



The Local

Official publication of the Mid-Eastern Region,

NMRA – A tax-exempt organization

SEARCH

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Holiday Issue!!

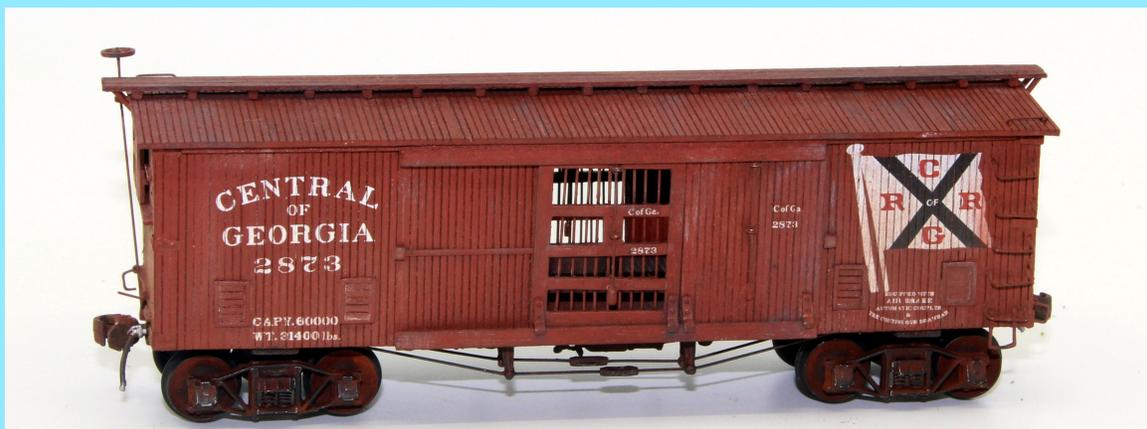
Piedmont Junction 2024

Best in Show

By Greg Warth



The Piedmont Junction 2024 Convention was a huge success. There were so many interesting things to do, it was difficult to see everything. One of the highlights of the conference was the excursion to the Aberdeen & Rockfish Railroad and then hearing the President of the railroad, Carl Hollowell, present its history at the banquet. The layout tours were really amazing and demonstrated the great talent we have here in the MER. I really enjoyed the Contest Room where there were so many excellent detailed models. The winners have already been posted on the [MER website](#). *Jerry Lauchle, MMR won the Best in Show Award with his highly detailed Central of Georgia Ventilated Boxcar. Congratulations! [See Contest Winners on p. 4].*



Best in Show: Central of Georgia Ventilated Boxcar by Jerry Lauchle, MMR

President’s Column...

Contents



Clutter Reduction

By R. Scott Unger

In a previous career involving engineering, land development and stormwater management, I worked with an EPA system called NPDES (National Pollution Discharge Elimination System), which dealt with removal of industrial waste, pollution and clutter. My coworkers and I unofficially changed the word “Elimination” to “Reduction” alluding to the impossibility of removing it all.

To model railroaders, clutter can be a form of pollution. Accelerated erosion can clog streams and rivers with sediment reducing their capacity to convey runoff. Similarly, clutter on our model railroads or workbenches can reduce our modeling efficiency and be a barrier to progress. I don’t think I am stating anything controversial when I suggest that, as a group, model railroaders are no strangers when it comes to clutter! Ours comes in many different forms - from yet-to-be-built structure or rolling stock kits to piles of magazines, framing lumber, modeling lumber, numerous types of plastic, scenery materials, wiring, circuitry, timetables, maps and tools just to name a few. Matters become even more complicated when your model railroad clutter begins to intermingle with regular household clutter!

Setting standards and reasonable expectations is a good way to begin any process or endeavor. Therefore, I have chosen to head into the winter modeling season by applying the MRCRS, i.e., the Model Railroad Clutter Reduction System.

[HOME](#)

Print Issue		
<u>Best in Show</u>	Greg Warth, Ed.	1
<u>President’s Column</u>	Pres Scott Unger	2
<u>More Contest Winners</u>	Jerry Lauchle, MMR	4
<u>AP Update</u>	Kurt Thompson, MMR	8
<u>Who’s Who</u>	Staff	9
<u>Editor’s Desk</u>	Greg Warth, Ed.	11
<u>Advertising</u>	Staff	12
eLocal		
<u>Submit an Article</u>	Greg Warth, Ed.	13
<u>More about Articles</u>	Greg Warth, Ed.	14
<u>Special Notes for Authors</u>	Greg Warth, Ed.	15
<u>Publishing Your Article in a Nat’l Magazine</u>	Brian Sheron, MMR	16
<u>Homemade Leaf Litter</u>	John Arthur	19
<u>LaBelle Trolley Kit in O</u>	Martin Brechbiel, MMR	23
<u>First Time Judge</u>	Dan Peele	31
<u>Resin Auto Kit</u>	Alan Mende	33
<u>Styrene Fascia</u>	Bob Gamble	36
<u>In Memoriam</u>	Greg Warth, Ed.	38
<u>Harvest Season - Scenery</u>	Lee Stoermer	39
<u>Branch Lines</u>	Greg Warth, Ed.	47
<u>Back on Track</u>	Greg Warth, Ed.	48



How to Build a Model Railroad

However, expectations from adopting the MRCRS are that this would result in almost certain failure. Since failure seemed a bit sinister, I have fallen back on one of my favorite, and often referred to, standards, which is to strive for the clutter in my railroad room and workshop to be “100% less bad.”

