries. Additionally, I would still like to hear from some potential judges and those that would like to become judges. Contact me by e-mail at [martinwb@verizon.net](mailto:martinwb@verizon.net), or by my other contact information listed on page 2. Participating in Judging is also a great way to learn and improve your modeling skills. I have certainly found this to be true for me! On top of that, judging is another activity that counts towards your Association volunteer category in the AP program!



**A scene from Marshall Abrams' layout – the Abrams Railroad Empire (ARE).**

would not have considered taking on this role unless I did not feel this to be a valuable part of the MER and the NMRA. I know that the MER has a great number of truly outstanding modelers out there.

There is more to this activity than just competing in a contest and you really are competing against yourself more than against any other modelers. My experience has been that participating and entering your models is a great way to get some feedback on your skills and to improve your techniques and all around model building. I have certainly found that to be the case. And as such I plan to continue to enter a few models periodically since I am a firm believer that there is always room for improvement! Additionally, I

## **A SAMPLING OF AVAILABLE CLINCS:**

- An Alternative Approach to Layout Design in Modest Spaces
- The Art of Decaling
- A Brief History of Model Train Control Systems
- Building and Coloring Masonry Buildings
- Ceiling Tile Rock Building
- Creating a Stencil for your Logo
- Intermodal 101



A scene from Dale Latham's layout – the Piedmont Southern Railroad.

Introduction to Steel Mill Modeling  
 Making Dwarf Signals  
 Sawdust Scenery  
 Tank Cars 101  
 Time Table and Train Order Operation  
 Tips and Tricks for Modeling Steel Mills  
 Trees of the Southeast  
 Using the PC as a modeling tool  
 Weathering Rolling Stock

## PROTOTYPE TOURS:

**Vulcan Quarry Tour** – Experience the loading of rail cars and tour the pit of Vulcan's Manassas Limestone Quarry. This popular tour shows the rail enthusiast actual crushed stone flood loading in rail cars by a remote controlled engine and siding placement for future local train pick-up.

**Mirant Power Plant Tour** – Tour the Mirant Power generating plant. (formally PEPCO Alexandria plant). Witness a rotary coal unloader and coal placement in storage. The tour will continue inside with safety presentations, a power generation slide series prior to our powerhouse and boiler house tours.

**Amtrak Ivy City Maintenance Facility** – A walking tour of The Ivy City Yard, just north of Union Station, which houses a large Amtrak maintenance facility. This includes the new maintenance facility

for the Acela high-speed train sets.

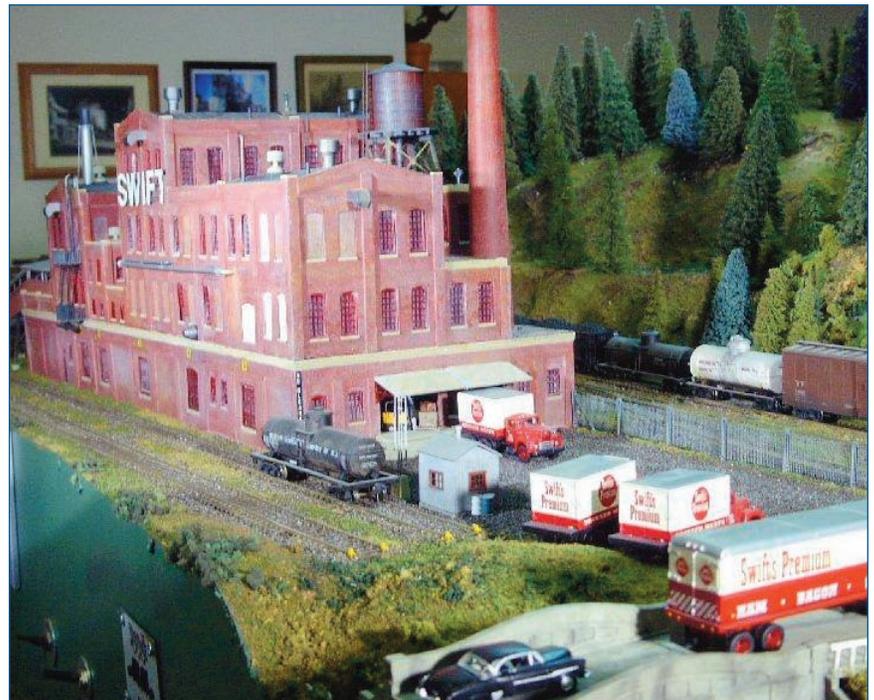
**NOTE:** All tours require closed toe shoes and long pants (men and women).

