

# The Local

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## Memories of National and Regional Conventions: That You Won't Believe – Or Maybe You Will

*By E. Winfield Gross  
Philadelphia Division/HO Scale*

**O**VER THE YEARS I have attended many national and regional conventions. I have attended at least 88 MER conventions and maybe 10 conventions from other regions. I have been to about 45 NMRA national conventions. The first Mid-Eastern Region convention that I attended was in 1951, which was held in Harrisburg, PA. I went with my friend and neighbor, the famous J. Harold Geissel. The next convention I attended was in the spring of 1952, which was held in York, PA. Again I went with Harold Geissel. In the spring of 1953, the convention was held in Philadelphia, PA. I probably went with Harold to this one too. Finally, at this convention I became a member of the NMRA National and I also joined the Mid-Eastern Region.

I wanted to share some of the experiences I had at different conventions. I will not name the conventions or the year they took place, and I will not do it in any order. As I type this story I will mention things that come to my mind.

The first one I can think of was that a day before the convention in one of the large cities all the hotel workers in the large hotels walked out on strike. That sure can mess up the best-laid plans of the convention committee! But things worked out for the convention attendees. We made our own beds, cleaned up our rooms and did other chores like that. Of course, because of the strike there were no restaurants or the bars open in the hotels. We had to find other places to get our food. The front desk clerks worked during the strike, I guess they belonged to a different union. The managers of the hotel had to pitch in do some of duties that the striking workers usually did. The worst thing about the strike was finding a new place for the banquet and the after dinner programs. The convention committee did a wonderful job finding a new location in a few short hours on Saturday. They found an American Legion hall about 2 blocks from the hotel and used that for the banquet and rounded up a caterer in a few hours to serve the meal. I know everyone who attended was very pleased that the committee could do all this in a short time.

Speaking about strikes, at two national conventions the tour bus company drivers walked out on strike the week before the convention was to take place. Of course, that cancelled most of the layout tours and other tours that were to be held during the week. The committee did manage to get some busses from the local city bus company but finding enough busses on weekdays was nearly impossible.

At another national convention the local city bus drivers – you guessed it – decided to strike the transit company – and no it wasn't Philadelphia (which is famous for having a transit strike every few years). The problem with this city bus strike was that the tour bus company drivers refused to go inside the city limits as they were honoring the striking bus drivers. So much for any tours inside the city limits.

While attending another national convention, I was on a layout tour bus, which took us miles and miles north of the convention city. We left the hotel shortly after dinner and rode at least an hour before stopping at the first layout. We visited at least four more layouts arriving at the last layout about 11 PM. We saw the layout and then went out into the driveway to wait for our bus to take us back to the hotel. We waited and waited and waited, and no bus showed up. Finally, the tour guide used the layout owner's telephone to call the hotel. This was before the cell phone age. The tour guide told us that our bus was to stay and wait for us to visit the layout and then take home to our hotel. Apparently the driver took the empty bus back to the hotel. I guess he thought another bus would pick us up. Wrong! Did I forget to mention this part of the country was full of big and very hungry mosquitoes – all 30 of us had to wait in the owner's house while we waited for another bus to show up. The bus came around midnight and we finally arrived back at the hotel about 2 AM. This was the end of another long, happy convention day.

At another nation convention I took a bus to visit 3 or 4 lay-

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# The Local

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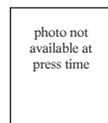


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All subscription information, advertising rates and publication deadlines are now located on page 16.

The MER website is <http://mer.nmra.org/>

# From The Business Car

By John Janosko  
MER President

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK Bob Clegg for his guest column on how we should recruit and welcome new members. I have already tried some of his ideas. I help a good friend, who owns a hobby shop, when he participates in one of the train shows in the Virginia and North Carolina areas. Recently at the New Bern, NC show I made it a point to use some of Bob's ideas and it seemed to work. We will have to see if it pans out in the long term.

In kind of the same vein, if you do attend train shows or go to your local hobby shop (I know they are becoming rarer) is it surprising how many of the models are ready to run? Where have all the kits gone? We seem to have modelers that want instant gratification and do not want to take time to put kits together. I think some of this is true, but it is also true that some of us do not share the joy of putting a kit together to the non-kit builder. Our Thursday night group has recently added a new person that once we shared some in depth conversations has started to put his own modular layout together. If we do not take the time with newer modelers, then someday when you attend a convention and won-

der why there are so few models to judge, we will have no one to blame but ourselves. It all comes back to the fact that we are a volunteer organization and we get out of it what we put into it.

Recently I have been talking to the Board about some ways for us to make a little money for the MER. We are looking into doing a short sleeve Polo type shirt with a pocket. You will be able to have your name along with the MER label on the shirt. This would be on an order only basis and we would not have it for sale at the company store or at conventions, but we would have the forms online and at the company store. We also have been looking at a new car kit for sale. A few different cars were brought up, but we hit some snags. If you have any good ideas for a car of a railroad that was in existence in the MER territory, please feel free to give me a call (919-656-6897) and I will bring it up to the Board.

I know that summer is coming up and for a lot of us, model railroading takes a back seat to outdoor activities, but it will not be too long before the 2012 convention in the Tidewater area of Virginia. Now is the time to send in your registration. From everything I hear it should really be another great MER convention. 

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**Memories of National and Regional Conventions** continued from page 1

outs one evening. We left the last layout about 11 PM and after driving for a while, the bus driver and the tour guide decided we were lost about 60 miles west of the hotel. We were out among the cornfields by this time. Finally, the tour guide asked us if someone from the area was on the bus. A man said was and he told the bus driver how to get back to our hotel. Again we arrived there about 2 AM. That was the end of another convention day.