So, what are some guidelines that are part of the MRCRS that can help us declutter before the holidays to prepare for a productive winter of modeling?

Here are some of the things I have tried towards that effort: Using some lumber that was too warped to use for benchwork, I built a tool cart. I designed the cart to be 24” wide so that I could navigate my 36” aisles as the railroad construction progressed. On one side of the cart, I arranged horizontal threaded rods to hold spools of 12 gauge bus, 14 gauge sub-bus and 20 gauge feeder wires in matching color pairs. The cart also features two levels: the top for tools and materials being used on current projects and the lower portion for materials and tools not in current use. There are also hooks on the sides to hang levels, squares, cordless drills and other commonly used tools.

My workbench was temporarily located in the second room of my basement. This location worked until the railroad benchwork progressed to the second room. Rather than continue moving the workbench out of the way of the growing railroad, I decided to finalize its location into the utility room nestled between the water softener and the furnace. I hung pegboard immediately behind the workbench with shelves above it. I deliberately attempted to limit how much is stored directly on the workbench to make the workbench easier to move for servicing the various utility systems. Coincidentally, keeping the surface of the workbench relatively free of storage keeps it open for current projects. On the shelves are various compartmentalized bins organized by purpose. I have several dedicated to electronics, one for locomotive details and several for fasteners.

Selecting a specific era and geography to model can help reduce clutter by discouraging us from collecting every model that catches our eye. We can also create some order in our hobby efforts by gathering up our research and reference documents and placing them in binders.

Whatever methods you choose, taking some steps in advance of the holiday season to get organized can help you get your winter started off on the right foot.

NOW HIRING!!

Positions are now open and available for:

Executive Convention Chairman
(ECC), and

Business Manager for the MER.

[Salary Competitive with other MER
Officers]

Promotional Advancements Available on Request
Job descriptions can be found [here](#) for Business
Manager, p. 10, and ECC, p.17. Send email to
president@mer-nmra.com.

(From Cushy Jobs Recruiting, Inc.)

[Convention Update, Continued from p. 1]

The 43 clinics kept everyone busy learning about every model railroading topic you could think of and then some. I learned a ton just by listening to other model railroaders talk about their projects and asking them questions. I always find everyone to be so friendly and helpful at all these conventions. It restores my faith in humanity.

The Company Store was chock full of great items to buy at very good prices. Many of the modelers took advantage of the great deals they found.

The Co-Chairmen of the Convention, Jack Dziadul and Kevin O'Connor did a wonderful job in keeping everyone informed. Detailed updates were provided by email every morning to let us all know of any change in plans. This kept everything running very smoothly.

My gratitude and heartfelt congratulations go out to all the leaders and to the many members of the Carolina Piedmont Division who worked hard to make this a very memorable experience.

More Contest Winners

Photos by Jerry Lauchle, MMR



Caboose - Jerry Lauchle, MMR



Clyde Gerald Award - John Sokash



Diesel - Joe Walters



Freight Car - Jerry Lauchle, MMR



Favorite Model - Joe Walters



Favorite Train - Ed Smith



New Jersey Div. Car Inspector's Award - Joe Walters



Non-Revenue - Jack Dziadul



Off-Line Display - Neil Blumenkopf



Off-Line Structure - Marty Steele



On-Line Display - Jim Kalenowski



On-Line Structure - Bob Bridges



Passenger Car - Robert Gamble



President's Award - Jim Kalenowski



Steam - John Sokash



Chuck Hladik Memorial Award - Bob Bridges



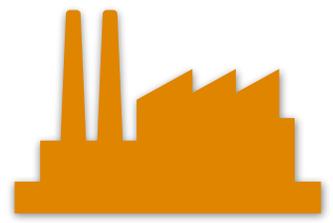
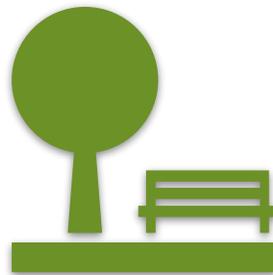
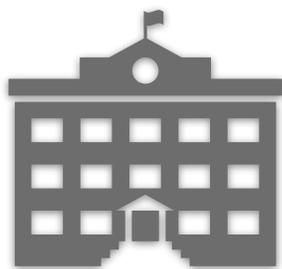
Philadelphia New Modeler Award - Jack Dziadul



Ray Bilodeau Narrow Gauge Award - Pat Flash

NEW TRACKS MODELING

"Where Mentors Help Modelers Build Better"

A model train on a bridge with various locomotives and cars.