## LAYOUT TOURS:

Abrams Railroad Empire  
 B&O RR-West End Subdivision  
 Berkshire Air Line Railroad Company  
 Clear Creek and Caldwell Mining and Railway Company  
 Continental United States (CONUS) Lines  
 CSX East Rail  
 Cumberland Shenandoah & Piedmont  
 Cumberland Valley Railroad  
 Day & Dean Railroad  
 Erie Lackawanna-Scranton Division  
 Kristenville and Michelleville Railroad  
 LIRR-Port Jefferson Branch  
 Oregon Coast Railroad  
 O'Ryan & Webb Railway  
 Penn Creek Valley  
 Piedmont Southern Railroad  
 Piermont Division  
 Southern Railway "The Rathole", KY Division

RO&S  
 Swiss Gotthard Line  
 Sylvania Central Railroa  
 Virginia & Western

Be sure to check the website frequently as more layouts will continue to be added. 



A scene from Mat Thompson's layout – Oregon Coast Railroad.



## Mid-East Region, NMRA Fall Convention

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 ADVANCE REGISTRATION FORM

Please enter all names as you wish them to appear on your registration badges:

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Significant Other (living at same address): \_\_\_\_\_

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City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_ NMRA # \_\_\_\_\_

Full Registration (\$50 after September 1) -	\$45 x	_____	_____
One-day registration	\$25 x	_____	_____
Non-NMRA Member (applied to Rail Pass Membership) -	\$10 x	_____	_____
Significant Other -	\$15 x	_____	_____
Children:	\$10 x	_____	_____
Banquet:	\$40 x	_____	_____
Cheap and Easy Trees Clinic	\$ 5 x	_____	_____
Building in Wood Post Office Clinic (HO)	\$15 x	_____	_____
(O)	\$15 x	_____	_____
Building and Coloring Masonry Buildings Clinic:	\$15 x	_____	_____

Total Advance Registration Charges: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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**Send all registrations to:**  
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For questions and / or additional information E-Mail – [MER-Registrar@comcast.net](mailto:MER-Registrar@comcast.net)

**HOTEL REGISTRATION INFORMATION:** The convention will be held at the **Sheraton Reston Hotel**, 11810 Sunrise Valley Drive, Reston, VA 20191. The convention rate is \$99.00 (plus taxes) per night. All hotel registrations must be made directly with the hotel at (703) 620-9000. When registering be sure to specify the Mid- Eastern Region, NMRA to be sure you get this special rate. (<http://www.Sheraton.com/Reston>)

**Additional events** will be added when their cost is know. Please check the web page [http://home.comcast.net/~Potomac\\_NMRA/MER2008/](http://home.comcast.net/~Potomac_NMRA/MER2008/) for current information.

# On The Road - Part 3

## A series article

By Mike White

UNTIL NOW, the highway signs that we have worked with have all been signs that are a standard no matter in what locale they are found. However on your pike, you are going to need signs that are specific to the roads and places that you model. For these, we have to “customize” existing samples from our resources.

