



The Local

Newsletter of the Mid-Eastern Region, NMRA
The Local, 78, Number 6, Nov-Dec 2023

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Holiday Edition

Building the Raffle Railroad

By John Pursell

Every year, the Cumberland Valley Model Railroad Club in Chambersburg, PA, has a small, completely finished N scale layout built. It is made with a continuous loop track, full scenery, and an engine with two or three pieces of rolling stock. The layout is then put up as first prize in our annual raffle, with ticket sales starting in September and the drawing of the winning ticket at our final holiday open house in January. Second and third prizes are also awarded, usually an HO train set or something similar.

For many years, the layout was built by our club secretary, Susan Norris. But upon her untimely demise, I assumed the job. This would turn out to be quite a learning experience, as I was an HO modeler with no real experience in other scales. This article is about the construction of the Raffle Railroad.



Photo 1

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Traditionally, the layouts have been 2.5' x 5'. Why those dimensions became standard, I don't know, but it could be because that size fits nicely in the back of most SUVs, making it easier to transport. The layout has to be robust enough, but also light enough, to withstand several moves such as from my house to the club, then from the club to a local train show, back to the club, and finally to the winner's home. This would influence the materials used, as you'll see.

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Construction started in my basement train room, where I could assemble the basic frame and keep the mess of cutting wood and foam, as well as painting the framework, downstairs. It has a frame of 1" x 4" lumber with 1" x 2" cross pieces that support a 1" sheet of insulation board as a base. The sheet of foam was attached with latex caulking instead of glue, which helps maintain just the slightest flexibility. I think it's as light as it could be while maintaining strength.

Once the frame was built, I laid out pieces of track to figure the track plan, as shown in **Photo 1**. While I had a plan on paper, actually lay-

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Photo 2

ing out the pieces of track helped me better visualize the final plan, because at that point I was still thinking in HO. It's a simple dog-bone shape, which allows for two large, more-or-less circular areas to scenic. I had earlier decided that one side would be a depiction of a small city; the other side would be more rural, but still have a small industry with a road leading back to the town. I marked out the track center line using a felt tip marker. As an HO modeler, this was my first lesson in N scale clearances, as well as those really tiny rail joiners!

At different points, while I was waiting for caulk or paint to dry, I was assembling structures. Most of the structures are Design Preservation kits. I scratch-built the industry from sheet plastic and PVC pipes. I also built a replica of our clubhouse, again using mostly sheet plastic. This became another lesson, because the N buildings are really small compared to HO. I soon realized that I didn't need to go into quite the level of detail that I did on my HO structures. Aside from the basic brick color, I'd paint the windows, doors and roof a different color, as well as painting the insides of the windows black, since the interiors would not be detailed. The black windows of many structures have signs or flyers of some kind. I also added some vents and other details on the roofs.

Once the plan was finally established, I set out building the track risers by stacking foam, as well as laying out foam for the scenery. Both were fastened together using the aforementioned caulk, although I did insert a 3" nail now and then to help stabilize the stacks of foam while the caulk dried. Where a bridge passed overhead, I installed abutments that I

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Photo 3



Photo 4

from 0.040" sheet plastic; the sidewalks from 0.020" sheet plastic. The streets had been painted Gull Gray to simulate asphalt. The sidewalks were painted an aged concrete color. Various traffic lines were painted on the street, using masking tape and white paint. [Photo 2](#) shows the basic layout at this point.

Then it was the first moving day, as my wife Bette and I slowly carried the layout out of the basement and upstairs into her "doll room," which she graciously allowed me to use to complete the layout. Once there, I started putting in scenery, starting with the back ridge that would blend into the foam board backdrop. This was a combination of Woodland Scenics trees, foliage and lichen, generally light green and medium green. Real dirt and stones were used in several places. Everything was attached with white glue.

The structures also started being put into place, glued onto the sheet plastic. On the right side, I created rock work using tree bark from a water maple tree in my backyard. This bark tends to curve naturally as it dries, so it fit in with very little adjusting.

Now came my favorite part of any modeling project - details! Using brass wire, I created stoplights (something that often seems to be missing on many layouts) and installed them. Other details included Preiser figures, trash cans, a mailbox, benches, cars, streetlights and small trees at various points. A small scene was created near the front, that I simply called "Roadwork." It consists of a truck, several figures in orange work suits and hard hats, piles of stones and orange traffic cones. The orange cones were made by cutting off the tops of pawns from a small, travel chess set. They were just the right size. At a City Classics gas station, I also included a man gassing up his car, with the hose leading from the pump to the car. [Photo 3](#) shows the finished layout. [Photo 4](#) shows the city scene in more detail.

And then, . . . I was done. Work on the layout was spread out over about 6 months. Along the way, I learned a lot about the differences in modeling in N verses HO. Trouble is, in a few months, I'll be starting all over again on the next year's Raffle Railroad!

cut from 1"x4" lumber and covered with sheet plastic cinderblocks. The HO cinderblocks looked the right size for cut stone in N scale.

To keep the weight down, and to allow a tiny amount of flexibility, I used "glueshell" on the foam pieces instead of plaster. Glueshell consists of paper towels torn into small pieces, placed on the foam and then "painted" with white glue that has a small amount of water added. I use glueshell almost exclusively for my scenery. I think that it is superior to plaster in most ways, especially with respect to weight and cleanliness, and there's no plaster dust!

With the foam contours ready, I laid cork roadbed and sanded any uneven spots. Then I laid the track, some of it sectional, some flex track. Both cork and track were laid with the same caulk. I held off installing the bridge until I had laid the track underneath it. I also installed two sets of electrical feeders to insure smooth operation. After allowing a few days drying time, it was time to apply ballast.

I used the finest gray ballast I could find. Many modelers use "wet water" and thinned white glue for ballast. I use 70% alcohol and the same thinned white glue. I think it dries a little faster. This became another lesson for me, as I learned that ballasting N scale track is, at least for me, a little more tedious than HO. Fortunately, the track plan has no switches, so I didn't have to worry about trying to ballast around switch components.

At this point, the basic layout was pretty much ready to move out of the basement into an upstairs room for finishing. I gave the scenery a base coat of medium brown paint and an initial coating of green ground foam in some places. The roads and streets for the town scene (yep, caulk again) were then installed. The streets were cut



Elections 2024 – Officers

By Bob Charles, MMR

If you are a member in good standing and want to support the Mid-Eastern Region (MER) with good ideas and real involvement, we need you to volunteer to serve as one of the four Officers for the Region. The MER Board of Directors generally meets 3 times per year; once at the MER convention. The deadline for nomination is May 30, 2024. The term of office is two years, with a limit of two terms for the President or Vice President, six terms for Treasurer or Secretary.

Any MER member in good standing can be nominated, either by him or herself or by another member with the candidate's permission. The process is very simple:

Prepare:

A 200 word (max) statement outlining the nominee's interest and qualifications for the position, AND a photo of the candidate.

Send the nominations package – by **May 30, 2024** – to ALL of the following nominations process officials:

Nominations Committee:

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Robert Charles, MMR, Chair | rcharles@aol.com |
| Jack Dziadul | jackdziadul@gmail.com |
| Kenneth Montero | va661midlo@comcast.net |

Option – also by May 30, in addition to the above requirements, candidates may supply a 500 word statement suitable for placement on the MER website.

You can make a difference by giving something back to the hobby you enjoy. This is your chance. Successful completion of three years in office fulfills most of the requirements for the Achievement Program “Association Official” certificate. Please respond in one email to all three committee members to ensure receipt of your nomination! That is all there is to it!

Deadlines and Schedules for 2024 Nominations and Balloting

Our Bylaws require the publication of deadlines and schedules for nominations and balloting in the first issue of *The Local* of each year. The dates and schedule for nominations, ballot and election results are in Executive Handbook, Section 5, Policies, Article VI.

The dates for 2024 are:

May 30, 2024 -- Deadline for receipt of self- nominations sent to the Nominations Committee. Date for Nominations Committee to notify Board of Directors of slate of nominees validated by the Business Manager.

July 4, 2024 -- You must be a member in good standing (paid up NMRA dues) based on the membership report supplied to the MER Business Manager from NMRA National as of 07/05 (the 5th of July) of every election year to be eligible to vote. If an individual is not a member or if membership has expired as indicated by the record supplied to the MER, and MER officials have not been informed by NMRA National of a valid renewal of membership by 07/05 (the 5th of July), that individual will not receive a ballot, nor be permitted to vote in that year’s election.

August 1, 2024 -- Deadline for mailing paper ballots to members and for commencing electronic voting; could be mailed earlier depending on other deadline requirements.

September 3, 2024 -- Deadline for electronic voting, also last day as shown by postmark for mailing paper ballots.

September 7, 2024 -- Deadline for receipt by Balloting Committee of paper ballots sent by mail.

September 14, 2024 -- Deadline for Ballot Committee to transmit results to President, the Director overseeing this committee, and the Business Manager.

September 21, 2024 -- Deadline for The President to communicate the election results to candidates. The Business Manager also notifies the MER Webmaster and the NMRA of the election results.

October 10, 2024 -- Deadline for publishing election results on MER’s website.

MER Elects Three New Directors-at-Large

By Bob Charles, MMR

Let's all congratulate our three new Directors-at-Large who took office at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Eastern Region in Altoona on October 22, 2023. They are Bob Bridges, Kevin O'Connor and Greg Warth. These are three excellent, well qualified Directors-at-Large who will serve our Region well.

With that said, as Nominations Chair, it is disappointing to me that more folks have not stepped up to volunteer to support our region. Out of approximately 1,500 members of the Region, though many were approached, only three stepped forward. The result of that is, of course, a ballot with no choices. In a healthy association, like a healthy democracy, the more members involved, the better the organization. As a Region, we need more folks to become involved at both the staff and management levels.

One comment I often hear is, "I don't want to run against so and so." We all need to understand that no one runs "against" anyone, but rather we provide an option for our members to consider whom they prefer to represent them and which ones they believe bring the best talents, knowledge and/or abilities forward to the benefit of the MER. Everyone prefers a choice. Otherwise, there is always the perception that it is a "good old boys club." Nothing could be farther from the truth. Service is the essence of our elections.

Equally distressing, and likely due to the situation described above, was the level of voting in the elections this year. Of our total membership, approximately 25% bothered to vote. This is the weakest participation since the inception of electronic voting. This may be, of course, related to the lack of choice on the ballot.

We have upcoming elections for our Officers in 2024. There are many folks in our membership who are well qualified to serve in this capacity on the Board of Directors. They have been involved in various Region activities such as convention teams, AP teams, chairing a department of the MER, etc. They understand the challenges of our Region. If you have those experiences and have a small amount of time to share in running the business of this nonprofit, but very viable and fun organization, the MER needs you. This is a great service for a good cause in helping your fellow model railroaders to have the best experiences possible in enjoying their hobby. If you have ever wished for better management, better conventions, better use of funds, more education and mentoring, better programs, or more fun, now is your time to make things happen. You can actually help to control all that. It's also a great way to make more friends and create comradery by working together to improve the hobby. Please consider stepping forward by contacting a member of the Nominating Committee listed on page 5. You'll be glad you did.

Clinics Coordinator as a Resource

By Jack Dziadul

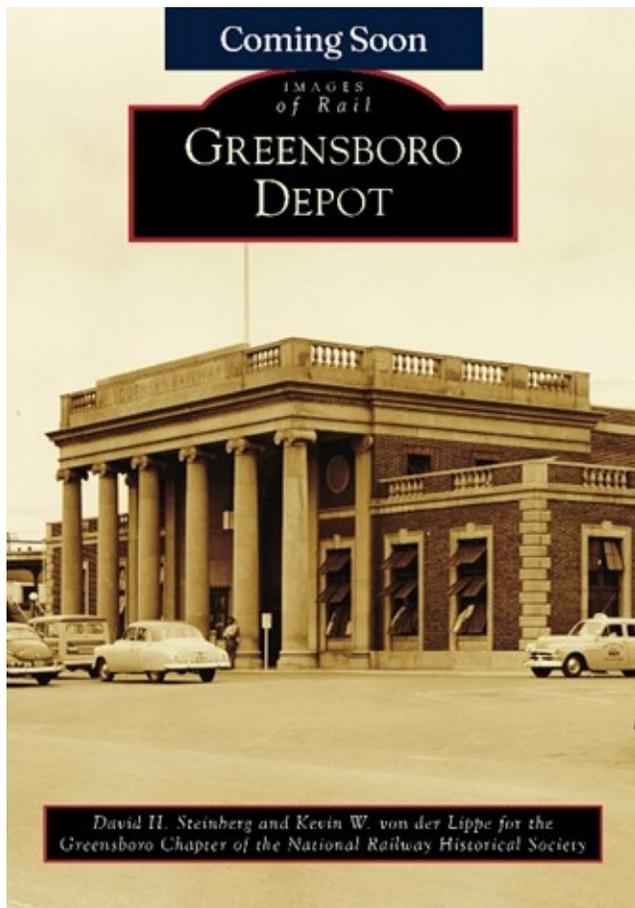
The Local Issue 78 #2, March/April 2023, introduced the new and improved clinics exhibit. This brief article is a reminder to Division leaders and convention planners that this resource is available on the MER website. [MER-NMRA : Clinic Indexes](#) Webmaster Jeff Burch recently posted the updated schedule.