Kurt Thompson, MMR

NMRA Achievement Program Update

By Kurt Thompson, MMR
MER AP Manager

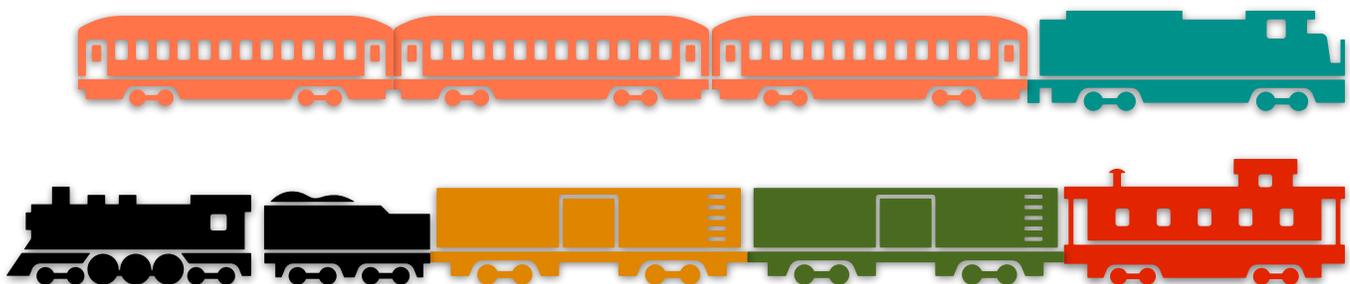
Since the last issue of *The Local*, the following members have earned the listed awards - both AP certificates and Golden Spike Awards. When you see them next, please congratulate them and if you're curious, ask them how they achieved these awards.

Division 4 - Tidewater Division

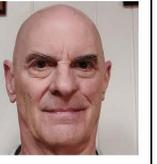
- | | |
|------------|--------------------------------------|
| Alan Balma | Model Railroad Engineer - Civil |
| Alan Balma | Model Railroad Engineer - Electrical |
| Alan Balma | Master Builder - Scenery |
-

Division 13 - Carolina Piedmont Division

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| Bob Gamble | Chief Dispatcher |
| Jim Murphy | Chief Dispatcher |
| Jim Murphy | Master Builder - Cars |
| Jack Dziadul | Master Builder - Cars |
-



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	<p>Past President: Kurt Thompson, MMR 410-507-3671 pastpresident@mer-nmra.com</p>				

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	<p>Philadelphia Division 3 Joe Walters, MMR (302)521-5884 Josephwalters@yahoo.com Division web page: www.phillynmra.org</p>		<p>Susquehanna Division 11 Alan Mende (717) 469-1047 super@susquehannanmra.org Division web page: www.susquehannanmra.org</p>		<p>Chesapeake Division 14 Kirk Bateman (410) 442-0446 super@chesdiv-nmra.org Division web page: www.chesdiv-nmra.org</p>
	<p>Tidewater Division 4 John Robey (571)217-0599 jrobey2019@gmail.com Division web page: nmra-mer-tidewater.org</p>				

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Jack Dziadul



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UPCOMING MER CONVENTIONS

- 2025 — Philadelphia Division — “Philly Express,” October 16-19, 2025, Crown Plaza Hotel, King of Prussia, PA
- 2026 — Tidewater Division — “Tidewater Triangle,” Virginia Beach, VA - TBD

MER BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING SCHEDULE

- Board of Directors Budget Meeting — January 11, 2025, 3 PM, by Zoom
- Board of Directors Business Meeting — April 2025, King of Prussia, PA

From the Editor's Desk...



Esprit de Corps

By Greg Warth

One of the things that I like the most about getting together with other model railroaders is the comradery. This is most evident at Division meetings, Regional conferences and even National conferences. You expect it at Division meetings where everybody knows everybody fairly well. But at Regional or National conferences, you may not expect it as much, but it's there, nevertheless. You can feel it in the air. You can feel comfortable about going up to almost anyone there to ask a question, and you will get a very friendly and detailed answer, including drawings and pictures, where to find a book or a video on the subject, who else that's here at the convention that is an expert on it, his or her phone number and email address and probably where that person might be at the moment. The person you asked might even escort you to the place where you can find the information you need! If you see that person later in the Convention, they will likely follow up on it and ask if you found out what you needed to know. That's just how model railroaders are.

There are many who say this country is severely divided right now, that families and good friends are being torn apart due to different beliefs about religion or politics. I don't see that happening much with model railroaders. Maybe because we generally stay away from those subjects when we are talking with each other. Perhaps it's because we

have learned patience over the years during which we have been painting tiny figures and modeling structures. Maybe it's because most of us are humble, that we recognize that there is more than one way to accomplish something, and that we don't always know the right answers to every question. Or is it because we have all made mistakes, we know that everyone makes mistakes, we easily admit our mistakes, and no one is perfect? We may disagree, but most of us don't get emotional or angry about it.