Probably the most common signs that you will want to model are classified in the MUTCD (**Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices**) as “Guide” signs and include destination and distance signs – those that point to the next towns or cities and those that tell you the distance of remaining travel. There will be other



**Figure 1: Black on white destination sign and route signs. Photograph from U.S. Highways Sign History website.**

signs that you may wish to customize and the techniques you will learn here are easily transferable.

Today, black on white is restricted to Regulatory signs. In the mid-1950's, the use of color was not as constrained as it is today and destination and distance signs were in a black on white scheme. See Figure 1. Today many are white on green, but we can use that as a starting point to customize what we need. As we did in Part 2, we need to download and save one of the sections of the MUTCD to extract our starting example.

Open the MUTCD at [http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/kno\\_2003r1r2.htm](http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/kno_2003r1r2.htm). In the first sentence of the screen that comes up are choices of either the PDF or HTML version. Click on PDF. Open “Part 1 – Chapter 2D – Guide Signs – Conventional



**Figure 2: Copied sign with “white working space” (shown as gray here).**

Roads”. As before, save this section to a convenient place on your computer.

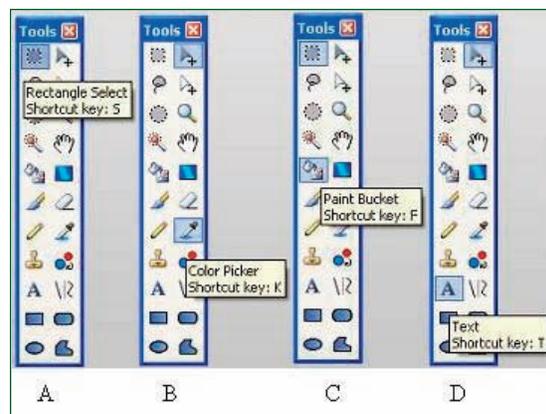
In Windows Explorer, find the file that you just saved. Double click to open the file in Adobe Reader and go to page 16. These are the familiar destination and distance signs on today's roads.

If you followed the directions for using Adobe Reader in Part 2

(see **The Local** May-June 2008 issue), you should now have a “camera” icon in your Adobe Reader toolbar. Click on the icon. Your cursor now changes to a “crosshair”. Starting in the upper left-hand corner, left click and draw a box around the sign labeled “D1-1a” – adding a little “white space” evenly around the sign as you do this. See figure 2. Release the mouse button and you should see a dialog box telling you that the “selected area has been copied”.

Open the Paint NET program and from the menu bar, select “Edit” and then “Paste”. From the “Image” menu bar selection, select “Crop to selection”. This is what we are going to work with, so you may want to save it now so that it is available later.

This is the time to tell you about the *most important tool* in Paint NET. On the menu bar, left click “edit”. The first item in the drop-down list is “undo”. Whenever you make a mistake or don't



**Figure 3: Tools used to customize signs.**

get the result you want, “undo” is your salvation. Also, on the right-top of the screen is a box labeled “History” that contains, in sequence, the commands that you have invoked. At the bottom of the box is a “looping arrow” icon. That is also the “undo” command. You can select the command(s) you wish to reverse and then click the “undo” icon and you're back to where you want to be.

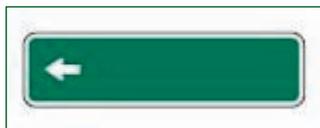
To make this sign a little easier to work with, located just below “Effects” in the menu bar you will see a box with “Window” or “100 percent” in it. Click on the little arrow just to the right and select 400 percent from the drop down list. Now, click on the “Rectangle Select” icon in the tools icon box. See figure 3-A. Draw a rectangle around “Buffalo” and “14” within the sign. From the “Edit Menu” click “Cut”. There should now be a rectangular hole in the sign with a faded-looking checkerboard pattern inside it. In the Tools icon box again, select the “Color Picker” tool. See figure 3-B. Left click the color picker in the green area of the sign. Notice that the upper of the two squares in the “Colors” box at the lower left of the screen now shows the green color. See figure 4. Select the “Paint Bucket” icon from the Tools icon box (see figure 3-C) and left-click inside the empty rectangle within

the sign. You should now have something that looks like figure 5. Use the “Save As” feature to save the completed sign with a different filename. Change the cursor back to the default (top-right) in the tools icon box.