The Excel format is easy to search as is or to sort. I try to maintain the exhibit with at least annual updates to add new clinics and clinicians after the fall convention. Each year that new clinics are added, the oldest year is dropped. This ensures that the most recent clinics and the most recently active clinicians are listed. As you will notice from scrolling the exhibit, we give priority to NMRA / MER members.

I am always available to assist if you have any questions or clinics related suggestions. JackDziadul@gmail.com

Greensboro Depot – Book Review

By Jack Dziadul



Arcadia Publishing photograph

I was excited to find out that Mid-Eastern Region member Kevin von der Lippe has co-authored a new book on the Greensboro Depot (MSRP \$24.99). This is the latest in the continuing series called “Images of Rail” released by Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, SC. www.arcadiapublishing.com Copyright 2023 by David H. Steinberg and Kevin von der Lippe for the Greensboro Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.

Nestled between the 127 pages of this softbound book are 180 black and white vintage photographs. Each of the nine chapters has a full-page text introducing the photographs and illustrations that follow. Every picture is annotated with a caption which provides names, dates, and photo details of interest to any fan of American railroads. Most of the photographs are from the archives of the Southern Railway Historical Association, which is located at the Tennessee Valley Railway Museum in Chattanooga, TN.

Chapter One, “Railroads in Greensboro,” takes the reader from 1852, through the Civil War period, to the eventual consolidation of long-forgotten and obscure railroads into the Southern Railway system in 1950. Of special interest to

a modeler is a full plan of yard office of the North Carolina Railroad from 1916.

Chapter Two has some excellent vintage photos of downtown Greensboro, including the boarded up 1899 depot and the Cascade Saloon Building, both of which still stand at South Elm and Smuthers Streets.

Chapters Two through Five provide many details and photographs of the site development and construction of what became known to us today as the Greensboro Depot.

Chapter Six, “The Awaited Announcement” walks us through to the grand opening of the new depot. There is a nearly full-page floor plan of the new facility from the April 1927 issue of “Railway Age.” The caption with this plan reads in part, “...the New Station Provides Adequate Facilities for Both White and Colored Patrons.” The plan is representative of the Jim Crow era of the South with a separate waiting area, lunch counter, rest rooms, as well as a separate “Colored Entrance Vestibule.” Many model railroaders and vendors will recall that for several recent years the train shows that were held in what was the “Colored Waiting Room.”

Chapter Seven, “Detailing the New Southern Railway Station.” This narrative could have been written by an architect (I had to look up demilune windows). The text describes the construction materials, decorative fin-

ishes, and general interior layout. The station area trackage and passenger platforms are also described. There were six passenger tracks plus two mainlines for through-freights.

Chapter Eight, “Additional Station Facilities” describes the management of ancillary passenger services such as the restaurant, news stand, and three-chair barber shop. Freight and baggage buildings are also discussed. This chapter includes a two-page illustration of the Greensboro track plan, including the placement of various railroad structures. There are photographs of the Railway Express Building, which many of us can identify as the present-day home of the Carolina Model Railroaders and Greensboro Chapter of the NRHS.

Chapter Nine, “In Summary” brings us up to date with a restored depot that retains the original architecture with a modernized interior. The restoration took place from 2001 to 2003 and is now a more full-service transportation center providing Amtrak service, plus Greyhound and Greensboro Transit Authority local bus routes.

Kevin von der Lippe will have autographed copies available at the Piedmont Junction MER convention in September 2024.

Proceeds from the book benefit the Greensboro Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society. The book is highly recommended for railroad fans, model railroad hobbyists, and historians.



Western Maryland Railroad Enroute—Pat Reber photo

Don't Forget!

November is Model Railroad Month.

Do something special this month related to model railroading.

Take a train to work.

Put up a train display at work.

Give a train set to someone.

Give a copy of *Model Railroader* to someone.

Write an article for *The Local*.

Nominate yourself or someone else for an MER office.



President's Column

President Scott Unger

Defects

I am beginning to realize that I have been slow to observe the number of rough edges that exist within our hobby. It's not that I didn't see any of these rough edges previously, but recently it dawned on me just how pervasive they are in model railroading. These rough edges, sometimes referred to as a burr or flash, are so abundant that any attempt to list all of them would be futile. So here are just a few specific examples: that raised edge on one piece of cork roadbed where it was joined with the other piece, the fuzzy bur left by the saber saw along the top edge of hardboard fascia, and, of course, sprues on injection molded parts are possibly the most notorious examples. While not exactly rough edges, there are also other little imperfections that draw attention to themselves like those little seed pods on tree armatures made from seafoam sprigs. Even ready-to-roll models often seem to have a loose part or other item that requires attention. Almost everything needs some level of correction. Failure to fix these defects can be magnified during the finishing process as the raised edge tends to collect paint or glue further highlighting the imperfection. It seems that every time I turn around, I notice another manifestation of a rough edge or similar barb.

The worst part is that once each defect is identified it seems impossible to "un-see" it! The result is a project like building a simple car kit that formerly took only the nine simple steps listed in the instructions now takes many more steps to complete after cleaning up all the previously unobserved imperfections. Does this mean that as we become better modelers, we become slower at it? If so, that seems somewhat discouraging... but fortunately there are endless solutions in the form of countless files, knives, flush cutting nippers and sanding sticks available to assist us with the rough edges. The other good news is that some defects, like sprue flash, often appear in consistent patterns because of an imperfection on the injection mold itself making them easier to find and address.

I am not sure what led to my recent revelation about detail but to some extent and over time, it seems natural that the building aspect of model railroading puts us in a posture of scrutiny. Attention to detail and seeking to improve are generally good

things when kept in perspective. Deciding what level of detail is acceptable in our models is an individual preference and matter of practicality. The size of the railroad, one's available time, and the intended purpose of what you are building are key considerations when determining the appropriate level of detail. On railroads that are focused on sophisticated operations a new guest might not even notice which cars have cut levers or other prototypical details. Conversely, intricate detailing pays large dividends on a smaller diorama or shelf style model railroad. A collector or builder of only fully detailed high-quality models may also gravitate to an elevated standard of refinement.

Much like our models, each of us has our own unique set of rough edges. Human nature often leads us to focus on the negatives rather than the positive attributes one has to offer. When that posture of scrutiny shows up in our personal interactions it can be much less productive than it is with our models. We might seek to correct someone or point out an error even when it isn't necessary or purposeful to do so. Simply put, it can be hard to choose being effective over being right. In many situations, efforts to advance and move forward require some level of practicality, compromise or trade-off. Much like overcoming a rip current in the ocean, the most effective approach often involves some tact and patience rather than swimming directly at the shoreline.

While choosing effectiveness over being right is laudable, I frequently need to remind myself that being kind is the most important. Offering a compliment or asking a question rather than providing correction can be a universally positive approach. Learning can certainly include challenging each other to grow in our skills or having a respectful debate, but we could all use a periodic reminder to try to keep some perspective that this is a hobby, and the goal is to have fun! Wait...did I just see a typo?

Advertising in *The Local*:

If you have a model railroading business and would like to place an ad in *The Local*, please contact the Editor. The new rates per year are as follows:

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| Divisions & Clubs | Free |
| Clinics & Education | Free |
| Convention Ads | Free |
| Full Page - Color | \$100.00 |
| ½ Page – Color | \$60.00 |
| ¼ Page – Color | \$35.00 |
| Business Card | \$10.00 |
| Text Only | \$7.00 |

Your ad may appear as text, photo, art, or any combination thereof. Art must be of high quality and camera-ready. Formats must be in txt, doc/docx, pdf, jpeg, bmp or tiff only. The content must be related to model trains or railroads or provide a benefit specifically to model railroaders. If you need help with your ad, please don't hesitate to ask the [Editor](#).

Send in Your Articles

We are always looking for new articles, tips, ideas, photos, and comments from our readers. If you have been awarded an AP (Achievement Program) Certificate or an MMR (Master Model Railroader) award, please consider writing an article about it so others can learn how you did it. We always enjoy looking at new layouts, dioramas, and models that our members have created. If you would like to contribute to *The Local*, please send an email containing your article and photos to [The Local Editor](#).

The Local welcomes and encourages articles, photographs, and model railroad related material as contributions to members' education and enjoyment of the hobby. Materials should have a wide appeal. The Editor will exercise all due care of submissions, but contributors should not send paper/photo originals without retaining back-up copies. Editors, by definition, reserve the right and have the responsibility to make corrections, deletions, and changes to accommodate space. If your item is time-sensitive in any way, please advise the Editor. Otherwise, stories and photos that are accepted are published in approximately the order in which they were received.

How to Submit an Article for The Local

Please observe the following steps to submit your contribution:

Please read the article written by Martin Brechbiel, MMR on "[How to Prepare a Manuscript for The Local.](#)"

Compose and submit your text in one of the following formats: TXT, DOC, or DOCX.

Consider what photos, illustrations, or other graphics can go with the text. These are essential. But DO NOT include/insert

them into your text. DO put notations in the text such as "Insert Photo #1 here."

Your photos should be high resolution and very clear. We cannot accept photos that are fuzzy or out of focus. JPG, GIF, TIFF, and PNG formats are acceptable.

Please rename your photo files in the order you want them to appear, e.g., Photo-1.jpg, Photo-2.jpg, etc.

If you have captions for your photos, etc., create a separate text file for the captions, each of which should be numbered to match a numbered photo or figure.

Send your article or photos by email to [The Local Editor](#). There may be a limit on the number of megabytes you can send depending on your email program. If necessary, either send the photos three at a time, or compress the photos with a "Zip" program to send more at one time.

Deadlines for Submitting Articles to The Local:

| Issue: | Deadline: |
|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Jan/Feb | Dec 1 st of previous year |
| Mar/Apr | Feb 1 st |
| May/June | Apr 1 st |
| Jul/Aug | Jun 1 st |
| Sept/ | Oct Aug 1 st |
| Nov/Dec | Oct 1 st |

Special Notes:

Please only send us *your own* creative work or that for which you have written permission to use so we can give that source proper credit. We need to avoid any copyright infringement situations.

If you have previously published your article or photo in any other magazine or newsletter, including a division newsletter or your own website blog, it cannot be reproduced in *The Local* without written permission from the magazine publisher, editor, and author or photographer.

If this is your first submission to *The Local*, please fill out and return this [Media Agreement](#) form to the Editor, which gives us permission to use your material and verifies that the work is yours, or that you have obtained written permission to use it.

Once your article is approved for publication, and you have qualified for 42 or more points in the [Author Category](#) of the Achievement Program (AP), you may submit a [Statement of Qualifications Form](#) to your Division AP Manager to receive your Author AP Certificate.



From the Editor's Desk

Greg Warth, Editor

Holiday Traditions

November and December are months where traditions mean more to families than any other time of the year. There are certain things we like to do every year around this time. We put up a tree and decorate it with ornaments that are meaningful and that our families have collected over the years. Or we put up menorah candles. We eat too much turkey and watch football games on Thanksgiving. We go to visit family members and bring gifts. We make eggnog and holiday cookies. We tend to be more giving and forgiving to others. We pray for peace. For some families, it's a time to get together and bicker with each other about things that don't matter. Nevertheless, we keep doing it every year because deep down we love each other. Wreaths, lights, certain songs, candles, shopping, apple cider, hot cocoa, sleighs, reindeer, and jolly old men with red suits are part of those traditions. So are model trains thanks to advertising in the 1950s by Gilbert and Lionel.

Model trains are here to stay. They have become as much of a tradition at this time of year as any of the things mentioned above. In the old days, trains brought families together. They still do in many areas. They also bring food for the table, gifts to enjoy, new cars, and Holiday trees. One of our Tidewater Division members, who also happens to be one of our MER officers, collects trains from the other members to give to disadvantaged kids in the area. The rest of us are busy putting up displays in libraries and in the local churches. We even have one group that offers to set up trains around the trees at home for those who are unable to do it themselves. The Carolina Piedmont Division also donates train sets each year to underprivileged kids. They raise funds for the train sets by building a yearly raffle layout. The drawing for this layout is at the November Neuse River Valley Model Train Show in Raleigh every year. I'm sure other Divisions and clubs have their own traditions for this time of year.

So why is this just during November and December? Why don't we do things like this during all parts of the year? I guess the spirit of giving is also a tradition but only during these two months. I think we need to broaden our commitment to spread joy, goodwill and brotherly love throughout the year. We can do this through model railroading.