I wish we could instill some of our comradery into the rest of the world. As I watch the news every day, I am dismayed by the free flow of verbal abuse and character assassination expressed by those who simply don't agree with each other. Unfortunately, I think we are becoming numb to it. Of course, the news media is distorted somewhat by the fact that the negative things that are said are the reportable news items, while the good things aren't generally considered to be newsworthy.

I am so glad our hobby is mostly devoid of that negativity. It provides a safe haven for some of us to get away from it all. It helps to keep us sane and provides some balance and peace in our lives.

I don't think there is anything to get angry about in this issue of *The Local*. We have lots of great articles. First, the Contest Winners showcase the great modeling talent we have here. Martin Brechbiel, MMR demonstrates how to build a wooden LaBelle Trolley Kit in the Part One of a three-part series. John Arthur shows us the absolute best way to make a ground cover of autumn leaves for a forest. Have you ever used styrene to create fascia? Bob Gamble is now the

local expert on that. Brian Sheron, MMR tells about his experience in submitting an article to be published in *Model Railroader*. Lee Stoermer goes back to nature in finding better scenery for his pike. Alan Mende models a nostalgic 1938 Plymouth starting with a resin automobile kit. And Dan Peele talks about his first experience as a judge (aka, evaluator) in the Contest Room.

Also, please note that the MER website has posted the annual post-convention clinics listing update which will be a tremendous reference for anyone planning Division Clinics or Conferences.

So, you’ve got a lot of fun reading to do today. Grab yourself a cup of hot chocolate, eggnog, or pumpkin-spiced coffee and relax by the fireplace while you enjoy learning more about your favorite hobby! Oh, and send a copy to your son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter, niece or nephew. You never know what might happen.

Once again, I would like to thank our outstanding editorial staff for all their hard work, not only for this issue but for all they have done over the last several years:

Jack Dziadul

Alex Belida, MMR

Martin Brechbiel, MMR

And special thanks to all our authors. Without them, we would have nothing to show you.

Happy railroading,



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 rates per year are shown on the right.

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.

Advertising Rates (per year)	
Divisions & Clubs	Free
Clinics & Education	Free
Convention Ads	Free
Full Page - Color	\$100.00
1/2 Page - Color	\$60.00
1/4 Page - Color	\$35.00
Business Card	\$10.00
Text Only	\$7.00

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 our 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.

We love our authors and we love our jobs in creating *The Local* for you to enjoy. We receive many articles with great content and we are always anxious to publish them. However, so many articles that we receive are not in a good format and require many hours of work to get them ready for publication. When you are preparing your article to send to the Editor, please follow the instructions presented here. It won't require any more work for you in writing the article, but it will save us many hours of proofreading and publishing time. Depending on the size of the article, it may take as many as 10-12 hours to actually get it in the newsletter. We can save at least half that time if it comes to us prepared according to the instructions.

How to Submit an Article for The Local (Please Follow These Steps Carefully!)

1. **Please read** the article written by Martin Brechbiel, MMR on "[Preparing Your Manuscript for Publication in The Local](#)."
2. Compose and submit your text in Word format (.doc or docx).
3. Use Times New Roman font in 12 pt size.
4. The title should be **centered** and in **bold**.
5. Directly under the title should be "By (your name)" - centered, not bold. If you are an MMR, put it there.
6. If the photos are yours, enter in parentheses (Photos by the author) right after your name.
7. Enter your text with no paragraph indents. Justify the text so it is even on both sides.
8. In your text, refer to your photos this way: (**Photo 1**) - in parentheses, bold and blue.
9. Between paragraphs in your text, write "**Insert Photo 1 here**" where you want the photo to appear. DO NOT put your photos there. Otherwise, we just have to take them out.
10. Include the number of the Photo in the file name of the Photo so we know which one goes with which number.
11. Photos must be clear and sharp or they cannot be accepted. JPG, GIF, TIFF and PNG formats are acceptable.
12. Photo captions should be listed at the end of your article, or in a separate Word file, and numbered with the same number as the photo.
13. Send your text and your photos separately by email to [The Local Editor](#). They can all be sent in the same email as long as the total file size is less than 25 MB. If the size is larger than that, you will have to split them into two or three emails.

What Happens to Your Article after You Send It In?

First, the substance and context of the article has to be reviewed. Is it original? Has it been used before, or published elsewhere? Was it borrowed from someone else's work? Is it an appropriate topic for our newsletter? We've had to reject a few articles because they were more about rail fanning than they were about model railroading.

Then the text is carefully reviewed line by line by four different sets of eyes to check for typos, grammatical errors, wording or phrasing problems that have to be rewritten to be more understandable. Punctuation has to be corrected. If there are photos in the text, they have to be removed. Photos frequently require editing to make them look brighter and more appealing. File names of the photos have to be changed to include the number of the photo.