Choose a destination name that you would like to have in the sign. If you keep it short, you can also add mileage. Remember the colors box, and the green color on the upper square? We have to change that back to black. Left click on the far left of the top color bar near the bottom of the “Colors” box and the upper square should change to black. If you left click on the crooked arrow symbol just to the right of the two squares, it will swap the black and white colors in the squares. Select the “Text” icon from the Tools icon box. See figure 3-D.

Place the cursor in the green area of the sign where you want the text to start and left click (if you don’t get it exactly where you want it, that’s OK we can move it later). In the third row of the top tool bar is a label “Font”, followed by a small down arrow, then a box with a number followed by another small down arrow, then a box with the word “smooth” or “sharp” in it followed by a small down arrow. The down arrows display drop down lists of selections when clicked. For this sign, we want respectively: “Arial Rounded MT Bold”; “14” and “Sharp”. At this magnification, “Sharp” does not produce a very attractive appearance, but when we reduce this to HO scale, the result will be much clearer than if we had used “Smooth”. The last two icons on the same bar determine how the text is rendered on the sign. Choose “Antialiasing Enabled” and “Normal Blending”.

Type your “destination” and optional mileage on the sign in all caps. If you are not happy with how it fits, or where it is located, left-click and hold on the little box with the double-headed arrows that follows the cursor. When you move your mouse, the text that you just typed can be moved anywhere in the sign. When you are

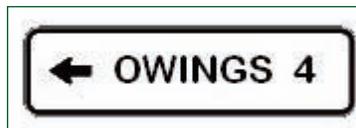


**Figure 5: The copied sign has been filled in and is ready to be customized.**

satisfied, left click outside of the sign to remove the cursor. Reduce the sign back to 100 percent and you will see that the text looks very sharp and clean. Use the “Save As” feature again to save the file with a different name than the prior versions saved so far.

Now, let’s make a black on white 1950’s sign out of this. As you did above, swap the black and white colors in the squares (black should be on top). Zoom back up to 400%. Select the “Paint Bucket” tool and left-click on the green part of the sign.

You may also have to left-click on the inside of any closed letters which still have green in them. Repeat this outside of the sign border in the “white space” you added when selecting it from the MUTCD. Now select “Adjustments” from the menu bar, and “Invert Colors” from the drop down list. Reduce the sign back to 100 percent and now you should have a sign that looks like Figure



**Figure 6: A complete look at the customized sign from the 1950’s.**

6. Use the “Save As” feature again.

These signs will vary in height depending on the time period and where they are used. When using distance signs in combination they will also vary in width depending on the longest destination name, so be flexible when sizing these signs.

We are going to make this sign 12” high and keep the width proportional. From the “Image” menu bar selections, select “Resize”. In the print size “Height” box, type “0.35” (without the quotes) centimeters. Click on “OK”. The result is an HO scale destination and distance sign graphic that scales fairly well. “Save As” to a folder and file name of your choice. This is the final graphic that you will print to make the sign. At this point, you can construct the sign using what you learned in Part 2.

This same basic process will enable you to “customize” any sign you may need for your HO highway. The next part of the series will focus on an earlier era: the 1930’s and 40’s. Until then, have fun!

**MIKE WHITE** lives in the Potomac Division where he models HO scale. 🏠

**HEY MEMBERS,** are you too busy modeling, operating, scratch building and even kit bashing railroads to print and then whittle away precious minutes filling out the Achievement Program forms??? Simplify your life by downloading the AP forms from the NMRA website (<http://www.nmra.org/achievement/apforms.html>). The forms are available in several different formats including MS Word documents. You can add your own information by editing the forms on your PC. 🏠

**Visit Our Website**  
Visit the MER’s website for all the latest information, contacts and archives [www.mer-nmra.org](http://www.mer-nmra.org).