Everyone who attends the local conventions, know the layouts are usually open Friday evening and Sunday afternoon. I remember some incidents that happened on a few Sunday afternoon layout tours. We found our way to one house and rang the doorbell. The man's wife answered the door and asked what we wanted. We told her we were here to see her husband's layout. She told us that her husband took her sons to a ball game and knew nothing of his layout to be open for the convention. Of course, we didn't get to see the layout. I suppose nobody on the convention committee notified the man that his layout was open even though he was listed in the layout tour booklet. At another convention we went layout touring on a Friday evening. We arrived at one of the houses and rang the bell. A man answered the door and asked why we were there. We told him we were there to see his layout. He said he torn the layout down the week before and notified the convention committee but they neglected to put signs up telling the convention attendees about his layout. First, why would you tear your layout down a week before the convention? And second, why didn't the committee do their job and notify the convention people of this? Oh well, the fun of going to conventions!

I have seen both finished layouts and layouts that were under construction during open houses. A few stand out in my mind. They were in the basements of the houses. The problems with certain open houses were with the owner's cats and dogs and that they never bothered to clean up the messes. All these layouts really had a nice ripe odor. All I wanted to do was get outside and breathe some fresh air! The layout owners could have cleaned up the messes from their pets before the convention people arrived.

At a national convention I checked into the hotel and was assigned my room. Easy, I thought. Wrong!! I went upstairs to my room and opened the door. Guess what? No curtains or shades at the huge windows. I took my bags back down to the front desk and they assigned me another room. Up I go again and opened the door, this room had curtains and shades but no furniture in it. Again, I went downstairs to the front desk and told them about this room. Finally, on the third try I received a complete room. Needless to say, the hotel chain was not one of my favorite ones as I had a lot of problems with them. We had a regional convention at the same chain hotel later on. The convention was held in the middle of October. Usually by then the weather was nice and pleasant, but of course the weekend of the convention there was a summer heat wave. The hotel had central air-conditioning, as most hotels had then. But the hotel had shut down the air-conditioning the first of October so the rooms were extremely hot (and I mean hot!). Ah, the joys of going to conventions.

When attending national conventions you usually choose the  
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# Keeping In Touch...

By Fred Miller, MMR  
MER Business Manager

HAS THE UNUSUALLY warm weather we have been experiencing caused you to leave your basements (and railroads) prematurely? Perhaps these days the migration from winter-time modeling projects to outdoor activities is not as great as it was in the past.

And speaking of the past, I was recently somewhat shocked at the amount of time I have been actively participating in this great hobby of ours. I was doing some research for a 2-rail DC wiring clinic I was preparing and found some articles I had written 50 years ago. Wow! Among other things, those articles dealt with building a DC throttle complete with momentum and separate throttle and brake levers. The article was published in a little mag called **TT Today**. Yes, that's right. I modeled in TT scale for several years. Now there was a fine modeling scale: 1:120, or conventionally 10 scale feet per inch. TT is a tad bigger than N and nicely

smaller than HO. The number of manufacturers was very limited – and produced only kits. Yes, TT became known as the scratch builders scale since that was the only way you could develop a model railroad. Probably because of that, and the emergence of the new Ready-To-Run N scale equipment, TT scale disappeared from the scene.

And then there were the years I modeled and wrote about Z-Scale, but that's a story for another time... Now my fingers are busy with HO, O and G. Notice the trend? If interest in your current modeling seems to be waning, why not consider the challenges of working in a different modeling scale.

Have you looked at the MER Products page in **The Local**? Our editor has included photos of the MER Patch and the MER Pin. This has generated some interest and orders. If you haven't already, perhaps you would like to add the patch to your MR cap or vest. The pin is a nice addition for your lapel or tie.

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. 

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## Memories of National and Regional Conventions continued from page 3

tours you want to go at home and then send in your choices to the committee. This one national convention decided to wait until the people arrived at the convention to choose the tours. This was a big mistake and caused mass confusion. You had to pick the tours you wanted right there, but no description of the tours was provided. I asked a person working behind the tour desk what tours to take. His answer was: I don't know anything about the tours, as the committee never told us about them. Somehow I picked out some tours and went on them. But this never happened again.

Attending the national conventions in a strange city is always a challenge to find places to eat. One convention as I was checking in I asked the worker behind the desk about places to eat downtown. Again, the answer was: I don't know I never eat downtown. Sometimes the convention timetable includes a list of dining places and sometimes it doesn't. I will say of lately they have been providing a list of places.

During one region convention we were supposed to have a banquet. But the food served to us consisted of tiny sandwiches, which I think are called hors d'oeuvres, and drinks of some kind. Of course, after this fiasco we had some of the banquet money refunded to us. At another nation convention we were to have roast beef but this was held during a time when the United States President asked people not to eat beef because of the high prices. The hotel decided to honor the President's request and served chicken, which was mostly frozen and couldn't be eaten. The hotel never consulted the convention committee about the change so they also received some money back.

The auctions, both silent and live, are a very important item on the convention list of activities. The national conventions usually have a large silent auction, which last at least three or more days. I have found most people attending the convention want to place their items in the auction as soon as possible so they can attend all the other activities of the convention. This holds true both for

national and region auctions. At several nationals I spent several hours registering my items because the help was not ready and there wasn't enough people helping, especially during the first few hours of the registration. This was very discouraging to me because I was forced to miss attending other activities being held at the same time. At the national convention so many items are placed in the auction that the auction committee usually has to turn people away from placing items in the auction because of lack of space. This makes people very angry when turned away. On one occasion, when I was the silent auction chairman I was in a room close to 12 hours a day for at least 5 days. I had to turn people away from placing their items in the auction after the third day because we just didn't have room for any more items. Of course, that made for a lot of hard feelings but there was nothing I could do about it. In the end, the silent auctions are always very successful and make a lot of money.

As to the local region auctions, they usually have only a live auction after the banquet. This is fine if the after the banquet activities are over early. But if these activities drag on and on it gets very late until the auction gets started. As it gets later and later, people start to leave to go to bed leaving only a small amount of people to bid on the items. I remember at a few region auctions when the convention was held in the spring and it was daylight savings time, which made the auction go over an hour later. One regional committee tried to have the auction Friday evening but it was not very well attended because the people were busy doing other things. That was never repeated at future conventions.