After the proofreading is finished, the text has to be entered into the publishing program, paragraph by paragraph, sometimes line by line. The text often has to be resized to make it fit properly without looking inconsistent. When we come to a point where a photo has to be inserted, it has to be resized so that it fits in with the text and in the right order with the proper caption. If a photo is missed, the whole article may have to be redone in order to get the photo in the right place.

It's just like putting a model together in many ways. You start with the raw materials or the parts that come in a kit. The materials and instructions for the kit are what the author provides. In this case, the various parts include the words that have to be put together properly. Then the paragraphs and the photos may have to be rearranged. Then you have to fit the pieces into the right places, so that they make sense and look appealing. There are many details that have to be added or corrected. Eventually, we glue them all together by converting them from Word into a pdf file.

What Kinds of Articles Do We Like to See?

1. Anything about modeling, whether it be about just putting a kit together, kit bashing, scratchbuilding, or just adding details or weathering to a model.
2. Any type of "How to..." article, as long as it is about model railroading.
3. New tips or techniques, or even old ones used in a new way.
4. A tour of your layout or that of a friend, including its name, location, theme, era, scale, size, best features and biggest challenges.
5. Summary of a model railroad conference you visited.
6. Tell us about your workbench, or any special tools you use.
7. Tell us how you fixed a problem you encountered with your model or layout.
8. If you received an AP or MMR Certification, explain how you did it, what were the challenges. What would you recommend to others working on the same project.
9. New electrical techniques that you performed, new automations, how you set up signals, how you installed sound or flashing signs, billboards, or other details.
10. Scenery techniques, mountains, water, river rapids, trees, forests, ground cover.
11. Building a bridge or trestle.
12. Photographing your layout or model.
13. How to recruit more people into the hobby.
14. Your summary of a clinic you attended.
15. How we can help each other.

Special Notes for Authors:



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 or Regional 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 along with a Record and Validation Form to your Division AP Manager to receive your Author AP Certificate.



Circus Model at the Piedmont Junction Convention 2024, created by CPD member, Rick Allen. (Photo by Greg Warth).

Some Observations on Publishing a Layout Article in a National Magazine

By Brian W. Sheron, MMR



I recently had an article about my Long Island Railroad train layout published in the August 2024 issue of *Model Railroader* (MR) magazine. This is the story of the journey from first being told that MR was interested in doing an article on my layout to when it was actually published.

The article began in 2018, when the Potomac Division hosted the MER fall convention. Lou Sassi, whom many of you probably know or have heard of, is an Assistant Editor at MR, as well as an outstanding author, model photographer, modeler [*and a member of the Carolina Piedmont Division of MER (Mid-Eastern Region) - Ed.*]

Lou was the convention banquet speaker and also presented several clinics. However, he did find time to visit some layouts, including mine. After he got the “cooks tour” around the layout, he asked if I was interested in preparing an article for MR. I said that I was, so he took some photos and said he would have to send them back to MR headquarters to get the OK from management.

About a month later Lou contacted me and told me that his management was interested in an article. He said he would be sending me some materials to fill out. One item was a questionnaire about the layout ([Figure 1](#))*. Another was called “Layout at a Glance” ([Figure 2](#))*. A third document ([Figure 3](#))* was called “What Do I Need?” [*Click on each of these links to show the referenced documents - Ed.*] Lou also asked if I wanted my article published in “Great Model Railroads” or in an issue of MR. I said that my preference was publication in MR.

To publish an article about a layout, you can write it, take your own photos, and submit it to the model railroad magazine of your choice. In my case, Lou said that he would take the photos of my layout himself. I could write the article and forward it to Lou; or Lou said that he could write it based on the information that I had provided in my response to the questionnaires. The MR Editors will likely edit your article if you write it, so the better you are at writing, the less likely the editors will be to significantly edit it.

The main item needed is a track plan of your layout. While it does not have to be exactly to scale, it needs to be close. This can be the most time consuming part of the article preparation process. First, you will need to go to an artist supply store and get drawing paper that is at least 18” x 24.” If you have a large layout with a lot of trackage, I suggest you consider 24” x 30” paper. As you can see from the “What Do I Need” list, you need three copies of just the track plan, three copies of the track plan with layout structures shown, and finally, three copies of the track plan with both structures and an index to the structures. You do not need to label every structure, but you should label the major structures on the layout.

Because drawing a track plan can be very time-consuming and tedious, once you have a clean version of the track plan you should take it to a copy shop and make at least six or seven copies.

Three can be used for the submittal of the three copies of the track plan, and one can be a spare (in addition to the original). One of the others can be used to draw the structures on (with a spare or two if you make a mistake). Once you have a clean copy with the structures shown, take this to the copy shop and make at least five copies. Three can be used for submission, and one can be used to label the main structures on the track plan. Finally, you need to make four or five copies of this last plan, three for submittal and an extra one or two. Note that all of these will be redrawn by MR's commercial artists.

If Lou is taking the photos of the layout, everything needs to be finished by the time he comes to your home to do the photo shoot.