Model trains are a universal tradition. They bring fun all the time. Wherever there are tracks and a model train, there is joy. In model railroading, we realize the benefit of communicating, sharing information, free trade, comradery, good leadership, and good will. I am glad to be part of an organization that fosters these traditions. The more clubs we have like this in the world, the better off we'll be. That's all we can do, make our

small part of the world the best it can be and hope the benefits travel up the ladder to other people and ultimately to our leaders and those of other countries. I am also glad the NMRA has an international presence for these same reasons.

I am one of those people who believes we can make a difference in the world no matter how small we are. It has to start somewhere. Don't just give up on it. Get involved. Make things happen that will improve the hobby and subsequently, the world. Run for an office in the MER. Let's make that a tradition.

This issue of *The Local* will spread lots of cheer and information! We have awesome news and photos from the Altoona Convention. The 2023 election results are in along with a call for nominations of new officers for 2024. Martin Brechbiel, MMR has provided us with another great scratchbuilding article on how to create a gondola. Jack Dziadul provides a plan on how the Carolina Piedmont Division is trying to bring unaffiliated members into that Division through expansion of its boundaries. In the Electronics Corner, we have information from Fred Miller, MMR about how to create a model railroad sound system. We will have layouts and models to display, contest winners and much more.

Three words about the call for 2024 nominations: Just do it! Don't be afraid of it. It'll be fun. You'll make friends. And you'll feel great that you contributed to a great cause and made the world a better place.



NMRA Achievement Program Update

Kurt Thompson, MMR
MER AP Manager

Since the last report in *The Local*, the following Achievement Program certificates were earned and awarded in the Mid-Eastern Region (MER):

James River Division

| | |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| Glenn Lapkin | Master Builder - Cars |
|--------------|-----------------------|

Carolina Piedmont

| | |
|------------|------------------|
| Joe Skorch | Chief Dispatcher |
|------------|------------------|

Carolina Southern

| | |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| Robert Gamble | Master Builder - Scenery |
|---------------|--------------------------|

Carolina Piedmont Division HO Car for Sale

Carolina Piedmont Division, Mid-Eastern Region



N Scale version
coming in Fall 2023!

Exclusive Limited Edition Custom Decorated by Accurail
Norfolk Southern Rwy HO Scale 70-Ton Offset Triple Hoppers
2 Road Numbers Available

Exclusive, first time run of 86xx series HO scale Norfolk Southern 70-ton Offset Hopper. These ex-B&LE cars were leased by Norfolk Southern from U.S. Ry Equipment in 1967. They were photographed in service and all have lightweight dates that was always stenciled to the right of the car's light weight on the left side under reporting marks. WA was for Washington, Indiana on the B&O, the old B&O car shops on their route to St. Louis. The shops were closed and US Ry Equip acquired them.

Carolina Piedmont Division is offering these in two unique road numbers, 8613 & 8724 for sale as limited edition kits using Accurail's 70-Ton Offset Hopper car. Pricing is \$28 per car plus USPS shipping.

To order, visit <http://cpd13.org> or email railroad@nc.rr.com today!

IPSWICH HOBBIES



Craftsman Structure Kits

Jack Dziadul



IpswichHobbies.com

919-721-8757

UPCOMING MER CONVENTIONS

2024 – Carolina Piedmont Division—“Piedmont Junction” Sep 26 - 29, 2024, Durham, NC

2025 – New Jersey Division Dates and location TBD

MER Board of Directors Meeting Schedule

Budget Meeting - 7pm January 13, 2024 - Zoom

Board of Directors Meeting - 11am April 13, 2024 - Marriot Hotel at Research Triangle Park, Durham NC

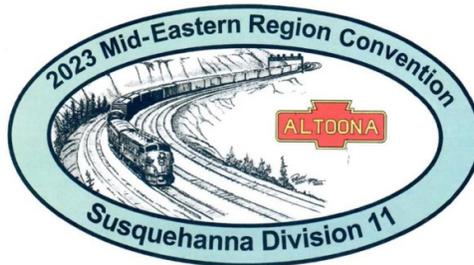
Board of Directors Meeting - 7 pm Sep 26, 2024 - Marriot Hotel at Research Triangle Park, Durham NC

Annual Business Meeting - 10 am Sep 29, 2024 - Marriot Hotel at Research Triangle Park, Durham NC

'Round the Curve' Round Up

By Greg Warth, Editor

The 2023 "Round the Curve to Altoona" Convention was a superb display of the modeling talent, the competitive spirit, and the organizational ability of the Mid-Eastern Region, and specifically that of the Susquehanna Division led by Jerry Lauchle, MMR.



More Contest Photos

The contest entries at the Convention this year were some of the best we've ever seen, and the awards were well deserved. Even our President, Gordy Robinson, MMR, who attended the convention, was impressed. The contest winners are included in the article by Alan Mende elsewhere in this issue and on the [MER website](#). Here are photos of some of the other contest entries ([Photos 1-22](#)). All contest entry photos were taken by Jerry Lauchle, MMR.



Photo 1: Donn Winn—River Valley Coatings



Photo 2: Michael Hauk—PR X29 boxcar-1924



Photo 3: Chris Lasher- Conrail G52X coal gondola



Photo 4: Jeff Burch—B&O baggage car



Photo 5: Jeff Burch—Western Maryland coach



Photo 6: Jerry Lauchle—Renovo, PA town scene



Photo 7: JW Snyder—N scale tank car



Photo 8: JW Snyder—MOW converted RPO



Photo 9: JW Snyder—MOW boxcar

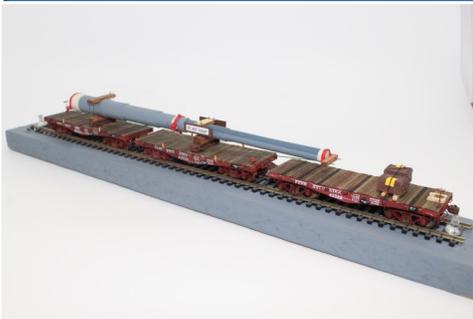


Photo 10: Joe Walters—PRR gun car



Photo 11: Joe Walters—Sanding structure



Photo 12: Don Winn—CB&Q 2392MOW flat car



Photo 13: Favorite train photo



Photo 14: Harvey Kramer—Clont's automotive service



Photo 15: James Stuchko—Capelli ice cream parlor



Photo 16: James Stuchko—Stuchko Landng



Photo 17: James Stuchko Texaco gas station

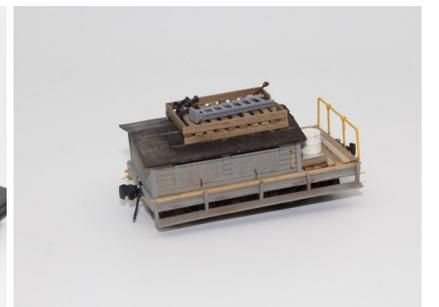


Photo 18: John Pursell—MOW work car



Photo 19: Kevin O'Conner— Pulpwood hauler



Photo 20: John Pursell—Bartender's home and pub



Photo 21: John Pursell—Abandoned freight station



Photo 22: John Pursell—L&NE covered hopper



Photo 23 - Western Maryland (Photo by Pete Clark)

Train Excursions

Many of the attendees took advantage of the excursions on the East Broad Top and the Western Maryland. The weather could have been a little better, but that did not stop the fans from enjoying the ride.



Photo 24 - East Broad Top (Photo by Matthew Malkiewicz)

Clinics and Layout Tours

The [clinics](#) were outstanding, well organized and well presented (photo 25). The Modelers' Haven article in this issue provides a summary of some of those clinics. The open house [layout tours](#) were also excellent. We greatly appreciated the hosts who allowed us to tramp through their homes to view their fantastic model railroads.

Photos from these tours are also shown in a separate article.



Photo 25 - Lance Mindheim - Clinic on Layout Design (Photo by the author)

Layouts in the Hotel

The layouts inside the Altoona Grand Hotel were small due to space limitations but were very well done, and showed what can be accomplished with forced perspective to provide more realism and to make small layouts look much larger (Photo 26). You can fit a lot of railroading in layouts with smaller scales (Photo 27).



Photo 26 - N Scale in the foreground and Z in the back. (Photo by the author)



Photo 27 - Lots of railroading in a small space. (Photo by the author)

The Banquet and Contest Awards

The banquet was well attended and enjoyable although the sound system was challenged a bit. Nevertheless, it was great fun, the food was excellent, we learned about the history of Altoona and the Railroaders' Memorial Museum, and the contest awards were phenomenal. (Can you find yourself here?)

Photos by Randy Foulke







NMRA Pres., Gordy Robinson, MMR



Bob Charles, MMR

The Annual MER Board Meeting was held on October 19, 2023*. At the Annual Membership Meeting on October 21-22, a summary of the Board Meeting was reported to the membership. It is notable that Assistant Treasurer Bill Wurtzell will be assuming the role of Treasurer to fulfill the remainder of Brian Kampschroer’s term. Brian is stepping down for now due to health issues. We wish him well.

Gratitude was expressed to all those responsible for creating another very successful MER Convention, Registrar Kirk Bateman, Jerry Lauchle, MMR and the Susquehanna Division. Thanks were also given to the outgoing Directors-at-Large, Bob Charles, MMR, Randy Foulke and Charles Rausch, MMR, who provided superb leadership and direction to move the MER forward. We are much better off as a result of their efforts. The new Directors-at-Large, Kevin O’Connor, Bob Bridges and Greg Warth were then installed and congratulated. We are also thankful for our outstanding Officers, President Scott Unger, Vice President Gary Brown, Treasurer Brian Kampschroer and Secretary Rick Stoneking ([Photos 61 and 62](#)).

*A complete copy of the minutes from the Board Meeting and the Annual Membership Meeting can be obtained upon request from the MER Secretary.



Outgoing Board (Left to Right): Randy Foulke, Gary Brown, Scott Unger, Rick Stoneking, Bob Charles, MMR, Charles Rausch, MMR



Incoming Board (Left to Right): Greg Warth, Bob Bridges, Gary Brown, Scott Unger, Rick Stoneking, Bill Wurtzell, Kevin O’Connor

So, the 2023 Round the Curve to Altoona Convention was truly a great success. We hope you will join us next year for the Piedmont Convention 2024. Preparations are already well under way. You won’t want to miss it!

Banquet Photos



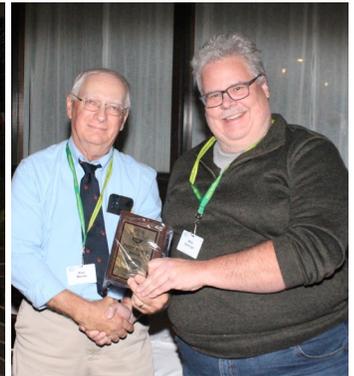
*Jack Dziadul, Co-Chair,
Piedmont Convention 2024*



*Kurt Thompson, MMR,
Past President*



*Gordy Robinson, MMR and Ed
Smith, MMR*



*Alan Mende and Mike
Dettinger*



John Pursell and Alan Mende



Chuck Endreola and Alan Mende



Keith Iritsky and Alan Mende



*Jerry Lauchle, MMR and
Alan Mende*



Don Winn and Alan Mende



Chris Lasher and Alan Mende



*Alex Belida, MMR and Alan
Mende*



*Mike DeSensi and Alan
Mende*



*Alan Mende and
Joe Walters, MMR*



*Alan Mende and
Kevin O'Connor*



*Scott Unger, Gordy Robinson,
MMR and Steve Salotti*



*Keynote Speaker - Joe DeFrancesco,
Executive Director,
Railroaders Memorial Museum*

Contest Room Results

The Round the Curve to Altoona Convention

By Alan Mende, MER General Contest Chair

Once again, this year's contest room was fortunate to be the host of some exceptional, high-quality models. Our host, the Susquehanna Division, provided us with a large, well-lit space which made for a quality contest experience in 2023.

A special thank-you goes out to our model contest judges (now called *evaluators*). We were fortunate to have Bob Charles, MMR, Ken Montero, Scott Unger, Chuck Davis, MMR, and Patrick Flash as our lead evaluators. Our other evaluators were Michael DeSensi, Jack Dziadul, Rob Hinkle, Earl Paine, Ray Persing, JW Snyder, Charles Stevens, Jr., and Dennis Vaccaro. Kurt Thompson, MMR, was our administrative evaluator. I also want to thank Robert (Robby) Alvis, Gary Nastase, and Ken Roth for their help in assisting me with paperwork, taking in models, and running errands.

We had 44 models entered with 34 being entered for evaluation. Of the 34 evaluated models, 21 received Merit Awards in 9 categories. That means 62% of the models entered achieved Merit Awards. Of those Merit Awards, 14 achieved a score of 100 or more points out of a possible 125 (Photos are at the end of this article, starting on page 21).