I was the MER auction chairman for about 5 years sometime ago. I finally gave the job to some else because of several problems I had. I could never get enough help at the conventions and or having enough room at the hotel to check the items in. At one convention I had to use the public hallway because the room I was supposed to have was unavailable. The hotel gave it to another

group instead of us. At night we had to move all the items into a locked storeroom and take them out the next morning to a small room that the hotel found for us.

After I resigned from the auction chairman job, I did take items to be put in the auction but there were still the same problems. Once, I remember the auction chairman, after he arrived at the hotel several hours late had to return home to get the auction tickets. Another time there was no room available to register the items because the hotel gave the room to another group. The auction chairman had to use part of the lobby and then lock up the items somewhere and then on Saturday morning get the items out and set them up in the hotel lobby because there still wasn't a room available. I think the auction items stayed there until the auction. After I saw that fiasco I was really glad I gave up the regional auction chairman job.

I still haven't mentioned one important item of all the conventions - the clinics. Over the years since I started going to conventions I attended many, many, many clinics. I have seen clinics about every possible subject pertaining to model railroading and many clinics about the prototype railroads, industries and about famous model railroad layouts. Some of the clinics were excellent, some were so-so and others weren't so good. Some of the clinics were about what they were as written up in the convention timetable and other clinics started well but strayed off on other subjects. I leaned over the years to sit in the back of the room so I could leave when I wasn't enjoying the clinic.

Around 1998 and 1999 when DCC was really starting to become popular a lot of the conventions (especially the nationals) had many clinics about DCC. That was fine but the rooms were always too small and the people had to stand around the walls or stand in the hallways. This was very poor planning by the conven-

tion personal by not providing large rooms for this new subject. Now I rarely attend the clinics as most of the subjects I have seen or the subjects don't interest me.

Of course, the biggest events at the national conventions are the train shows. The shows are usually held on the last Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The show is for the convention attendees and the public is allowed in after a few hours. This is very nice as it gives convention attendees a chance to see the displays and talk to the vendors before the general public is in. I will never forget one train show several years ago. We had the show to ourselves from Noon until 3 PM. At that time the public was permitted to enter the show. I was standing at the top of a row of escalators and the convention hall personnel opened a row of doors downstairs and the public streamed up those escalators in one huge mob just like the commuters do when the train gates are opened in the Amtrak Station in New York City. And where did the public go to when they got upstairs on the train show floor? I saw most of them head straight to see all the train layouts and not to the dealers and vendors.

The last national convention I attended was 2005 in Cincinnati. I did attend part of the 2006 Philadelphia convention but I was at it only one day during the week as my layout was open on the other days. I did attend the train show at the end of the week but the show was a bit of a disappointment to me for some reason. The last train show I attended was 2009 in Hartford, CT. The show was a great and I really enjoyed myself.

The last MER convention I went to was 2009 in Hagerstown, MD. I really enjoyed the convention as the committee did an excellent job putting on the convention. I hope you have enjoyed reading about my thoughts and stories about attending conventions over the years. 🏠

## Master Model Railroader #469

*By Brian W. Sheron, MMR  
Potomac Division/HO Scale*

**L**IKE MOST MODEL RAILROADERS, I was introduced to model trains as a child, and the fond memories and fun I had provided the impetus for me to get back to model trains when my oldest son (who is now 36) turned 5.

While model trains did not stay in his blood, they remained in mine. So what got me interested in the Master Model Railroader program anyway? Well, I've been working on my third layout (The Long Island Rail Road, Port Jefferson Branch – circa 1964) since we moved into our third and current house in 1988. My layout was fairly complete by 1996, and was a featured article in the September 1997 issue of **Railmodel Journal** magazine.

I actually "burned out" on model railroading about that time (as I told people, one too many drops of solder fell on my ankles while I sat cross-legged under the layout wiring up turnout machines), and turned my attention to learning to play the banjo and restore classic wooden boats as hobbies. However, in 2004 the Potomac Division's layout tour coordinator asked if I would be willing to host an open house/layout tour. I was at first hesitant, but decided it was time to get back to the railroad, and I therefore agreed. I cleaned up the layout and got it back to a sufficiently operational condition for the open house.

Once back into the hobby, I discovered and became fascinated with DCC and sound locomotives. This led to me to completely rewire and convert my layout for DCC operation. I also finally cleaned out a room in the basement adjacent to my layout room, and was able to expand my railroad to add the New York City Pennsylvania Station terminus. Following these improvements, I was again asked by the Division to host an open house in May of 2008. Subsequent to the open house, Tom Brodrick, a member of our Division who had visited my layout, asked me if I'd like to join him and others in his group in an operating session at his house. I had never participated in an operating session, didn't know what to expect, or if I'd like it, but figured I'd give it was worth a try.

I went to the session with Tom and his operations group, and had a great time, and since it has opened up a whole new aspect of model railroading for me. I assume I didn't offend anyone or screw up too badly, since the group invited me back, and by July I was asked to host my first operating session. It turned out that a

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**Brian W. Sheron**

number of the members in the operations group were also active in our division, including the Division Superintendent, Marshall Abrams. In October of 2008, Marshall approached me and asked if I'd like to be the Achievement Program (AP) Coordinator for the Potomac Division. I said "Sure. What's an Achievement Program?" Well, I quickly familiarized myself with the NMRA's Achievement Program by gathering and reading all the information I could about it and learning what my duties were. I also found out that as the AP coordinator, I had to write a column for the quarterly Division newsletter. But what could I write about? Figuring I could kill two birds with one stone, I decided that the best way to learn about the Achievement Program was to participate in it and try to earn Achievement awards. That way I could use my learning experience as a source of information for my quarterly column. Not quite 3 years later, I completed the requirements for the Master Model Railroader (MMR) certificate.