In my case, Lou originally planned on coming to do a photo shoot in August 2019. He usually schedules several photoshoots while he is on the road. However, he had a change of plans and said that he wouldn't be at my house to do the photo shoot until August 2020. Of course, by August of 2020, the COVID pandemic was in full swing, so he postponed the shoot until 2021. But in August 2021, the pandemic was still highly active, so the photo shoot was again rescheduled to August 2022.

Finally in August 2022, the stars aligned, and Lou and his wife, Cheryl, came to my house for the photo shoot, which took 1-1/2 days.

It is important that your layout look its best and be in good running condition. For example, make sure that there is no dust or bits of ballast on roads, buildings, etc. Handrails on diesels are fragile and often break off. Make sure your engines have all the handrails, horns, etc. Not only did Lou shoot still photos of my layout, but he also took a video of some of my trains running on the track.

Once the photo shoot was finished, Lou and Cheryl headed north to their next photo shoot. In hand were not only the photos that he took, but the nine copies of the various versions of the track plan.

Lou explained that MR receives many unsolicited layout articles and has a schedule for which ones will run in which issue of the magazine. In this case, Lou did not know when MR would run the article, but said that if I didn't hear from MR within a year to call him.

A year went by without hearing from MR, so in late September 2023 I contacted Lou. He checked with MR and was told that they planned to run the article in the spring of 2024. However, by spring I had not heard from MR, so I contacted Lou again. He said MR was planning to run the article in *Great Model Railroads*. I reminded him that my preference was to run it in an issue of MR. He passed this on to the editors, and the article was rescheduled to be published in the August 2024 issue of MR.

It should be noted that once you sign the agreement with MR and receive payment for the article (in my case \$400) MR then owns your article and all the photos of your layout (the ones that Lou took).

Conclusion

It took nearly six years from the time Lou Sassi first asked if I would be interested in MR running an article on my layout to when the article was actually published. The COVID pandemic accounted for two of those years. Nevertheless, preparing a layout article takes a fair amount of work and time, and then getting it scheduled to be published also takes time. However, in the end, I think it was worth it! For one thing, it is an honor to see your layout featured in a national model railroad magazine. Additionally, it requires you to take the time to “clean up the layout,” like removing dust from hard-to-reach places, fixing any scenery or rolling stock that is broken or moved out of place, etc. And finally, it can be a fun challenge to sit down and write an article describing your layout.

**Supplemental:*

Figure 1: <https://mer-nmra.com/documents/elocal/Figure-1-MR-Layout-story-questionnaire.pdf>

Figure 2: <https://mer-nmra.com/documents/elocal/Figure-2-MR-Layout-at-a-glance.pdf>

Figure 3: <https://mer-nmra.com/documents/elocal/WHAT-DO-I-NEED-Figure-3.pdf>



Dieter Steinhoff's G scale layout in Virginia Beach, night scene. Photo by Greg Warth.

Homemade Leaf Litter

By John Arthur (All Photos by the Author)



At the time of this writing, there is just one more day of Summer 2023 left, and that means fall is just around the corner. For any of us living in the eastern US, the rakes and leaf blowers will dominate many a weekend over the next several months. But don't despair, fellow modeler! If you also model the eastern US, you can use some of those leaves on your model railroad.

All too often we model railroaders attempt to accomplish a wooded scene by nothing more than planting some model trees into an area that has some grass turf sprinkled over it. For a single tree, or even a small stand in the middle of a field, that can work. However, if you take a walk through the woods, you will see that the ground cover is not all green. The green that is there is not low-lying grass, but vertical underbrush. Other than the underbrush, the forest floor, even in the summer, is littered with brown, fallen leaves – not grass. Where the sun hits this leaf litter, it takes on a faded, gray/tan color ([Photo 1](#)).



Photo 1 – An Eastern US wooded area in the summer. Note all the leaf litter on the ground, and that where the sun hits this leaf litter, it takes on a faded, gray/tan color.

At the recent NMRA division meet at Rail Tales, I was having a conversation with another modeler who had said that he had trouble grinding real leaves fine enough in his blender, and this got me thinking about an experience my son and I had trying to accomplish the very same last fall. We did come up with a solution that I thought worked well enough to warrant sharing here. The secret is ... water! More on that when we get to it.

We started by removing the heavier stems from the center of a bunch of oak leaves, and throwing the (mostly) destemmed halves into the blender. We found that mixing in some beech leaves lightened the overall color and gave some variety, so we removed the bottom woodier bits of the beech leaves and threw those in as well. All told, with two of us de-stemming (just the thicker bits) it took about 15 minutes to fill the blender with leaf parts (**Photo 2**).



Photo 2 – For a leafier final material, remove more of the stems. If you desire more “sticks” in your mixture, leave some of the stems in the leaves before grinding.

Here comes the secret part – water! We attempted to grind up leaves dry, and they mostly just got knocked around. We used a stick to push them back down into the blade, and still, very little grinding was happening. So, after some thinking, we added a cup or two of water, and voila! Once the leaves get worked down to the spinning blade, it begins to make a leafy paste; and once all the bigger pieces have begun to pulverize, we were able to stop poking the pile down with a stick and just wait. We let the blender run for approximately 5 minutes (**Photo 3**).