THE CONTEST WINNERS

Model Contests:

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| <u>Steam</u> | – | 1 st place – Alex Belida, MMR – Vertical boiler engine* (Photo 1) |
| <u>Diesel</u> | – | 1 st place – Mike DeSensi – Santa Fe GP30 (Photo 2) |
| <u>Freight Car</u> | – | 1 st place – Chris Lasher - DJJX scrap gondola* (Photo 3) |
| <u>Non-Revenue Car</u> | – | 1 st place – Joe Walters, MMR - 200-ton wreck crane* (Photo 4) |
| <u>Caboose</u> | – | 1 st place – Steve Salotti - Susquehanna caboose (Photo 5) |
| <u>Passenger Car</u> | – | 1 st place – Ed Smith, MMR - Erie RPO car* (Photo 6) |
| <u>Structure On-Line</u> | – | 1 st place – Don Winn - Yorkville depot* (Photo 7) |
| <u>Structure Off-Line</u> | – | 1 st place tie – John Pursell – Arrow Brewery* (Photo 8) Don Winn - Curbside LTD* (Photo 9) |
| <u>Display On-Line</u> | – | 1 st place – Jerry Lauchle, MMR - O.W. Houts & Son & O'Neills Fabrication* (Photo 10) |
| <u>Display Off-Line</u> | – | 1 st place – Jim Murphy – Chuck Endreola - Escaping the Noose* (Photo 11) |
| <u>First Place Module</u> | – | 1 st place – Michael Dettinger – Horseshoe Curve in N Scale (Photo 12) |

The Special Awards:

The MER also supports an array of Special Awards that complement the evaluated model contest.

Clyde Gerald Kitbash Award - the best kitbashed model in the model contest.

John Pursell – Bartender's home and pub ([Photo 13](#))

Ray Bilodeau MER Narrow Gauge Award

None awarded this year

Favorite Train - chosen by popular vote

Ed Smith, MMR – Erie Military Train ([Photo 14](#))

Favorite Model - chosen by popular vote

Keith Iritsky - C. Drew & Co. Ironworks* ([Photo 15](#))

Bob Liberman Award – sponsored by the NJ Division

Ed Smith, MMR - Erie RPO car* ([Photo 6](#))

Chuck Hladik Memorial Award: sponsored by James River Division (JRD), awarded to a model representing a railroad in the south.

Kevin O'Connor – ACL phosphate hopper (**Photo 16**)

The President's Award: this year's award was for rolling stock or locomotive of a railroad in the textile industry.

Mathew Hosford – 15-ton Crane* (**Photo 17**)

Best-in-Show: given to the entry with the highest point's score in the model contest this year à 120 points! This award includes to the recipient the cost of registration to next year's convention in Durham, North Carolina.

Jerry Lauchle, MMR - O.W. Houts & Son & O'Neills Fabrication* (**Photo 10**)

*Denotes AP Merit Award—scoring a minimum of 87.5 points.

Next year's President's Award is yet to be determined.

If you have any questions about NMRA or MER contest rules, regulations, NMRA evaluation of models, would like to be an evaluator, have contest questions of any kind, complaints, suggestions, or whatever you might want to talk about, contact Alan Mende, MER General Contest Chair at: contests@mer-nmra.com.



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11



Photo 12



Photo 13



Photo 15



Photo 14



Photo 16



Photo 17

During our study, an interesting side issue was raised. There are fourteen designated Divisions within MER, but only ten are currently active. Division 7, Piedmont Crescent (Crescent), is one of the inactive Divisions. An MER member from this inactive division inquired of NMRA Headquarters (HQ) about reactivating Piedmont Crescent. HQ referred the inquiry to MER, which further referred the inquiry to CPD. We reviewed this issue and determined two salient points. 1) MER Archivist Kevin O'Connor was able to locate the Piedmont Crescent charter. This document showed that several, but not all, of the Division 7 counties had already, and long ago, been absorbed into either Carolina Piedmont or Carolina Southern. 2) A review of the MER roster of members in Division 00 (the designation for members not in a division) determined that there were an insufficient number of MER members in the remaining Crescent territory to support a new division. Members of the CPD study committee met with the inquiring MER member and explained the situation. He concurred with our conclusion that reactivating Crescent was not practical. This was conveyed to MER.

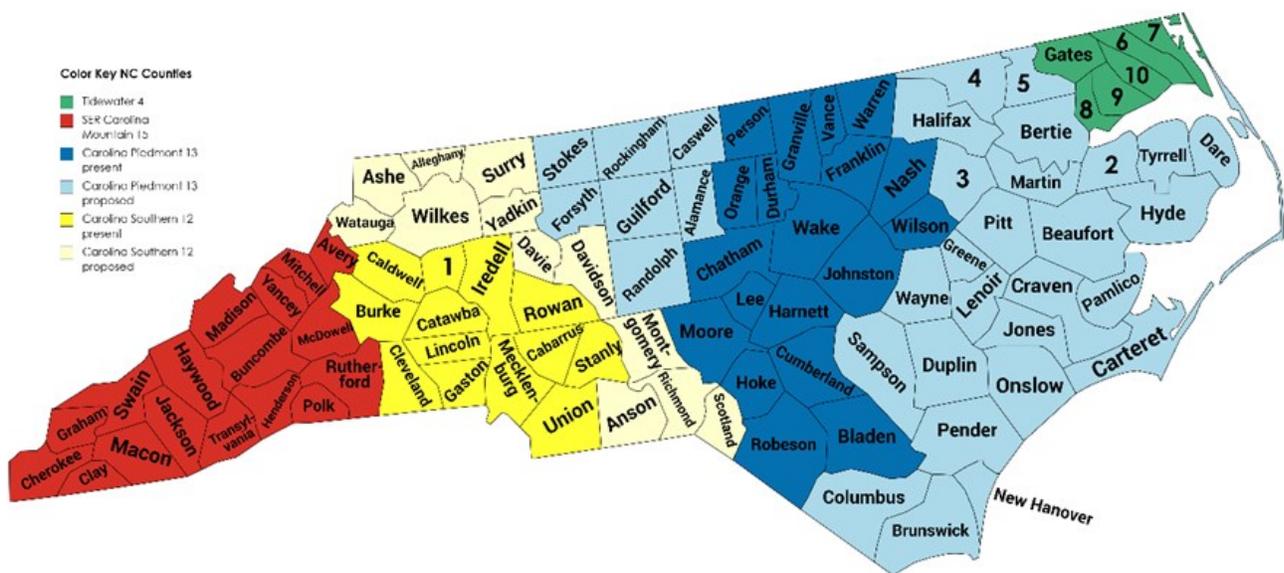
Back to our study.

We reviewed the distribution of members in the unassigned counties. It was a checkerboard with a member or two here and there, and many counties with no MER members. The more populous counties with the most unserved MER members were the more suburban areas. (Membership statistics change with each monthly report received from Business Manager Howard Oakes. But the changes are minor, especially in the rural counties.)

CPD initially went back and forth internally with evaluating the pros and cons of expansion from the minimum (essentially just counties bordering or in close proximity to our present borders), to the maximum (absorbing, with CSD, all counties presently unserved by a division.) The former was considered easier to accomplish. The latter, getting this done all at once instead of the inevitable piecemeal over multiple years, would be more efficient over the long run.

Anecdotally, we became aware that NMRA national and MER preferred that all NMRA members be assigned to a Division. This pretty much ensured that we would have support for maximum expansion. Members of our expansion study committee met with CSD representatives Andrew Stitt and Joe Skorch. CSD outlined their expansion preferences as did CPD. All of these expansion counties accounted for every unserved area between Raleigh and the SER area to the west.

Refer to Map 2 below. The counties in light yellow represent the potential expansion area assigned to CSD. The counties in light blue represent the potential expansion area assigned to CPD.



As to the process, MER’s Executive Handbook outlines the procedure for changing division boundaries. **Section 4 B. Request for Divisional Boundary Changes** is the reference. We determined that some of the language was not logical to our thinking; it was in fact an insurmountable obstacle. We appealed to MER and the Board approved our request for a change in the text. This MER Board action was timely and allowed our process to continue.

The next step is to poll those voting eligible members in the unserved areas. MER President Scott Unger appointed Director-At-Large Charlie Rausch, MMR to conduct the poll. This process has started.

Throughout this process we kept reminding ourselves that with expansion comes responsibilities. Namely, we would commit to serve the new division members such as continuing Zoom and web presence, additional distant Achievement Program support, more distant operating sessions and home layout tour visits, plus periodic meetings outside of our traditional venues. We are aware that throughout the NMRA, even more locally throughout the MER, serving members from a wider geography can be quite cumbersome. It does take a commitment.

We can think of many reasons for votes in favor of being a part of a division and many of those were outlined above. We cannot think of any reason not to be a part of a division.

Refer to Chart 1 below to see a list of the 100 NC counties and the present and proposed alignment of division assignments.

Editor's Note: The above article was written before the recent MER Board meeting that was held at the Round the Curve to Altoona convention with NMRA President Gordy Robinson, MMR. The MER Board of Directors approved the Carolina Piedmont boundary expansion.x

| Division | County | Carolina Piedmont | | Carolina Southern | | Tidewater | SER Carolina Mountain |
|----------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------------|
| | | Current | Proposed | Current | Proposed | Current | Current |
| 1 | Alamance | | Alamance | | | | |
| 2 | Alexander | | | Alexander | Alexander | | |
| 3 | Alleghany | | | | Alleghany | | |
| 4 | Anson | | | | Anson | | |
| 5 | Ashe | | | | Ashe | | |
| 6 | Avery | | | | | | Avery |
| 7 | Beaufort | | Beaufort | | | | |
| 8 | Bertie | | Bertie | | | | |
| 9 | Bladen | Bladen | Bladen | | | | |
| 10 | Brunswick | | Brunswick | | | | |
| 11 | Buncombe | | | | | | Buncombe |
| 12 | Burke | | | Burke | Burke | | |
| 13 | Cabarrus | | | Cabarrus | Cabarrus | | |
| 14 | Caldwell | | | Caldwell | Caldwell | | |
| 15 | Camden | | | | | Camden | |
| 16 | Carteret | | Carteret | | | | |
| 17 | Caswell | | Caswell | | | | |
| 18 | Catawba | | | Catawba | Catawba | | |
| 19 | Chatham | Chatham | Chatham | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|-------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 20 | Cherokee | | | | | | Cherokee |
| 21 | Chowan | | | | | Chowan | |
| 22 | Clay | | | | | | Clay |
| 23 | Cleveland | | | Cleveland | Cleveland | | |
| 24 | Columbus | | Columbus | | | | |
| 25 | Craven | | Craven | | | | |
| 26 | Cumberland | Cumber- land | Cumberland | | | | |
| 27 | Currituck | | | | | Currituck | |
| 28 | Dare | | Dare | | | | |
| 29 | Davidson | | | | Davidson | | |
| 30 | Davie | | | | Davie | | |
| 31 | Duplin | | Duplin | | | | |
| 32 | Durham | Durham | Durham | | | | |
| 33 | Edgecombe | | Edgecombe | | | | |
| 34 | Forsyth | | Forsyth | | | | |
| 35 | Franklin | Franklin | Franklin | | | | |
| 36 | Gaston | | | Gaston | Gaston | | |
| 37 | Gates | | | | | Gates | |
| 38 | Graham | | | | | | Graham |
| 39 | Granville | Granville | Granville | | | | |
| 40 | Greene | | Greene | | | | |
| 41 | Guilford | | Guilford | | | | |
| 42 | Halifax | | Halifax | | | | |
| 43 | Harnett | Harnett | Harnett | | | | |
| 44 | Haywood | | | | | | Haywood |
| 45 | Henderson | | | | | | Henderson |
| 46 | Hertford | | Hertford | | | | |
| 47 | Hoke | Hoke | Hoke | | | | |
| 48 | Hyde | | Hyde | | | | |
| 49 | Iredell | | | Iredell | Iredell | | |
| 50 | Jackson | | | | | | Jackson |
| 51 | Johnston | Johnston | Johnston | | | | |
| 52 | Jones | | Jones | | | | |
| 53 | Lee | Lee | Lee | | | | |
| 54 | Lenoir | | Lenoir | | | | |
| 55 | Lincoln | | | Lincoln | Lincoln | | |
| 56 | Macon | | | | | | Macon |
| 57 | Madison | | | | | | Madison |
| 58 | Martin | | Martin | | | | |
| 59 | McDowell | | | | | | McDowell |
| 60 | Mecklenburg | | | Mecklen- burg | Mecklen- burg | | |
| 61 | Mitchell | | | | | | Mitchell |
| 62 | Montgomery | | | | Montgom- ery | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|--------------|---------|-------------|--------|----------|------------|--------------|
| 63 | Moore | Moore | Moore | | | | |
| 64 | Nash | Nash | Nash | | | | |
| 65 | New Hanover | | New Hanover | | | | |
| 66 | Northampton | | Northampton | | | | |
| 67 | Onslow | | Onslow | | | | |
| 68 | Orange | Orange | Orange | | | | |
| 69 | Pamlico | | Pamlico | | | | |
| 70 | Pasquotank | | | | | Pasquotank | |
| 71 | Pender | | Pender | | | | |
| 72 | Perquimans | | | | | Perquimans | |
| 73 | Person | Person | Person | | | | |
| 74 | Pitt | | Pitt | | | | |
| 75 | Polk | | | | | | Polk |
| 76 | Randolph | | Randolph | | | | |
| 77 | Richmond | | | | Richmond | | |
| 78 | Robeson | Robeson | Robeson | | | | |
| 79 | Rockingham | | Rockingham | | | | |
| 80 | Rowan | | | Rowan | Rowan | | |
| 81 | Rutherford | | | | | | Rutherford |
| 82 | Sampson | | Sampson | | | | |
| 83 | Scotland | | | | Scotland | | |
| 84 | Stanly | | | Stanly | Stanly | | |
| 85 | Stokes | | Stokes | | | | |
| 86 | Surrey | | | | Surrey | | |
| 87 | Swain | | | | | | Swain |
| 88 | Transylvania | | | | | | Transylvania |
| 89 | Tyrrell | | Tyrrell | | | | |
| 90 | Union | | | Union | Union | | |
| 91 | Vance | Vance | Vance | | | | |
| 92 | Wake | Wake | Wake | | | | |
| 93 | Warren | Warren | Warren | | | | |
| 94 | Washington | | Washington | | | | |
| 95 | Watauga | | | | Watauga | | |
| 96 | Wayne | | Wayne | | | | |
| 97 | Wilkes | | | | Wilkes | | |
| 98 | Wilson | Wilson | Wilson | | | | |
| 99 | Yadkin | | | | Yadkin | | |
| 100 | Yancey | | | | | | Yancey |