I think that if working towards achieving my MMR certificate taught me anything, it was to become a better modeler. Working through the requirements was a challenge. But challenges are good. They force you to do better and achieve results of which you probably thought you weren't capable.

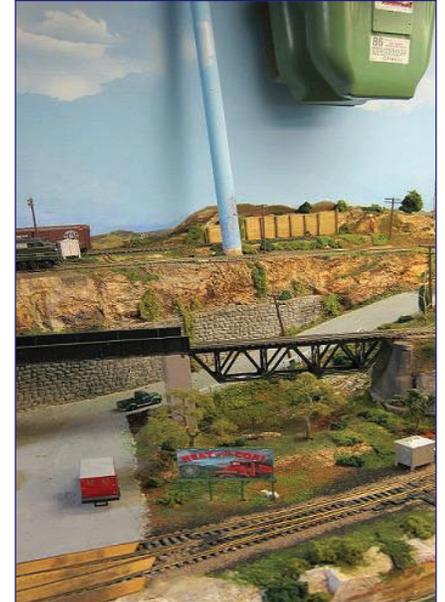
*Brian earned the following certificates to achieve his Master Model Railroader designation: Author, Volunteer, Model Railroad Engineer-Civil, Model Railroad Engineer-Electrical, Chief Dispatcher, Master Builder-Cars, Master Builder-Scenery.* 🚂

## Time to Replace Your Gas Line – Follow Up

Article and photograph by Ron Baile  
New Jersey Division/HO Scale

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** After last issue, Ron sent me a thank you note and a follow up photo that I thought some of you might be interested in. Enjoy!

**T**HE GAS METER is still there but the MOW siding is another foot or so longer. I finally got a nice bridge installed too. It's still a work in progress, but it looks good now.

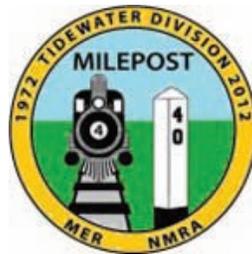


## Milepost 40 is Approaching!

**T**HE TIDEWATER DIVISION will be hosting this year's MER Convention at the Hilton Garden Inn, 100 East Constance Road, Suffolk, VA, 23434 on October 18th-21st. Room rates are \$89 per night, reservations can be made thru the Division website [www.NMRA-MER-Tidewater.org](http://www.NMRA-MER-Tidewater.org). Click on the convention link, then Hotel Reservation. The information on the hotel will be displayed and at the bottom of that page is a direct link to the hotel booking. Convention registration also may be made on the MER website, which is linked from the Division website.

Some of the events we have confirmed are listed below, and we are still working on more!

Prototype tours include the operations at Vulcan Materials, receiving and processing rock and gravel by rail. A tour of the Port of Virginia, Norfolk International Terminals and the APMT (Maersk) Terminal, loading and unloading container ships and intermodal rail cars. We have a lunch excursion on the Eastern Shore railroad; a 3 hour trip up and back their rail line along the Eastern Shore. We are still working on a tour of Norfolk Southern's Portlock yard and their Lambert's Point coaling facility, along with a tour of the maintenance facility for Norfolk's new light rail line.



By Gary Brown  
Tidewater Superintendent and  
Convention Chairman.

We have twenty five open house/layout tours confirmed; 14 HO, 6 G, 4 O, and one On30 gauge. Three operations sessions are confirmed including the TMRC/Great Lakes and South Eastern which can handle 14-22 operators and usually holds four hour operation sessions.

Clinics include: Modeling the Western Maryland Railway; Recycled Freight cars; Epoxy casting techniques; Lost wax casting; Easy Model railroad Inventory software; Uncoupling magnets; Modeling the Central Vermont; Interesting Flat Car loads; Selecting Industries for your Model Railroad; Perishable Operations in the 1950's; Modeling the C&O; Prototypical Accessories to Buildings and Communities for Model Railroads; Operations on the Chicago Belt Line; Operations on the TMRC/GLSE; and we are adding more clinics each week!

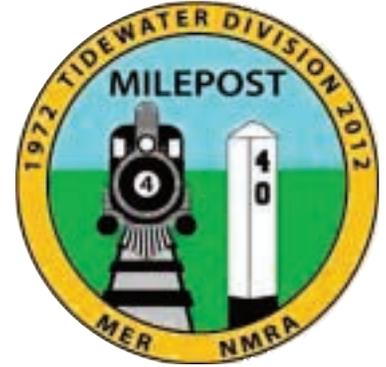
For non-rail activities we have arranged a combined tour of the Virginia Aquarium and the Military Aviation Museum (every aircraft from the Corsair, to the PBY, to the B-17 are flown on a regular basis). There is the USS Wisconsin, Nautilus, and The Mariner's Museum with the Monitor's recovered Turret, Busch Gardens and "Howl-O-Scream".

This promises to be a great time, come join us at **Milepost 40!**

# Mid-East Region, NMRA Fall Convention Milepost 40

October 18th to October 21st, 2012

## REGISTRATION FORM



Please enter (print legibly) all names **as you wish them to appear on your registration badges**. They will not be changed at the convention.

Primary Registrant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Children (under age 16 – List all): \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ NMRA # \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIPTION	COST	#	PAYING
Early Registration (until September 15, 2012 then \$45 until October 15, 2012)	\$40		
Non-NMRA member extra fee	\$10		
Significant other	\$15		
Children (under 16)	\$10		
Banquet Chicken Marasala Saturday Night	402 \$40		
Banquet Broiled Fresh Salmon Saturday Night	403 \$40		
Banquet Grilled New York Strip Saturday Night	404 \$40		
<b>TOTAL ADVANCE REGISTRATION PAID</b>			
Additional events will be added when their cost is known.			