Photo 3 – With the secret sauce (water) added, the leaves ground right down. For HO Scale, 5 minutes worked well, but if you want a finer material, go longer, and vice versa.

Once satisfied that we had a fine enough material, we poured the material through a strainer to remove most of the water. We made a tray out of aluminum foil and emptied the solids from the strainer onto it. Once we had worked through the whole batch, we spread the material out over the tray and poured off what water remained that the strainer had left in the leaves, and then baked it in the oven at 175 degrees for a few hours to fully dry out. We stirred it around once or twice during this process to aid in the drying (Photos 4&5).



Photo 4 – I recommend a fine mesh strainer that you will not attempt to put back in the Kitchen.



Photo 5 – Keeping anything that should remain in the kitchen out of this process, fashion a little tray out of foil for drying.

To use some of the material (we still have an entire turf container full!), we sprinkled it over what was to become a wooded area of the layout to set the base texture and color color, and fixed it in place with isopropyl alcohol and diluted Mod Podge. Once dry, we mimic the tan highlights where the sun catches the forest floor in nature by airbrushing very dilute Tamiya Buff from the side, over the top. By very dilute, I mean the airbrush cup was 90% isopropyl alcohol, and 10% paint. This really is just for a highlight – after going through the trouble of procuring natural material, we want that to be the main color tone here. Once that was done, we planted some Super Trees and various underbrush materials (**Photo 6**).



Photo 6 – the final product can be seen beyond the grass, under the trees along the right of way on my HO Scale Manchester & Deepwater Railroad.

I hope you'll consider giving this a try – maybe the motivation will come to you when you have a rake or a leaf blower in your hand. Happy Fall!

I produced a YouTube video that shows the process discussed in this article. Here's the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLETBITutM4> [Video length: 3:33 min.]

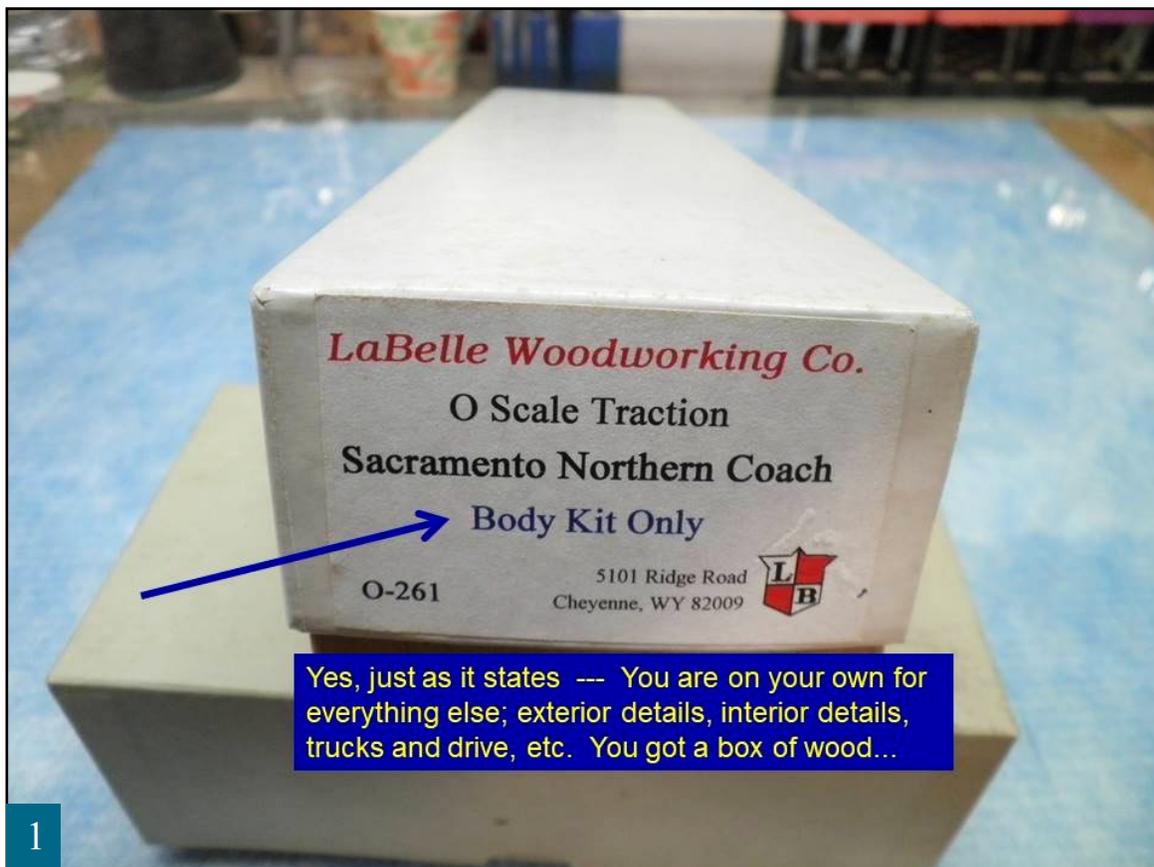
Re-Visiting Building a LaBelle Trolley Kit – Part 1