# A Note From the Editor

By Steve Kindig

**H**ELLO EVERYONE! I hope you are finding ways to stay cool during the hot weather.

Right now I am leading a busy life with a new wife and new nephew (via photos for now) and family picnics and so forth I want to use my column time wisely and issue a brief reminder and to pass along a new idea.

Even though it is summer and not typically thought of as our hobby season, a newsletter still gets published. Since my goal is to keep you interested – and you don't want to be bored reading the same old things – be sure to keep sending me articles, Division activities, Callboard items, how-tos, scratching building plans, general use, maintaining and updating of any model related items. The more artistic modelers can share their weathering and painting techniques, landscaping projects and inventive use of everyday household items in their layouts and modeling projects. Don't forget about a frequently missed opportunity to produce a written summarization of clinic that you have presented and reach the people that weren't able to attend a convention. I also want you to share your trials-and-errors and your general modeling stories, trips and accomplishments. All of these have the opportunity to earn AP points.

You may have noticed that I have taken the "Artist of the Month" a step further. When I have space I will run a drawing, photo-

graph, painting and now I will also feature a LAYOUT or INTERESTING PHOTO SCENE of the Month (see example below). Photographs can be of anything seen on your layout – or perhaps a friends' layout. I am asking for a sentence or two to describe the scene. I am also accepting prototypical photographs of stations, graffiti and any other rail related items that you care to share. Of course this will be on an 'as space' basis but I am sure it will fill up fast – so hurry and send your submission now!

I hope to meet more of you at the upcoming convention and that gas prices won't deter you! My contact information is on page 2 and I will be happy to discuss any of your ideas or give you a hand with your writing. Until then — Happy Modeling! 🚂

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## Artist, Layout or Interesting Photo of the Month

by Steve Kindig

*About two years ago, I was doing the railfan hustle (you know the one where you don't hear/see the train until the last minute and you want to catch a good opening), along Routes 11/15 outside of Cove, PA. I caught this flatcar, crane and gondola carrying a section of track – not the best picture but an interesting story.*

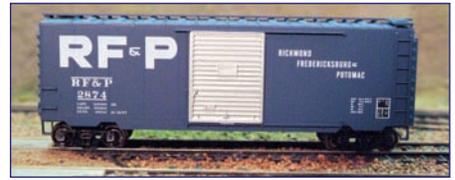
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# CALLBOARD

## Coming Events

**July 12th** – Wade’s Train Town Open House operated by Carolina Southern Division members. Brookford Town Center located at 1700 South Center Street in Hickory, NC. Hours: 10 AM till 4 PM.

**July 13th - 19th** – The Pacific Southwest Region hosts the “Anaheim Special” – the National Convention in Anaheim, CA. For more information visit [www.nmra.org/2008/](http://www.nmra.org/2008/).

**August 2nd and 3rd** – Potomac Module Crew is running at The Lyceum - Alexandria’s History Museum. 201 South Washington Street in Alexandria, VA. Saturday: 10 AM till 5 PM and Sunday: 11 AM till 5 PM. Cost is free but donations are welcome.

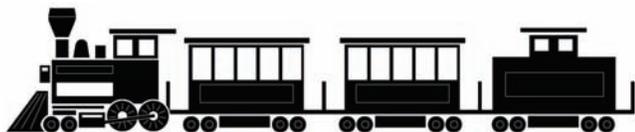
**August 9th** – Wade’s Train Town Open House operated by Carolina Southern Division members. Brookford Town Center located at 1700 South Center Street in Hickory, NC. Hours: 10 AM till 4 PM.

**August 9th** – Tidewater HO Module Group is displayed from 11 AM till 5 PM at the Children’s Museum located at 221 High Street in Portsmouth, VA.