### CONVENTION HOTEL:

Hilton Garden Inn  
100 East Constance Road  
Suffolk, VA 23434

The convention rate is \$89.00 per room (plus taxes) per night. All hotel registrations must be made directly with the hotel at 757-925-1300 or online at [www.suffolk.gardeninn.com](http://www.suffolk.gardeninn.com). These rates are in effect until 18 September 2012. When registering, specify the Milepost 40 MER Convention to get these special rates.

Payment must accompany registration.

Make checks payable to: **MER Fall Convention 2012**

Send all registrations to: **MER Fall Convention, P.O. Box 447, Swedesboro, NJ 08085**

For questions and / or additional information email **MER-Registrar@comcast.net**

## Tidewater Division Announces Custom Cars For Milepost 40

*By John Fallon*

**T**HE TIDEWATER DIVISION is having a custom run of car kits made by Accurail to commemorate the Division's 40th Anniversary and **Milepost 40**. The HO scale kits will be for a 50' combination door boxcar painted for the original Norfolk Southern Railway.

Norfolk Southern ordered 250 of the prototype cars from American Car & Foundry in 1959. Numbered 1201-1450, they were used mainly for paper service. The gray paint scheme with the large NS lettering was applied to the cars starting in the mid 1960's.

There will be two road numbers produced, 1210 for the year

and month of the **Milepost 40** Convention, and 1240 for 40

years of the Tidewater Division. Accurail does offer re-numbering decals for those who would like them.

The cars will be priced at \$17.00 for one, \$30.00 for two, shipping TBD for now. If you would like to reserve one, email John Fallon at [zzoxdoc@yahoo.com](mailto:zzoxdoc@yahoo.com). 



# Building a Camera Car for Your Railroad Tour

Article and photographs by: Don Jennings, Director in MER  
Carolina Piedmont Division/HO Scale

**A**FTER AN IMPORTANT MEETING about The Neuse River Valley Model Railroad Club's layout, Bernie Dawson and myself got together to talk about the meeting. Both of us were thinking about taking pictures of the club's layouts for our website.

The club has: two Thomas The Tank engine layouts (one with two tracks in HO Scale and the with two tracks in G Scale); an 8



**Photo 1: Attempt two, front view of camera on gondola.**

foot by 32 foot HO Scale layout; a large Lionel layout with two tracks; and a Garden Railway layout. There is also a Lego layout in the middle of the Lionel table and a Marklin HO three rail AC layout that can be viewed from the front window. All of this is for viewing by the public when we are open.

We wanted pictures of the N Scale layout that Bernie works on and the HO Scale layout that I like. Bernie said he knew of someone who could edit the pictures we took so it would be best presented on the website. I took many pictures of the layout during our busy open houses on Saturdays and Sundays. But the pictures were not quite what I wanted to show of the layout.

This got me thinking about taking a video of the layout rather than just pictures. I figured with my small camera mounted on a



**Photo 2: Attempt two, rear view of camera on gondola.**



**Photo 3: A small piece of furring strip wood drilled with holes to accept the camera's mounting screw (pictured in bottom corner).**

train car I could show the entire layout as it traversed the trackage of our club's entire railroad. I went to my home layout, The Atlantic and Western Railroad – Rallec Division, to try to find ways to mount the camera to a train car.

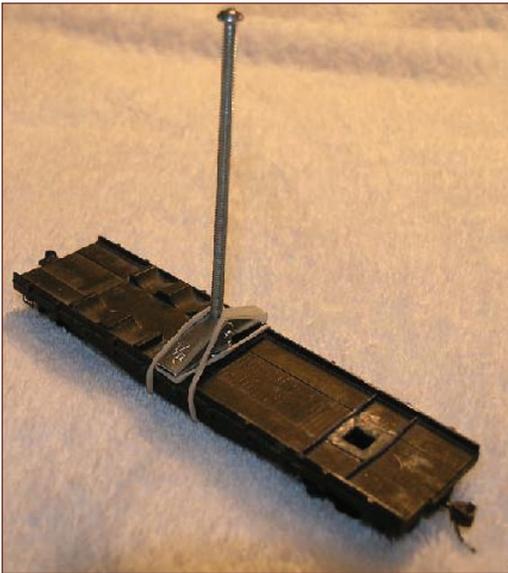
My first attempt was to just place the camera on a coal hopper car, which I weighted so it would not topple over while the train was running. This sort of worked but gave me a lot of roof top views. It also showed me that I had to move some structures so



**Photo 4: The lead weights on the car's one side counter-balance the weight and size of the camera.**

the camera would not be bumped or fall off the car. I learned two important things from this attempt.

On the next attempt I placed the camera on a gondola car. This had a lower profile than the coal hopper car and gave a more realistic view. But the camera still needed to be mounted to the gondola car in some way so that it would not bounce around while running. Since my camera lens is offset, it would also not be in the center of the gondola. Photos 1 and 2 show



**Photo 5:**  
Attempt three,  
a  
metal flat  
car with a  
toggle bolt  
mounted.



**Photo 7:**  
Rear view  
of the  
finished car.



**Photo 6:**  
Front view  
of the  
finished car.

the front and rear view of camera on the gondola.

To make a tripod for the gondola, I used a small piece of furring strip wood and drilled a large hole to accept the camera's mounting screw. See photo 3. I drilled two small holes thru the wood and into the gondola car and attached the piece of wood so that the camera would be held firmly. This worked but I also had to use lead weights on the car's one side to counter-balance the camera. See photo 4.

I was happy with the results but I wanted to try one more idea. In my supply of rolling stock, I found an old Ulrich Trailer on a flat car. This metal car had a hole already drilled in the middle of the car to hold the truck trailer. This was perfect for my use. I filed off the fifth wheel support and was able to mount a toggle bolt thru the bolt hole, from the top down, with a couple of nuts on the bottom of the car. See photo 5. When the toggle bolt was rigid on the car, I was able to use a rubber band around the camera body to secure the camera to the toggle bolt and hold my camera in a horizontal position. See photos 6 and 7 for finished car.

It really works and gives a good video of your layout. Try this for yourself!