Electronics Corner

MODEL RAILROAD SOUND SYSTEM

By Fred Miller, MMR

Many modelers have added sound to their model railroad layouts using sound-equipped locomotives. Adding background sounds is a simple and inexpensive addition to further enhance the “multi-dimensional” effect on your layout. Specific industry or even generic city or country sounds, played at a modest volume, broaden the viewing and operating experience.

Several commercial standalone sound modules are available typically playing up to 60 seconds of a specific self-contained recorded sound. Other sound boards are available which play user-provided sounds, typically contained on SDHC memory cards. Some of these are only triggered with simple ON/OFF controls while other more expensive units have elaborate triggering controls. See the Reference section for a listing of some of these commercial offerings.

A New Opportunity:

Available Arduino microcontrollers and a wealth of compatible electronic boards provide an opportunity for a new approach to a build-it-yourself Model Railroad Sound System.



Figure 1–Model Railroad Sound System

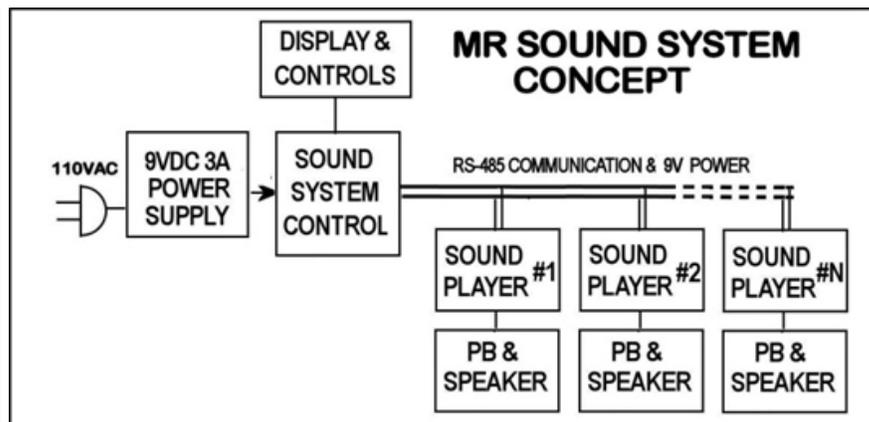


Figure 2 – Sound System Controls

The system described in this article includes a Master Control which operates multiple sound playing units intended to be spaced around a layout (Figures 1, 3). The sounds on each of those remote units can be activated by a layout fascia pushbutton at the unit site, or by the Master Control (Figure 2) operating in a selected Mode:

Manual mode: Sounds selected and controlled individually from the Control Panel

Auto (Scheduled) mode: Sounds initiated by a stored ‘schedule’

Random mode: Sounds initiated in a random fashion

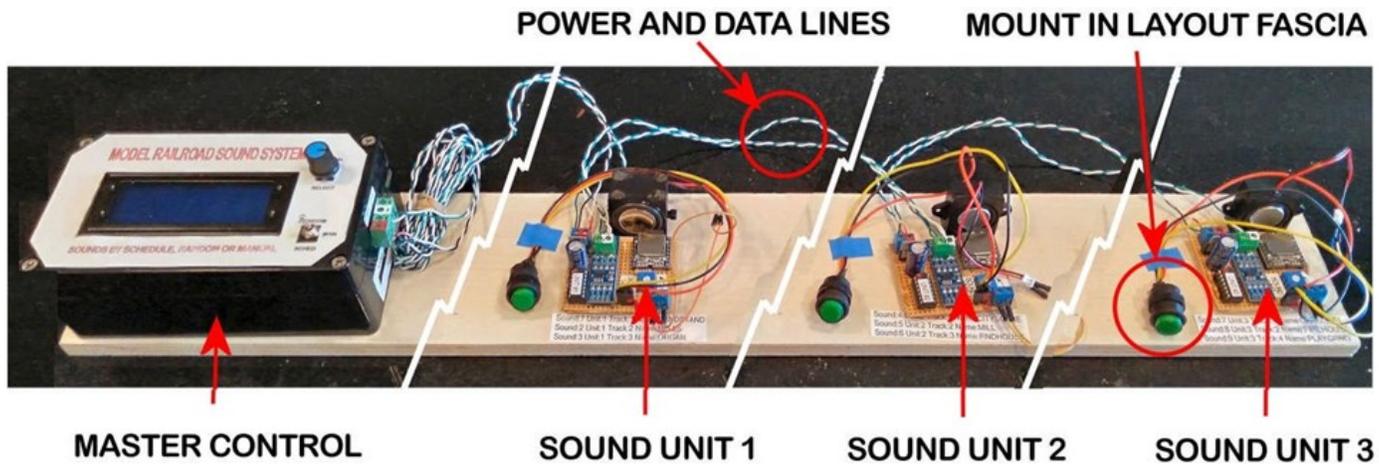


Figure 3 – Typical Connections from Control to Players

Design of the Master Control

The Master Control is based on an Arduino Nano microcontroller. The software (sketch) running on the micro monitors a toggle switch to determine the operating mode. When in Manual Mode a rotary encoder selects a sound file and a subsequent press on the encoder’s shaft turns the sound ON or OFF. Those sound files are also turned ON and OFF when in either a Random or Auto (scheduled) Mode. The Master Control displays the last command executed in any of the modes and shows the status of the active (ON) sounds (Figure 4).

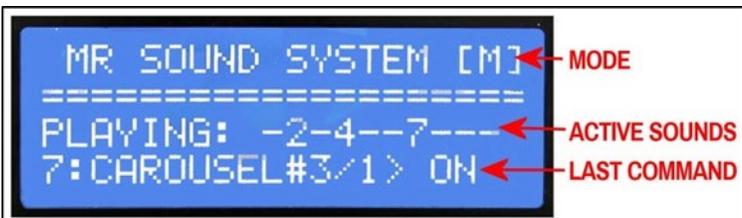


Figure 4 – Control Display Panel

Each of the remote units has a micro-SD card with one or more sound files in .mp3 format. The sound files are described to the Master Control in a file read from a micro-SD card. The ‘SOUND.TXT’ file lists the sound file name, the remote unit, and track where the sound file exists (Figure 5).

EXAMPLE 'SOUND.TXT' FILE

| |
|------------------|
| 1,1,1,BANDSTAND |
| 2,1,2,BELLS |
| 3,1,3,ORGAN |
| 4,2,1,CITYSCENE |
| 5,2,2,MILL |
| 6,2,3,RNDHOUSE |
| 7,3,1,CAROUSEL |
| 8,3,2,FIREHOUSE |
| 9,3,4,PLAYGROUND |

↑↑↑ SOUND NAME
↑ SOUND TRACK
↑ REMOTE UNIT#
↑ SOUND #

Figure 5 - Descriptions

The ‘schedule’ used in the AUTO mode is described to the Master Control in a file read from the same micro-SD card. This ‘SCHEDULE.TXT’ file contains lines which define the START and END times of each sound. The times shown are in minutes and tenths of minutes (Figure 6).

Design Objectives of the Remote Sound Units

Play commands are transmitted to the Remote Unit from the Master Control through an RS-485 data line. Sound files can also be controlled directly at the remote sound units.

The sound files are stored on a micro-SD card in each of the Remote units. A brief press on the fascia mounted pushbutton will start to play the .mp3 file in track 1. A two second press will play track 2, if any, and a longer press will play track 3. The pushbutton will be illuminated while the

EXAMPLE 'SCHEDULE.TXT' FILE

| |
|-------------|
| 1,1,0.1,0.4 |
| 2,2,1.2,1.5 |
| 3,7,0.5,1.3 |
| 4,5,1.0,1.4 |
| 5,9,1.5,2.2 |
| 6,4,1.7,2.1 |
| 8,3,2.3,2.7 |
| 7,8,2.6,3.0 |
| 9,6,0.2,0.6 |

TIME SHOWN IN MINUTES

↑↑↑ END TIME
↑ START TIME
↑ SOUND #
↑ LINE#

Figure 6 - Schedule

sound file is active. A subsequent press will turn the sound off. Sound files will repeat until turned off.

Sounds for the MR Sound System:

There are many sources for sounds which can be combined or otherwise edited and saved in .mp3 format using free sound editing software. A very useful collection of nicely edited background sounds is available from Fantasonics.com. Sounds are available for various industries and city “scenes.” The sounds are sold on standard audio CDs. PC software (e.g., Microsoft’s Media Player) can “rip” the audio tracks into .mp3 sound files which in turn can be copied to the micro-SD Flash Memory card. A standard 4 or 8 GB micro-SD card, currently available for a couple bucks when purchased in groups, can retain many hours of MP3 files. Each of the tracks on the Fantasonics CDs add up to about an hour’s worth of great sounds.

Building the Schedule for the MR Sound System

It is useful to use an Excel worksheet to visually develop a schedule. A scale of the intended timeframes can be drawn horizontally and then the various sound steps can be marked in a bar across the timeframe. The example in **Figure 7** shows a 3-minute schedule with nine different sounds, three on each sound unit. Color coding helps ensure that only one sound track is playing on a sound unit at a time.

The schedule file can be developed from the graphic display.

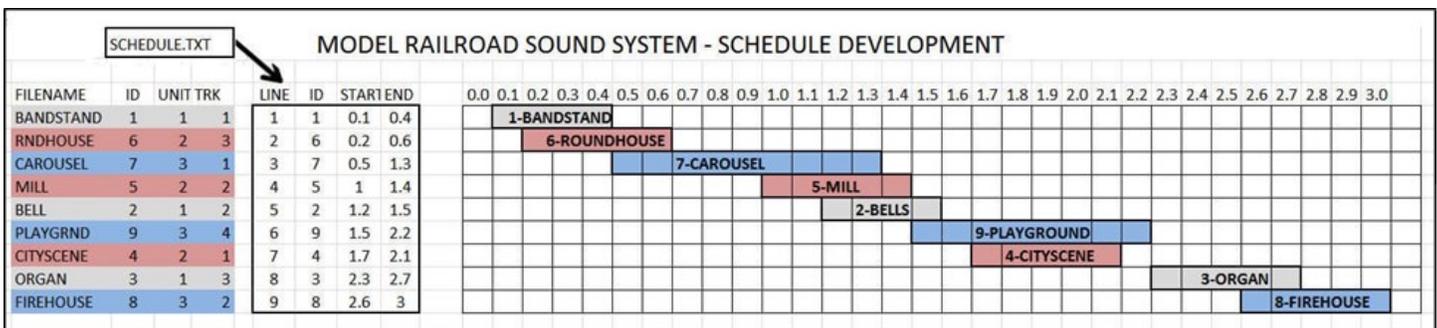


Figure 7 – Excel Worksheet to Develop Schedule

Building the Master Control

As noted above, the Master Control circuit is based on the Arduino Nano microcontroller. The circuit also makes use of an RS-485 module for communication to and from the remote units. A micro-SD card reader module houses the card with the ‘SOUNDS.TXT’ and ‘SCHEDULE.TXT’ files. The card reader is controlled by SPI communication. The LCD display is a 4-line 20-character module and is controlled with I2C communication. The rotary encoder and a simple power supply complete the circuit (**Figure 8**).