**August 9th** – Lynchburg Rail Day 2008 (30th anniversary), sponsored by the Blue Ridge Chapter NRHS. Boonsboro Ruritan Club located on Bradley L. Gaertner Drive in Lynchburg, VA. Hours: 9 AM till 4 PM. Layouts onsite; white elephant tables; clinics; dealers; historical societies; slide shows; food and drinks available. Cost: \$5 for adults; kids 12 and under are free. For more information visit [www.blueridgenrhs.org/rail\\_day.htm](http://www.blueridgenrhs.org/rail_day.htm).

**August 29th – 31st** – 3rd Annual North Carolina RailRun. Operation Sessions on multiple layouts over a three-day weekend. Cost: \$7 for OP SIG members; \$10 for all others. Registration deadline is August 9th. Visit [www.ncrailrun.org](http://www.ncrailrun.org) for complete details. E-mail Mike Pennie at [penniemichael@yahoo.com](mailto:penniemichael@yahoo.com); or call (336) 393-0552.

**August 31 and September 1st** – Fairfax Station Labor Day Show with the Potomac Module Crew. Located at 11200 Fairfax Station Road in Fairfax Station, VA. Sunday: 12 PM till 5 PM; Monday: 12 PM till 4 PM. Cost: Adults \$4.00; children \$1.00. Visit [www.fairfax-station.org](http://www.fairfax-station.org) for more information.



# Achievement Program Update

*By Charlie Flichman, MER AP Manager*

Since the last report in **The Local**, the following Achievement Program certificates were earned and awarded:

## Division 1 – New Jersey

Danny Seymour – *Gold Spike*

## Division 5 – James River

Charles J. Callaghan – *Gold Spike*

August Lupino – *Gold Spike*

Edmund Potter – *Gold Spike*

Harold M. Prettyma – *Gold Spike*

George Riley – *Gold Spike*

Melvin Simmons – *Gold Spike*

Gerald M. Walterreit – *Gold Spike*

## Division 12 – Carolina Southern

Steve August – *Chief Dispatcher*

Jack Monette – *Engineer - Civil*

In a perfect world, this information will appear soon in **Scale Rails**. This should not deter you from giving recognition locally. Normally you will be able to recognize AP accomplishments long before the names appear in **Scale Rails**.

Here is the running total of how many Gold Spikes and AP Merit awards have been earned in the last year. Since June 1, 2007, MER members have earned 23 Gold Spikes and 24 AP Merit Awards.

With the articles currently running on the “Year Of The MMR” in **Scale Rails**, I hope we will see more activity in the Achievement Program. If you have any questions after reading any of the articles, please do not hesitate to e-mail me. Your Divisional AP Chair and myself are here to assist you in any way we can, but you have to ask. Thanks. 📧

## NEEDED: Assistant Model Contest Manager for the MER

Convention attendance,  
computer wizardry, keen eye and  
modeling skills a must.

Humor, scale blindness, patience, fairness and  
impartiality will take you to the top!

Please contact Clint Hyde, [chyde@cox.net](mailto:chyde@cox.net)

or

Martin Brechbiel, [martinwb@verizon.net](mailto:martinwb@verizon.net). 📧

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**NMRA Included  
 in 2008 Combined  
 Federal Campaign**

*By Roger L. Cason, MMR  
 NMRA Fund Raising Manager*

The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) takes place in federal work places once a year. In many ways, this campaign is similar to a United Way solicitation. Employees can make contributions to charitable organizations of their choice via payroll deduction.

We have been notified that – for the first time – the NMRA will be included in the next CFC campaign – projected for the fall of 2008. This is in response to our application for inclusion (fifty nine pages, including attachments).

Bottom line: if you are a federal employee, and you wish to make a financial contribution to the NMRA, you may want to consider the CFC as the mechanism for making your contribution. We will be listed under “National/International Independent Organizations”. Our identification number will be 12286. 