You can see my video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsDds10cvGw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsDds10cvGw). 

## Your MER Board at Work

*Story and photo by Eric Dervinis  
Philadelphia Division/HO Scale*

**T**WICE A YEAR the MER board meets to conduct the official business of the Region. The treasurer was very generous to host the board in his house on January 14, 2012. Many thanks to Tom and his lovely wife Betsy for making all of the arrangements.

The board approved the 2012 budget, heard a report from Gary Brown, Chair of Milepost 40 and reviewed reports from the directors. Other MER volunteers were in attendance to present proposals and information to the board.

After the meeting, the board posed for this picture. Director Don Jennings had to leave early (his story on visiting the First State Model Railroad Club was in the last issue). 



**Back row (l to r) P.J. Mattson, MMR – Vice President, Marty McGuirk – Director, Bob Price – Director, Fred Miller, MMR – Business Manager;**  
**Front row (l to r) Tom Buckingham – Treasurer, John Janosko – President, Mike White – Secretary**

# Dispelling Myths About the Achievement Program

By Martin Brechbiel – MER Contest Chair; Brian Sheron, MMR – Potomac Division AP Coordinator;  
and Charlie Flichman, MMR – MER Achievement Program Manager

A RECENT LOOK at the NMRA Achievement Program (AP) in the Potomac Division revealed some interesting statistics. The Division has a membership of about 400 members. Of that, a total of 46 members are participating in the AP, in that they either have a Golden Spike Award, and/or have at least one achievement certificate. However, if you eliminate those members that only have Golden Spike Awards, that also do not have any Achievement Awards (14), then the number of members that have at least one Achievement Certificate drops down to 32. This of course does not account for any of those members that are actively working on their first AP award, but then there are also those that got their Golden Spike Award, and then stopped.

Model Railroading is all about just that – modeling railroads. Most, if not all of us, are in the hobby because we have a love for railroad models and modeling and the fun that we derive from this hobby. And modeling involves creativity. It provides an artistic outlet for us to learn, develop, and grow those skills to create scenes, models of structures, models of rolling stock, and models of motive power. It also provides us with an opportunity to learn and/or apply our carpentry, electrical and basic engineering skills. Finally, it provides us opportunities to learn operations, writing and communicating with our fellow modelers, and generally promoting all of those social interactions that make up that aspect of the hobby, much of which is a key component of the hobby for many.

To assist the modeler in his/her quest to achieve proficiency in all of these areas, the NMRA created the Achievement Program. So, just what is the Achievement Program? It is a program consisting of 11 areas related to almost all facets of model railroading in which specific achievement goals are set. The purpose of these goals is to help the modeler improve his/her modeling and model railroading skills by the attainment of some or even all these goals, such that the modeler will learn and acquire a broad range of skills that will aid or assist him/her to become better at many of the aspects of model railroading. It does not require one to master all 11 areas, but only a subset of 7 of the 11, appropriately distributed to reasonably touch upon a selection of fundamental model railroading skill sets. The goals are not designed to be easy to obtain, but then again, they are also not designed to be impossible, and that with the acquisition of the requisite skills and practice, should be achievable for any that wish to grow their skills, knowledge, and range of capabilities.

Basketball has always been a good analogy. If you only play basketball with people who are much shorter than you, and perhaps are not as good as you, there is probably not a lot of challenge for you to make baskets. However, if you play against people who are as tall as you, or even taller than you, or have good basketball skills, you force yourself to improve in order to keep up. You improve your moves; improve your shooting and all related skills. The same is true for the Achievement Program, except it might be more akin to golf or bowling in truth, if you want to use a sports analogy. What competition exists only exists between the modeler that you are now and the one you can

become, by testing or measuring yourself and your skills against the achievement goals. The goals are designed to challenge you and help you improve your modeling and model railroading skills.

So why don't more modelers participate in the program? Everyone has their reasons. However, many times we hear reasons that may be based on false information. And there are many who may have heard of these reasons, and were frightened off before even starting. There is a surprising amount of myth and misinformation that gets presented and passed around as gospel from "experts", much of which can be put into the same category as old wives' tales.

The purpose of this article is to hopefully dispel some of the myths about the AP that may be scaring people to try the program.

## 1. "I just don't have the modeling skills."

Modeling, like anything else you do in life, takes practice and some work in order to do it well. You may have to build several cars or structures before one of them receives a merit award. And of course, it is disappointing to spend a lot of time and effort on a model that does not receive a Merit Award. But what you do receive is experience –and there's that practice component at work, too. Few start out as gifted, talented modelers – almost all had to practice and learn from the beginning. And, beyond the model building, there's also the learning component surrounding whatever the car or structure was that you built. There's a lot that goes into prototype modeling and that takes some research and learning by a modeler. By building a specific prototype or prototype-based model, there's more going on that just simply building a model. Now, this is evaluated by being judged, so regardless of the outcome, you find out what the judges are looking for, you find out what you overlooked, and you learn you need to improve on, and in doing so you improve your own abilities across the board.

## 2) "I have been told there is too much paperwork."

Most things in life these days require paperwork, and the AP program is no different. However, for the most part, this excuse and complaint falls into one of the crevasses of myth and misinformation. The paperwork is not excessive or complicated, and many fellow model railroaders that work in the Achievement Program are more than happy to explain what is needed, why it is needed, and even provide example packages. Admittedly, some people have not found the NMRA guidance clear, and this has led to confusion as to what paperwork is needed. We suggest you should always first consult with your division AP Coordinator, any AP certificate holder, or MMR for assistance regarding what paperwork is needed and what it should contain, and they should be willing to honor that request for help. In fact, all three of us have reviewed paperwork in advance for modelers prior to conventions or in-home judging. Basically, the only paperwork that is required is that needed to succinctly explain what you did and how you did it. Yes, folks all too frequently submit binders of paperwork for models to be judged in contest rooms at all levels in the NMRA or

even for in-home judging. Anything much over 2 pages of information as broken down by the judging form is probably excessive – maybe a picture or two and plans, but anything much over that is unnecessary.