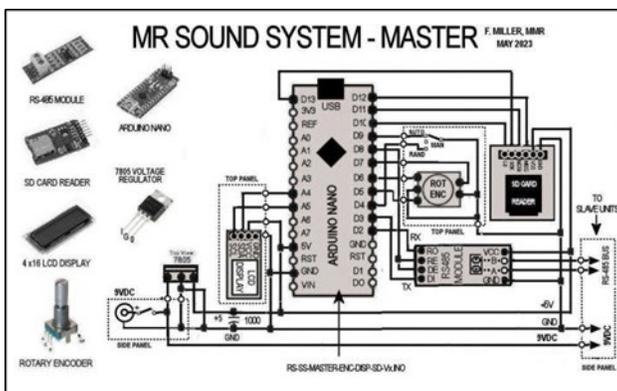


Figure 8 – Controls Box Circuit

My usual process in constructing electronic projects is to lay out the components on a drawn 0.1 grid, graphically ‘wire’ the components and then use that design to build the actual circuit board (**Figures 9, 10**).

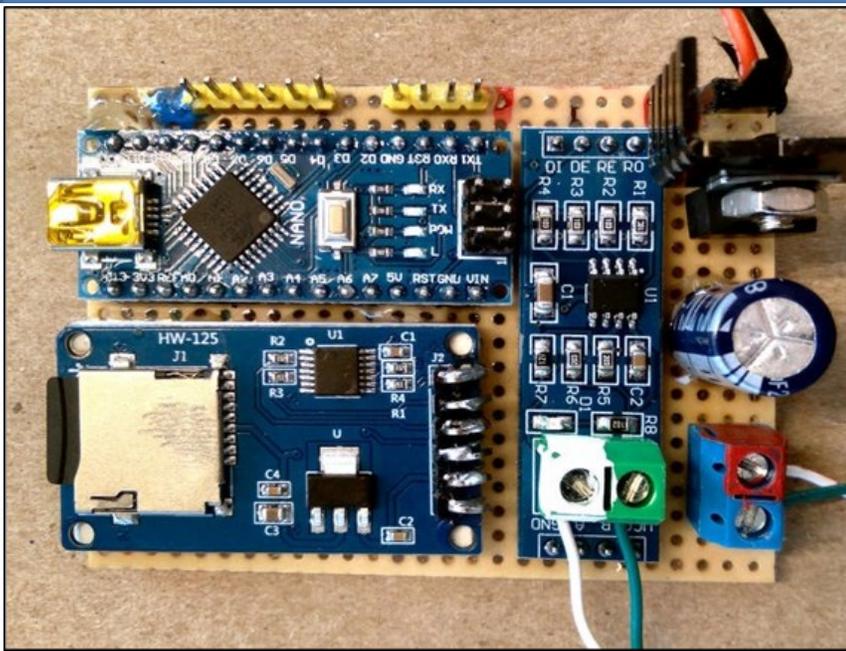


Figure 9 – Controls Circuit Board Assembled

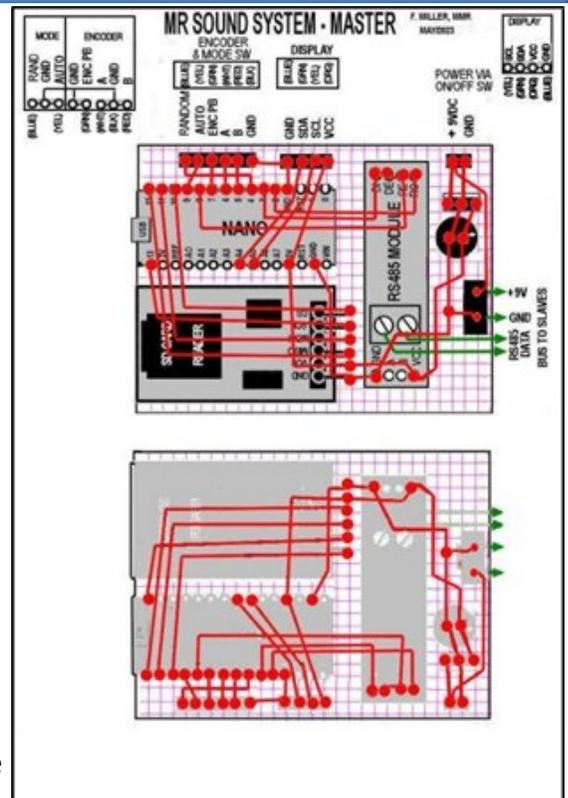


Figure 10 – Controls Circuit Design

The constructed circuit board is then mounted into a protective box but could just as well be mounted behind the layout fascia with the display and controls mounted on the fascia (Figure 11).



Figure 11 – Sound System Control Box Connections

Building the Remote Sound Playing Units

Each of the sound units is based on an ATTINY84 microcontroller, although an Arduino Nano could just as well be used, but with a slightly larger footprint and cost.

The sound units receive 9VDC power from the Master Control and the communication with the Master Controls is via the RS-485 twisted pair data line. The sound units contain a micro-SD card reader which provides access to the .mp3 sound files (Figure 12).

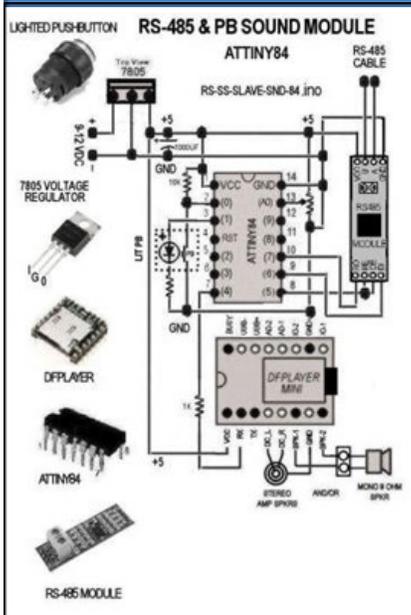


Figure 12 – Sound Player Circuit

The sound unit circuit is again designed by first laying out the components on a 0.1 grid, graphically ‘wire’ the components and then use that design to build the actual circuit board (Figure 13).

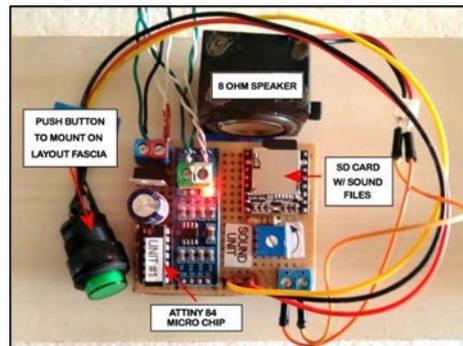


Figure 14 – Sound Unit Ready to Install

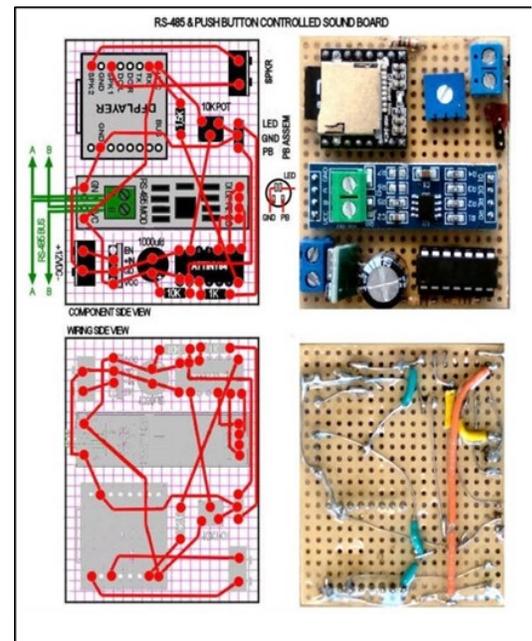


Figure 13 – Sound Player Board Design

Project Limitations

The memory available on the Master Control Nano micro-controller forces limitations on some of the operating parameters:

- A maximum of 10 sound files are supported.

- A maximum of 6 playing units are supported.

- The schedule, if any, can only contain 10 ON/OFF sound events (before repeating).

- The size of the names associated with the sound files cannot exceed 10 characters.

These limitations could be relaxed if a microcontroller with more memory was used (e.g., Arduino Mega).

References for alternative Sound Boards:

Electronics123.com – various sound boards/modules priced \$12 - \$60

ITTProducts.com (Innovative Train Technology Products) sound modules \$40

Pricom.com - Dream Player boards priced \$60 - \$120

References for this Sound Project:

The micro-controller programs (sketches) for this project are available on my Github website: ti-nyurl.com/35jyvm4r. (See Sound Project Notes)

A YouTube video demonstration of the project is available on my YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@fredmiller1367/videos>.

Answers to questions and further help is available by email: tractionfan@aol.com

Modeler's Haven...

Tips from the Altoona Convention

By Greg Warth

I always learn something new when I go to a convention. Here are a few ideas that I picked up from Altoona...

From Alan Mende: **Obsessive-Compulsive Detailing**. When Alan scratchbuilds and kitbashes brass locomotives, he leaves no detail unturned. If he can't find a part that he needs commercially, he makes his own. His well-honed hobby of woodworking has blended nicely into his skills as a model railroader. He has a wood lathe that he is able to use as a metal lathe for some materials, like brass, to create some of the parts he needs to complete a model. He creates details that you can't even see. Why? Because HE knows those details are there and that makes all the difference to him. One of his best models is the Class A Shay, which is truly a beauty.

Also from Alan Mende: **Soldering Tips**. Every model railroader should be able to master this skill since it is so widely used in the hobby. His recommendations include the following:

Always use safety glasses.

Get a soldering iron that has replaceable tips.

Always use a holder for your iron.

His preference is to use a resistance type soldering unit, or a mini-torch, depending on the project.

When first using a new soldering tip, the first thing to do is cover it with rosin core flux (not acid flux), then wrap the tip with 60/40 tin/lead solder (Alan's preference), then heat it up. Be sure not to get any solder or flux on the threads of the tip which will render it unusable thereafter.

Don't use an old, corroded tip.

Don't use too much flux.

Use the appropriate tip according to the size of the project.

Both surfaces that you are soldering together MUST be clean.

The soldering tip must be tinned and cleaned (with sponge).

When soldering,

Tin both parts first.

Hold the parts together. Use alligator clips, clamps or vise.

Support the edge of your hand that is holding the soldering iron on the edge of the table or workbench.

Then heat the two parts with the iron and when the flux is bubbling, add solder. It should flow quickly into the joint.

Practice makes perfect.

Dr. John Purcell: **Miser's Guide to Model Railroadng**. This hobby can be expensive, but you can reduce the cost considerably if you are careful.

The first thing to do is to shop around to see where you can purchase your most commonly used products for the least amount of money. Paints are usually expensive, so it pays to buy them at Hobby Lobby where they are cheaper than most other places. It's best to stir paint rather than shake it. Some of the paint is lost in the cap and in the threads of the bottle making it difficult to open after it dries there. Keep a ledger on what paint you used for which model.

Use the best brushes you can afford but clean them well after each use.

Use cheap foam board for the backs of buildings. Don't spend money on things that will never be seen.

Use dyed sawdust instead of paying for ground foam.

Use chicken grit for ballast.

Use Queen sized flat (not fitted) sheets split in half for layout skirting.

Instead of plaster, consider the glue-shell technique for your scenery base. Use a pan of diluted white glue and dip pieces of paper towels into it. Spread the wet paper towel pieces over the foam scenery base and use a brush to "paint" over them

with more white glue. It's very cheap and light weight. There's no dust. It is not as strong as plaster, but you can add more thickness to it with more sheets of paper towel.

Use baby's breath discards from flower shops or funeral homes to make a lot of background trees.

Learn from the expensive mistakes of others.

Look in flea markets, garage sales, estate sales, Dollar Tree, etc. for things you can use.

Wash hands frequently or use gloves to avoid getting greasy fingerprints on beautifully detailed models.

Buy a big bag of springs needed for changing or upgrading couplers. If you lose one or two, it won't be a tragedy.

Brian Sheron, MMR: Details Can Make a Difference. Brian mostly models urban scenes on his layout, particularly New York City. His city streets are packed with realistic details that you would be likely to see in the streets of NYC.

- Adding people to your scenes is one of the most important things you can do to spruce up your layout.
- Add action scenes where people are doing things, like wash-ing clothes, sweeping the sidewalks, where boys are selling newspapers, or walking dogs.
- Set up crews working on telephone lines, hot dog vendors, cars, motorcycles, trash, mailboxes, phone booths, utility poles and wires.
- Don't forget billboards, signs on the street and on buildings.
- Add signals and crossings gates even if they don't work.
- Weather the streets, the buildings, everything.
- Put white and yellow lines on roads.
- Use a felt-tipped pen to put cracks in the roads.
- Put transformers on telephone poles and add wires from the poles to the buildings.
- Put fire-escapes and downspouts on buildings and add cables and electrical wires.
- Add plumbing vents, HVAC systems, and roof access doors to business buildings.
- Consider putting wax paper on the backs of windows for a "frosted" appearance and to hide the empty interiors.
- Put window curtains or blinds in some of the office buildings.
- Don't forget to show junk piles, old tires, trackside fences and ditches.
- Graffiti can be added to rail cars and buildings.
- Use smaller buildings in back of larger ones to create forced perspective.