3) “I’ve heard the Achievement Program costs a lot of money; scratchbuilding is a financial burden.”

No. The argument that the AP is a financial burden, and that the cost of scratchbuilding is too much simply does not bear out. Participating in the Achievement Program shouldn’t cost any more than what a model railroader normally invests in the hobby. For example, the scratchbuilding supplies needed to build a scratch-built car or structure will likely cost the same or less than if you bought a quality craftsman kit of the same or similar car or structure. And, the cost of building a car, engine, or structure that will receive a Merit Award will almost certainly be comparable or even cost less than a craftsman quality ready-built structure, engine, or ready-to-run car.

4) “There’s too much emphasis on scratchbuilding.”

Not true! In order to meet the requirements for the MMR, you must receive achievement certificates in 7 of the 11 AP categories. Of the 7, you must receive at least 1 in each of the 4 broad categories. Upon further inspection of the MMR requirements, in theory you can actually meet the requirements for MMR by only getting an achievement award in 1 category that actually requires scratchbuilding. There are 6 categories in the remaining 3 broad areas that do not require any scratchbuilding (see below for a breakdown). In reality, it might be difficult for everyone that wants to earn their MMR to serve as a Regional or National officer, so getting all three of the “Service to the Hobby” categories could prove to be difficult. Scratchbuilding in at least two categories is a more likely scenario.

Let’s also reflect back on this to the scoring of judged models as well, since there’s a belief (another myth) that is perpetuated that only scratchbuilt models can get Merit Awards and that this arena is effectively closed to kits and kit-bashing. This is not true. For example, in the “Cars” category, while you must build 8 models and 4 must be scratchbuilt, the 4 that are scratchbuilt are not required to be the ones that are merit judged. You can have up to four kit built cars merit judged to meet the requirements. Scratchbuilding is but 15 of the 125 available points for judged models and you need 87.5 for a Merit Award.

**Category Areas and Their Scratchbuilding Requirements:**

<u>Railroad Equipment:</u>		<u>Scratchbuilding Component</u>
Motive Power	-	<u>1</u> locomotive or trolley, etc of 3 Merit Awards
Cars	-	<u>4</u> of 8 cars.
 <u>Railroad Setting:</u>		
Structures	-	<u>6</u> structures of 12.
Scenery	-	<u>None.</u>
Prototype Models	-	<u>2</u> of the 6 models

RR Construction & Operation:

Civil Engineering	-	<u>3</u> pieces of track work.
Electrical Engineering	-	<u>None.</u>
Chief Dispatcher	-	<u>None.</u>

Service to The Hobby:

Association Official	-	<u>None.</u>
Association Volunteer	-	<u>None.</u>
Model RR Author	-	<u>None.</u>

In summary, scratchbuilding is just one component of the overall MMR requirements, but it is not the predominant one.

5) “I’ll never be good enough.”

You would be surprised how many people become “good enough” after a bit of practice. However, you’ll never know unless you try. This connects back to “I don’t have the skills.” Nearly every time we ask how some one knows this or if we question how they have tried, we get something along the lines of “I don’t know...” or “I haven’t tried, but I know I can’t do that.” Henry Ford once stated, “If you think you can do a thing or can’t do a thing, you’re right”. Why give up before starting? And, there are folks all around you that should be willing to help you either local to you or via the Internet.

6) “I don’t have the time.”

Now that might very well be true, and everyone has other interests or obligations which compete for their time. But remember, there’s no time requirement on participating in the AP; there’s no rush to finish or deadline to meet. I (Martin) have a pretty time demanding career (so far!), but I still have managed to get a few Merit Awards and AP Certificates. I just putter in my shop when I take breaks from my work duties to escape the home office. Just like anything else, investing a little at a time slowly adds up.

7) “Joe Schmo said that.....”

Are you sure Joe is right? Don’t assume. Get accurate information from your divisional or regional AP coordinator, other AP certificate holders, and/or MMRs. Get your information from folks that have gotten Merit Awards and AP certificates; get your information from those that have succeeded and should be willing to help you.

8) “I don’t want to!”

Ok, that’s a perfectly good reason and everyone needs to respect that expression of choice. But honestly, ask yourself if it’s really not the first part of a sentence that ends in one of the excuses or reasons discussed above in disguise.....

So in conclusion, if you’ve ever given any thought to participating in the NMRA’s Achievement Program, but were reluctant to because of any of the reasons discussed above, we strongly encourage you to rethink your decision and give it a try. Chances are, you’ll be pleasantly surprised! 

# 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 **NMRA Magazine**, 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 two years.

## 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, 333 W. Trade St, Unit #2504, Charlotte, NC 28202-1961. (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 initially allocated \$2,000 for this program. The Board recently allocated an additional \$1,000 to extend the program to the end of 2012, or when the funds are spent – 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 below, 704-332-1753, [tractionfan@aol.com](mailto:tractionfan@aol.com)), or John Janosko, MER President (see contact information on page 2). 

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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 **NMRA Magazine**, 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 two years, 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 Sponsor: \_\_\_\_\_ (Required)  
(A Regional or Divisional officer or board member)

=====

When this form is completed,  
mail it to:

**Fred Miller, MMR**  
**MER Business Manager**  
**333 W. Trade St, Unit #2504**  
**Charlotte, NC 28202-1961**

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

Date of form: 1/31/07

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# Achievement Program Update

By Charlie Flichman, MMR  
MER AP Manager

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

### Division 1 – New Jersey

Christopher Conaway – *Model Railroad Engineer Electrical*

### Division 2 – Potomac

Martin McGuirk – *Association Volunteer*

Murray M. White – *Association Volunteer*

### Division 12 – Carolina Southern

Curtis A. Hardee – *Golden Spike*

Anthony L. Perkins – *Golden Spike*

### Division 13 – Carolina Piedmont

Robert Rousseau – *Golden Spike*

Robert Rousseau – *Model Railroad Engineer Electrical*

Stephen C. Wood – *Master Builder Scenery*

Stephen C. Wood – *Master Builder Structures*

Stephen C. Wood – *Model Railroad Engineer Electrical*

Stephen C. Wood – *Association Volunteer*

## I'm looking at you!

(Letter from the Editor)

By Steve Kindig  
*Susquehanna Division/HO Scale*

**DON'T KNOW** if it is the unseasonably warm weather leading to articles coming in slowly but I am still looking for both large and small articles to fill out the upcoming fall and winter issues. I usually have a bigger backlog by now and start preparing the incoming articles for next year.

I had people that wrote to me the last time I put the word out that I need articles and that they have ideas for an article and I had people write to me and ask 'is this a good idea?' but now I am looking to collect from those procrastinators and gather new authors.

I am also collecting "Artist of the Month" items. The item will be published when space is available and can showcase your original drawing, painting, a railfanning find, or layout scene.

If you have a question about submitting or want to run an idea by me all of my contact information is on page 2. Deadline information for each issue is on page 16. 📧

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

*Congratulations*



on your  
**Achievement!**

## Attention all MER Office Seekers

By Bob Minnis, MMR

If you are still interested in running for one of the four primary MER offices (President, Vice President, Secretary or Treasurer), you have until June 20 to submit a photo, a 200 word candidate statement and a petition of 25 current MER members to the nominating committee. See page 2 for contact details.

# SUPPORT YOUR NMRA REGION AND PURCHASE THESE GREAT PRODUCTS FROM MER



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These 40' Western Maryland N-Scale box cars are Micro-Train bodies custom painted by The Freight Yard. They are box car red with prominent white "speed lettering".

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MER Lapel  
Pin/Tie Tack

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Shipping \$2.50 for first car, + \$1.50 for each additional car				\$_____

\* Please list your MER or NMRA Membership # \_\_\_\_\_

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<b>NEW!</b> (all issues 1947–2011) on CD	QUANTITY _____	\$5.00 postpaid	\$_____
** Only available to MER members.			

<b>DONATION</b>			\$_____
<b>TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED</b>			\$_____

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**Mail to:**  
 Roger Ossman  
 MER Merchandise Sales Agent  
 3307 Englewood Road  
 Wilmington, DE 19819-3323

# CALLBOARD

## Coming Events

**May 5th and 6th.** Severna Park Model Railroad Club open house in the B & A Train Station (on the bike trail) located at 3 Riggs Road in Severna Park, MD. Noon until 5:00 PM each day. Admission is free, donations welcomed. For more information contact Sam Shepherd at (410) 647-6077 or Frank Winner at (410) 647-3335.

**May 12th.** New Jersey Divisional meet at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 15 East Lacey Rd in Forked River, NJ. Clinics from 9 AM until Noon. Layout tours from 1 PM until 5 PM, for which maps and directions will be available at the meet. For more information email [BobcatCS@comcast.net](mailto:BobcatCS@comcast.net) or call (856) 696-0463.

**May 12th.** Wade's Train Town monthly open house. Operated by Carolina Southern division members at the Brookford Town Center located at 1700 South Center St in Hickory, NC. 10 AM till 4 PM.

**May 19th.** Potomac Division layout tour in Oxen Hill, MD. 1 PM till 4 PM. Contact: Brian Sheron at (301) 349-5754 or [bwsheron@mac.com](mailto:bwsheron@mac.com).

**May 26th and 27th.** HO scale Model Railroad Open House and Display at the Northern Virginia Model Railroaders Club. Located in the historic Vienna Depot of the former Washington & Old Dominion Railroad, 231 Dominion Road NE (at Ayr Hill Avenue), Vienna, VA. Hours both days: 1 PM until 5 PM. Admission is free (donations accepted). The layout depicts the Western North Carolina Railroad (now a portion of the Norfolk Southern) during the period of transition from steam to diesel. For more information visit [www.nvmr.org](http://www.nvmr.org) or call (703) 938-5157 (leave message).

**June 1st – 3rd.** SER convention in Gatlinburg, TN. Visit <http://ser-nmra.org/convention/2012-gatlinburg-convention> for more information.

**June 9th.** Wade's Train Town monthly open house. Operated by Carolina Southern division members at the Brookford Town Center located at 1700 South Center St. in Hickory, NC. 10 AM till 4 PM.

**June 9th.** Potomac Division layout tour in Alexandria, VA. 1 PM till 4 PM. Contact Brian Sheron at (301) 349-5754 or [bwsheron@mac.com](mailto:bwsheron@mac.com).

**Divisions and Clubs tell MER members about your upcoming event!!** Send your FREE (limit of 25 words) event listings to the editor (contact information is listed on page 2.) Be sure to include all the specifics for the event: including the date/time, place, cost, a contact person, and a means of getting in touch with him/her (address, phone, e-mail, etc.), and if available a web site for updates or to get more information. Please see the publication deadlines on page 16 to make sure your event is published on time. 

## CLASSIFIED

### ATTENTION ALL MER MEMBERS:

Do you have a wanted/trade/for sale item(s)? Looking for carpool options to an event or options for sharing a room?

**The Local** publishes a FREE classified section for all MER members. Send your classified ad to the Editor at [stevespressrr@yahoo.com](mailto:stevespressrr@yahoo.com), or see all the editor's contact information on page 2. The ad must include full name and contact information and will be limited to one issue. Word count is also limited to seventy-five (75) words. Please include your NMRA number for verification purposes (number will not be published). 

## MER position open:

**Official Photographer – Duties include shooting all model contest photos, award ceremony/winners, layouts and scenes from around convention.**

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<u>Publication Schedule:</u>	<u>Articles/Callboard items due to Editor by:</u>
Jan/Feb	December 1st of previous year
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