Where can you find all these details to purchase? Look in Walther's Catalog and on eBay. Be observant while traveling. Take pictures of scenes you want to model and look for the details in those photos that you can add to your layout. For more information, this clinic can be found on the Potomac Division website.

Lance Mindheim: **Layout Design. Putting the horse before the cart.** In this clinic, Lance adeptly spells out the principal decisions you have to make in designing your layout.

Of course, the best layout design is the one that makes you happy, but that's not always easy to determine in the beginning.

The biggest mistake you can make is not starting at all. Beyond that, the second biggest mistake is overestimating your resources of time, space, energy, motivation, and finances.

In addition to assessing your resources correctly, you need to realistically determine your comfort level with the size and complexity (defined by the number of turnouts) of your planned layout, your skill level and the momentum required to move forward. Don't let your ego drive these decisions. Do you wish to complete your layout in a matter of months, or will this be a creation that will require decades? K.I.S.S. is often the best plan. A short branch-line is often better than modeling an entire pike.

You should also decide what you love most about model railroading. Do you enjoy the actual building of the layout? Are you more interested in operations? Or are you mostly wishing to experience the viewing of the railroad as a work of art?

Ergonomics are important. Your layout room should be clean and uncluttered, a pleasure to work in. Your working area should be comfortable. Car storage should be readily accessible. All parts of the layout should be easy for you to get to. Height of the layout should be comfortable for your size and height.

Benchmark should drive the design. Trying to create the benchmark to follow a complicated design usually doesn't work because you run out of space. Double-ended yards often use too much real estate to be worthwhile. Similarly, grades are frequently not worth the space required and the operational deficits they create.

Plan to have scene separation for the best appearance and realism. Avoid an over cluttered look with too many structures and too much track.

When in trouble with your design, copy what the prototype did.

Tom Neukirchen: **Garden Railroading**. Tom describes his adventure into modeling a successful G scale garden railroad. Salient features of his layout are as follows:

Drainage must be controlled to avoid flooding.

Create a six-inch gravel bed using 3/8" gravel ballast.

Track is laid loosely (not glued down) on top of the gravel.

Use the same size and brand of track all around. Different brands and codes of track often will not fit together well.

Use double insulated color-coded wires through waterproofed PVC pipe and distribution boxes.

Build a large enough control box to handle wiring, transformer(s), and storage for your main control panel, locomotives, and railcars to keep them out of the weather but still readily accessible when you want to use them.

Use single-solenoid switches on your graphic schematic control panel to manage turnouts remotely with momentary toggles and red/green lights that show the direction of the turnouts.

Put a metal sleeve over any PVC pipe containing wiring that is going through your yard, so it won't be destroyed by lawn mowers or weed whackers.

Seal up your buildings to avoid wasps or bees or other insects or birds from setting up nests in them.

Use small, but hardy plants that will survive well in your area. You may have to use a bonsai technique to keep them small.

Use an outdoor "blower" on the vacuum setting to get rid of dead leaves and debris. Use track cleaner cars pushed around the track with your locomotive to keep it clean once a week.

Add details, action scenes, people, etc. just like you would on any other layout.

Troubleshooting and solving problems are part of the fun.

Rich Wurst: **The Frugal Model Railroader**. This was a very entertaining clinic about using simple household items to make things you can use on your railroad.

Use discarded plastic wheels, removed from their axels, painted and glued into a gondola for an unusual carload.

Bundle discarded wheel axels with fishing line to make a gondola or flatcar load. (Paint the fishing line with a Sharpie pen with a "V" cut out of the marker before using the line to bundle the axels.)

Use stakes with drilled holes along the sides of roads. Run painted fishing line through the holes in the stakes to make a fence.

Use tulle fabric to make a chain linked fence, using copper wire for the framework of each section.

Use thin black tape to make straps for cargo on flatcars.

Find cheap farm toys like John Deere tractors at Tractor Supply stores for flatcar loads.

Use wooden coffee stirrers to make a bridge.

Bundle plastic straws with fishing line to create flatcar loads.

Thin coffee filters can be wetted and folded as a tarp over a small wooden block or anything else for that matter to create loads for flat cars.

Drier sheets can be wetted and used for roofing.

Collect aluminum foil tops from bottles, put a bunch of them in a coffee grinder to make them into small pieces, hammer them into bales and glue them into gondolas.

Cut up old toothpaste tubes into small pieces, spray paint them gray or brown, then glue them into gondolas, using contact cement or diluted white glue.

Take caps from Dawn bottles, glue them together and create turbine engine loads for flatcars.

Save scraps from old kits or from anywhere. Take a handful of them, spray paint them different colors from different angles and make junk piles or gondola loads.

Use rails from old tracks and bundle them for flatcar loads.

Collect old plastic Chinese take-out containers and use them to store various types of scrap that you can use later.

The insides of security envelopes are often printed with different designs and colors that you can use for interior floors or wallpaper.

Always be thinking about things you are throwing away, "What can I use this for on my layout?"

Jack Dziadul: **Make-and-Take Clinic on How to Build Craftsman Kits.** Jack provided us with another great clinic on building craftsman kits. This one was a tool shed, a.k.a., speeder shed. Each participant received a kit in their requested scale, O, HO, or N, produced by Jack's own company, [Ipswich Hobbies](#). Each kit contained illustrated, detailed instructions and precision laser-cut wood pieces including a floor, walls, doors, roof, gables, and even shingles for the roof. We used a glass plate for a flat level surface and wood glue as the adhesive that we applied with a toothpick. Each of us brought our own tools and paints, and fortunately Jack had extras that we could use as well. We all followed the instructions carefully, which was critical to our success, and Jack provided lots of tips and hands-on help. Everyone had a lot of fun, and we all ended up with very nice craftsman quality trackside buildings that we could proudly display on our layouts or dioramas at home.

There were many other excellent clinics that I didn't have time to attend. What did YOU learn at the Convention? Consider adding your own modeling tips to this column. We're always looking for new information to share. Send your tips and techniques to the [Editor](#) right now while you're thinking about it.



Altoona Association of Model Railroaders (Photo by Jerry Lauchle)



East Broad Top Railroad Number 16 (Alex Belida photo)

Building a LaBelle Cleveland, Lorain & Wheeling Gondola Kit

By Martin Brechbiel, MMR

Much to my continuing surprise it seems that in my stock of kits and projects that I have a substantial stash of both categories pertaining to gondola cars. This is as previously noted, odd as I have never had much of an interest in such cars. Apparently, I did at one time and have forgotten? It begs to question what other surprises lurk in my shop and on the shelves. Perhaps that will be revealed in the future by [Criswell](#), or just in these pages.

As it turns out, the next kit in the gondola cache was the venerable LaBelle Cleveland, Lorain & Wheeling car. I think that the third or fourth kit I ever built was a LaBelle kit of a narrow gauge coach that my father-in-law tested my O scale resolve with a few decades ago. However, I must have acquired this relatively recently as the kit bears the Wyoming address. It is a wood kit and I like to build in wood, so what could possibly go wrong?

Opening it all up and sorting out the parts on my work bench's glass surface is how I prefer to start when building a kit. Spreading everything out, I found two sides, two ends, a floor with a milled underbody frame, a bag of cast metal parts, and a single page of instructions printed on both sides with photos, exploded diagrams, and all sorts of good stuff you just need to know about

([Photo 1](#)). I looked over the diagrams and read through the instructions, then promptly decided to strike out in a slightly different order of assembly. I saved the underbody for last to keep building the top side of the car nice and stable on the flat surface. Once assembled top-side, I figured that the car would still be good and stable to work on installing all of the underbody. Also, as usual with Labelle instructions and my experience with them, some of the diagram information was for a different car. So, you have to read and look all this information over carefully to filter out the spurious bits.



[Photo 1](#)

Opening up the bag of cast metal parts resulted in my sorting them into their respective piles by location and use on the car. What I needed first were all of the stake and stake pocket castings. These go on the sides and ends prior to those

parts being attached to the floor. They all needed some well spent time with a file to clean up the flash from the metal casting process. Once cleaned up, these castings were glued to the sides using the template in the instructions for guidance on placement. The template is $1/8'' = 1'$ scale, so simply doubling everything should work. Except, it seems that these instructions have been through the copying machine or drifted just a wee bit off scale, so careful measuring and transferring that to the sides seemed prudent. I almost fully succeeded in this effort, but my command of higher mathematics has faded a bit and I apparently applied the wrong [Hamiltonian](#) so everything ended up just that wee bit off. The best laid plans of mice, indeed. I glued these as best as I could into place noting that they not only have to be spaced apart per that template, but also on the horizontal to get the stake pocket casting portion correctly positioned as well as the nbw (nuts-bolts-washer) castings in the stakes with the plank sides. These castings are also too long for the sides. So, once all the glue was set, I went back and nipped the excess off and then trued up the ends with a light application of a sanding drum in the Dremel. The stakes on the ends do not have the stake pockets, so those got nipped off and then glued into place with similar alignment considerations applied.

After gluing the floor ends and underside bits into place, the decking was glued to the top of the floor (carpenter's glue) with equal overhang on both sides. The sides were then used to mark where the decking needed to be trimmed, and those parts were carefully excised using a scalpel. Once the sides passed being test fitted into place, they were glued into place (Goo & CA) with the stakes keeping all square and upright ([Photo 2](#)).

With both of the sides glued into place, the ends with their stakes were to be added next in between the sides. They fit in between but were also not wide enough to engage the interior of the sides. This version of this kit has laser cut sides and ends, so perhaps this is off a bit or it's merely me. Either way, I just shimmed the width of the ends with some stripwood to make everything fit snugly. A film of glue anchored both of the ends into place ([Photo 3](#)).

Now was when the rest of the detail parts started to get used. There were sprues of exterior corner braces. These all required



Photo 2

I also replaced the wood body bolsters with my own resin ones. I did keep and install the needle beams in the locations defined by the instructions and drawing. I installed 10" queen posts (Grandt Line No. 70) and instead of running the truss rods using monofilament, I used my usual surgical silk. The plans had the truss rods running under and about under the bolsters, but I chose to run mine through the ends of the cars anchoring the surgical silk in the holes in the end sill with large nbws (Grandt Line No. 18). The braided silk thread was run through the car under the bolster, up over the needle beams, and under the other bolster, then back again four times total pulling it taut at each anchoring location leaving it off the queen posts. During each passage through the car a turnbuckle (Tichy No. 2004) was added onto the silk thread.

The K brake cylinder was mounted spanning the support on top of some scrap scribed siding drilled out to receive the linkage to the one brake lever. The "plumbing" was made up from 0.019" or 0.020" wire fitted with clevises made from cut down turnbuckles from Precision Scale Car (PSC). The brake hangers were fashioned from 0.015" x 0.060" brass stock. After all the brake components were in place, the truss rods were lifted up onto their queen posts with the turnbuckles positioned in between and then secured with minimal CA. A brake stirrup (PSC) was fitted to the brake wheel end of the car. A brake wheel (PSC) soldered to some 0.028" brass wire and fitted with a ratchet & pawl casting (PSC). The brake wheel with the ratchet & pawl casting was mounted to the top of the end of the car with the 0.028" brass wire base passing through the base of the brake stirrup. A bit of CA secured this unit in place. Lastly, a scrap of the 0.019" wire was linked to a bit of scrap chain which was in turn wrapped around the brake shaft within the brake stirrup. All was secured with minimal CA with the end of the wire linked under the car bolster to the brake cylinder. Staples were supplied as stirrup steps and they met their fate in the scrap metal disposal can. Replacement under the floor mounted stirrup steps (Auel....and I wish I would find more of these!!!) were fished out of the parts bin glued and then pinned in place. That pair of stray air hoses (Berkshire Valley?) that were in a box of goodies from an eBay acquisition were added to each end. The entire underbody was given a quick coat of black paint from the nearest available rattle can to finish off this part of the car (Photo 4).



Photo 4

set, I went back with a scalpel to cut them at the joints of the planks on the sides. A few days later I sealed the decals into the surface with some Matte Clear (Rustoleum) (Photo 5).

some file and scalpel time to clean the mold flash off to make them usable to fit neatly over the corners of the sides and ends. There are two different types of braces and where they each go is easily seen in the drawing in the instructions. A bit of CA and tweezers put these all into place. The rest of detail parts pertained to the underbody and brake system. I think I kept the K brake cylinder and the brake levers, and tossed the rest into the scrap can. Most were a bit too crude to use given that I already had better in my shop to use as upgrade substitutes.

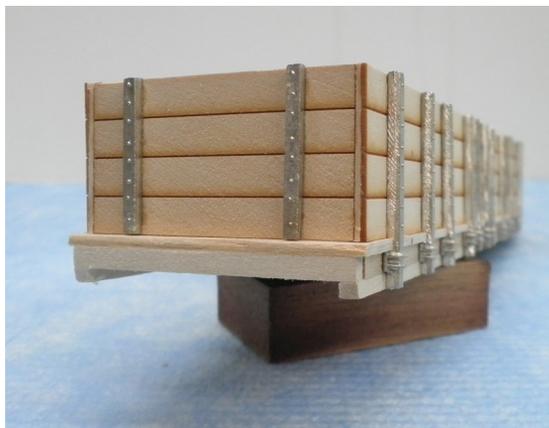


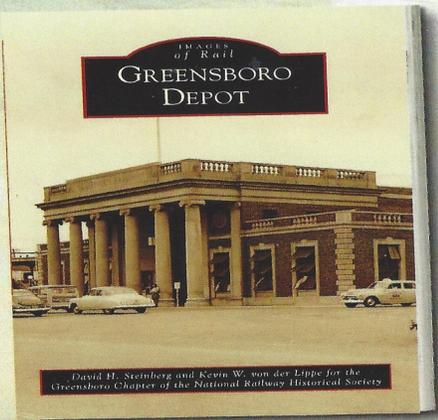
Photo 3

The painting and finishing were the final steps in completing this car. Painting was very basic and done using a rattle can (Scale Coat) of Boxcar Red which by its very nature put a good gloss finish on the car for applying the decals. The decals were a little tricky as everything had to be trimmed down and to also fit into their locations in between the stakes. Fine scissors and patience are required possibly more of the latter than the former. The decals slid off the paper nicely onto the surface with a little decal set that was reapplied periodically until they sat down tight onto the surface. After they were



Photo 5

All that remained was to add the Kadee couplers that were mounted using No. 0 x 3/8" wood screws. Then a set of Athearn arch-bar trucks were added using 4/40 screws into the car bolsters. I am stopping here since I have not made up my mind about adding a load to this car. It could use a bit of added weight and something to disguise the lack of interior hardware from all those stakes and corner braces. While I ponder the solution to that dilemma, it's time to move on and see if there is yet another gondola kit on the shelf or on the project rack.



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Piedmont Junction 2024 Convention

By Don Roback

The history of railroading in the Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill areas dates to the 1830s with the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad. Durham began as a depot for the North Carolina Railroad in 1853 with the donation of land from a local physician named Bartlett Durham. In fact, Union General William T. Sherman arrived by train at Durham Station to discuss the final Confederate surrender in April of 1865 at nearby Bennett's Farm.

This rich history of railroading continues today with Amtrak service along with a strong CSX and Norfolk Southern presence statewide. Currently, there are over 3000 miles of trackage in the state down from a peak of over 5500 miles in the 1920s.



Photo 1 The convention will be held at the Marriott Hotel at Research Triangle Park in Durham, NC. The registration link is open, and the cost is \$109.00 USD per night.

Our goal for this convention is to provide all attendees and guests with a wide array of activities and educational opportunities related to model and prototype railroading. We also have set up an exciting non-railroad tour at the North Carolina Museum of Art along with suggestions on what to see around the beautiful 'Triangle' area of North Carolina (Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill). So, if you are looking to explore the local area while in town, there are many great spots to visit.

Co-Chairmen Jack Dziadul and Kevin O'Connor lead the organizing team for this convention. Hotel-based activities will include numerous clinics, a Company Store to purchase or sell railroading items, a contest room, a raffle for a layout built by the Division and a large T-TRAK layout that will be available for operations. The banquet will be held on Saturday night September 28 featuring the Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad Company President Carl Hollowell as guest speaker (**Photo 2**).

Off-site activities will include local layout tours, operation callboard layouts, prototype tours, and a guided tour at the North Carolina Museum of Art.

Kevin O'Connor has assembled a schedule of 44 clinics including 17 by NMRA Master Model Railroaders covering both prototype and modeling topics featuring six hands-on clinics.

John Wallis has organized the layout room at the hotel. This room will feature an HO scale raffle layout built by a CPD13 team headed by Danial Fisher and a large T-TRAK layout that will be available for

With this extensive railroad history and vibrant model railroad community in central North Carolina as a backdrop, the National Model Railroad Association Mid-Eastern Region's Carolina Piedmont Division (CPD13) would like to invite you to the MER Annual Convention September 26-29, 2024, in Durham, NC. The host hotel will be Marriott Raleigh Durham Research Triangle Park at 4700 Guardian Dr in Durham, NC (**Photo 1**). The hotel website is [Hotels in Durham, NC- Marriott Raleigh Durham RTP](#).



Photo 2 The Saturday night banquet speaker will be Carl Hollowell, President of the Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad. After a long career working for many railroads all over the country, he joined the Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad in 2019.

operations. Members will be able to accumulate hours on this layout for their Chief Dispatcher AP (Achievement Program) certificate.

Alan Mende will manage the MER contest room which will showcase entries from NMRA members. This room will be open starting on Thursday September 26 and evaluations will take place on Saturday, September 28. There will be ample room available to enter your models and make progress towards your Master Model Railroader designation.

Gene Sing, MMR, will oversee our Company Store at the hotel. In this room, attendees can buy and sell new and used model and prototype railroad equipment. Also featured will be a silent auction with a “buy-it-now” option and raffle ticket sales for the CPD13-built auction layout. So, bring related items that you cannot use and search for items that you need.



Photo 3 The Rio Grande Southern and Eastern Divisions in On3 scale by Charlie Rausch MMR will be open for tours and operating sessions during the convention. Photo by John Sokash.

Union Station Museum which also houses the Sandhills Central Model Railroad Club. There will also be two tours of the Tichy Trains Group (tichytraingroup.com) factory in nearby Burlington, NC ([Photo 7](#)).

Finally, the triangle region offers many attractions for convention attendees. As part of the convention, a tour of the North Carolina



Photo 5 The New Hope Valley Railway and North Carolina Railway Museum feature tourist excursion rides along 4 miles of track from Bonsal to New Hill, NC and back. The Railway and Museum are dedicated to preserving and sharing North Carolina's rich railroad history.

John Sokash has created an impressive list of 25 local layouts that can be toured during the convention. Many of these layouts have been featured in the model railroading press and cover many sizes and scales. Bob Bridges and Don Roback have created very helpful guides including facts, pictures, and maps to help you make your decisions about which layouts to visit ([Photo 3](#)).

Charlie Rausch, MMR, and his team have identified eight local layouts that will be available for a total of twelve operating sessions ([Photo 4](#)). These layouts have held numerous operating sessions to ensure a great experience for convention attendees. The layouts cover multiple scales, sizes, and themes.

Randy Foulke has built a terrific list of prototype and manufacturer tours during the convention. These activities include prototype tours of the New Hope Valley Railway (triangletrain.com) ([Photo 5](#)), the Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad (aberdeen-rockfish.com) headquarters ([Photo 6](#)) and engine servicing facilities along with nearby Aberdeen



Photo 4 The Southern Pacific Coast Division in HO scale by Ken Reising will be open for tours and operating sessions during the convention. Photo by John Sokash.

Museum of Art guided by Nancy Murphy will be offered ([Photo 8](#)). In addition, there are numerous other self-guided options including the Duke Lemur Center, Sarah P. Duke Gardens, several prominent museums, the American Tobacco Campus in Durham which houses many restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues, and the State Capitol Building in downtown Raleigh.

Convention registration will be available starting in April 2024.



Photo 6 The Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad will be open for tours of the Headquarters Building and diesel servicing shops. Also nearby is the restored Aberdeen Union Station Museum which houses the Sandhills Central Model Railroad Club layout along with a restored caboose outside.

Photo 6 The Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad will be open for tours of the Headquarters Building and diesel servicing shops. Also nearby is the restored Aberdeen Union Station Museum which houses the Sandhills Central Model Railroad Club layout along with a restored caboose outside.

Hotel reservations can be made now at [the Marriott](#) at a fantastic room rate of \$109 per night. For the most up to date information including registration and hotel information for this exciting convention, see the convention website at [PiedmontJunction.org](#).



Photo 7 Don Tichy will host tours of his Tichy Train Group Factory. Don is great at showing the equipment and methods used to create all the great Tichy products.



Photo 8 The North Carolina Museum of Art has been open since 1956 and hosts many outstanding permanent and visiting collections. This tour will be hosted by Nancy DeGhetto-Murphy who is a local artist, art enthusiast and model railroad fan. Photo by Scott Frances.

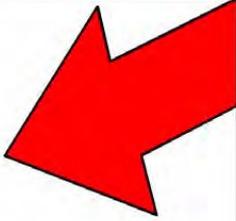
Branch Lines

From the Divisions...

As *The Local* Editor, I have the distinct pleasure of receiving a copy of all the Division newsletters, which are all very informative and creative to say the least. Here are links to those publications so you can stay up to date on what the other Divisions are doing:

| NEWSLETTERS | DIVISIONS | MOST RECENT EDITION |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| <u>Wheel Report</u> | <u>South Mountain Division</u> | <u>October 2023</u> |
| <u>The Potomac Flyer</u> | <u>Potomac Division</u> | <u>Oct-Nov 2023</u> |
| <u>Train Orders</u> | <u>New Jersey Division</u> | <u>September 2023</u> |
| <u>Sidetracks</u> | <u>Susquehanna Division</u> | <u>Sep-Oct 2023</u> |
| <u>The Dispatcher</u> | <u>Philadelphia Division</u> | <u>August 2023</u> |
| <u>The Callboard</u> | <u>Tidewater Division</u> | <u>September 2023</u> |
| <u>Crossties - Index</u> | <u>James River Division</u> | <u>Oct Blog 2023</u> |
| <u>The Brass Pounder</u> | <u>Carolina Southern Division</u> | <u>October 2023</u> |
| <u>The Herald</u> | <u>Carolina Piedmont Division</u> | <u>November 2023</u> |
| <u>The Relay</u> | <u>Chesapeake Division</u> | <u>June 2022</u> |

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And don't forget the new digital NMRA Magazine

Reminder: Here's how to access the

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1. <https://www.nmra.org/user/register>
2. Answer a few questions
3. Click on Create a New Account
4. You will receive an email on how to set your password.

Back on Track...

Gordy's Clinic

By Greg Warth, Editor



The last clinic of the 2023 Altoona Round the Curve Convention was appropriately presented by our NMRA President, Gordy Robinson, MMR. His comments about our Altoona Convention were very positive. He admired the craftsmanship of our members based on the quality of the models in the contest room.

He reviewed what National is doing to improve the hobby right now and for the future.

Communication: There are new ways to improve communication among members including the NMRA Interchange program, the new digital version of the NMRA Magazine, and new website upgrade. We should take advantage of these as much as possible.

NMRA Benefits: He reminded us of the many benefits the NMRA provides including the standards, the education, the insurance, the several publications, and the \$200 available annually (if requested) for each

Division to help promote membership. He also wants to remind members about the Partnership Program that can provide savings far in excess of the NMRA membership fee.

Leadership: He is aware of the significant difficulty in attracting members into leadership roles. The NMRA will be starting a program in June of 2024 to help foster new leadership. We need to teach the rewards of leadership and personal development, rather than considering it a job that takes you away from the hobby.

Retention: He is concerned that the NMRA membership rolls are diminishing. For every 1000 members that we gain every year, we lose about 1200. Each Division will be getting a "Success Kit" to help them attract and keep new members.

Kindness: Much of his clinic was devoted to the concept of promoting "kindness" to yourself and to each other. We need to promote the art of listening, encourage personal development in others, provide people with a sense of empowerment, and we should always assume that people show up with noble intent. No one comes in intending to cause harm or to make mistakes. We should always recognize their intent and not be too critical. Volunteer work should always be met with gratitude and personalized recognition. Leaders should be alert to conflicts, understand both sides, use communication and compromise to solve the problems right away, and don't let them fester. Exhibiting kindness in your daily activities is not a sign of weakness as some might think, but rather it is a sign of strength and security.

Fee Structure: NMRA is considering payment of membership dues as a monthly auto-renewable withdrawal from a checking account of \$6.50/ month, rather than a much larger amount payable annually which some may not be able to afford all at once. This will hopefully make it much easier for members to pay and prevent payment lapses, which is one of the main reasons that we lose members.

We are fortunate and grateful to have the leadership of an NMRA president who is focused on humility and kindness, attentive to problem-solving, and who is visible, involved, and accessible. We appreciate that and look forward to continuing to work with him in making this hobby even better.

Thank you for reading The Local and thanks to those who helped put it together. May your Holidays be filled with joy, good will, and lots of trains!