By Martin Brechbiel, MMR (Photos by the author)

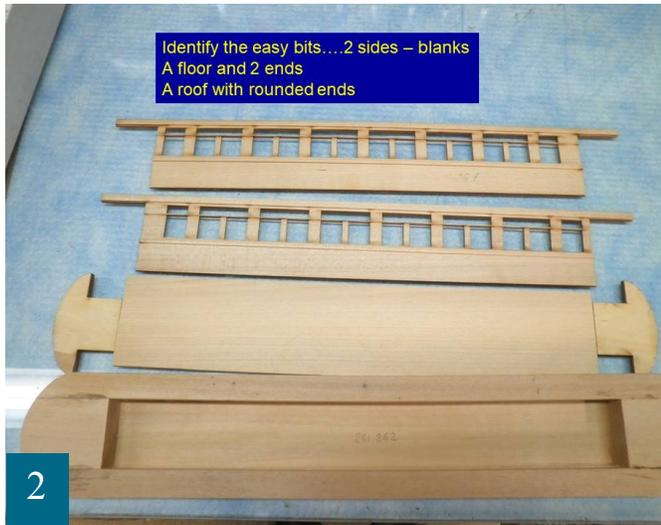


While it seems like nearly 20 years ago, I recall spending a good bit of time and effort building a pair of LaBelle trolley kits at a time when I was just beginning to scratch the surface of my interest in traction models.

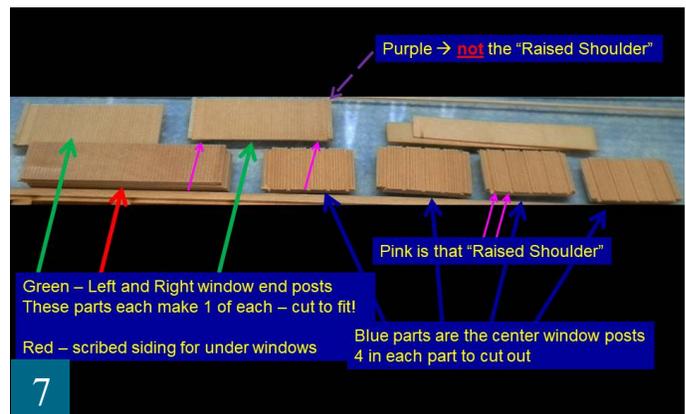
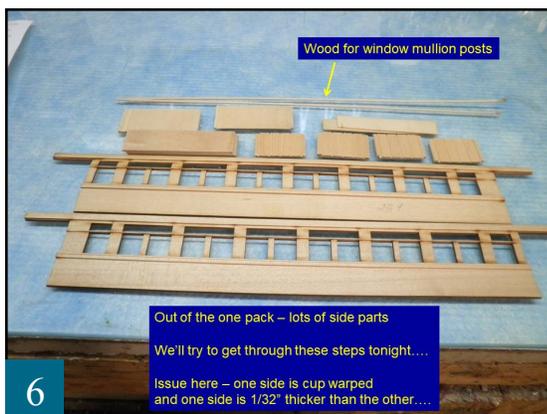
These were a Lake Shore Electric coach and a matching combine which, as it turns out, were just about the only passenger service cars on my traction roster. These were very quickly turned to freight motors, freight trailers, and MoW equipment. I know I have a small mountain of passenger trolley kits (more from LaBelle, in fact) and myriad related traction projects leering down at me in my shop, but none of those are the subject of this story. A box of kits very generously had been shipped to me some time ago. Upon arrival and unpacking I found among them two LaBelle trolley kits: a Sacramento coach and a combine. Suffering from a severe momentary lapse of reason, I opened up the kit for the coach thinking that since (Photo 1) I've built these sorts of kits before, what could possibly go wrong?



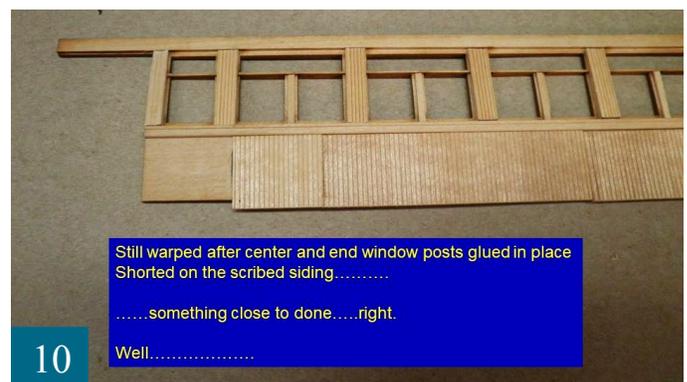
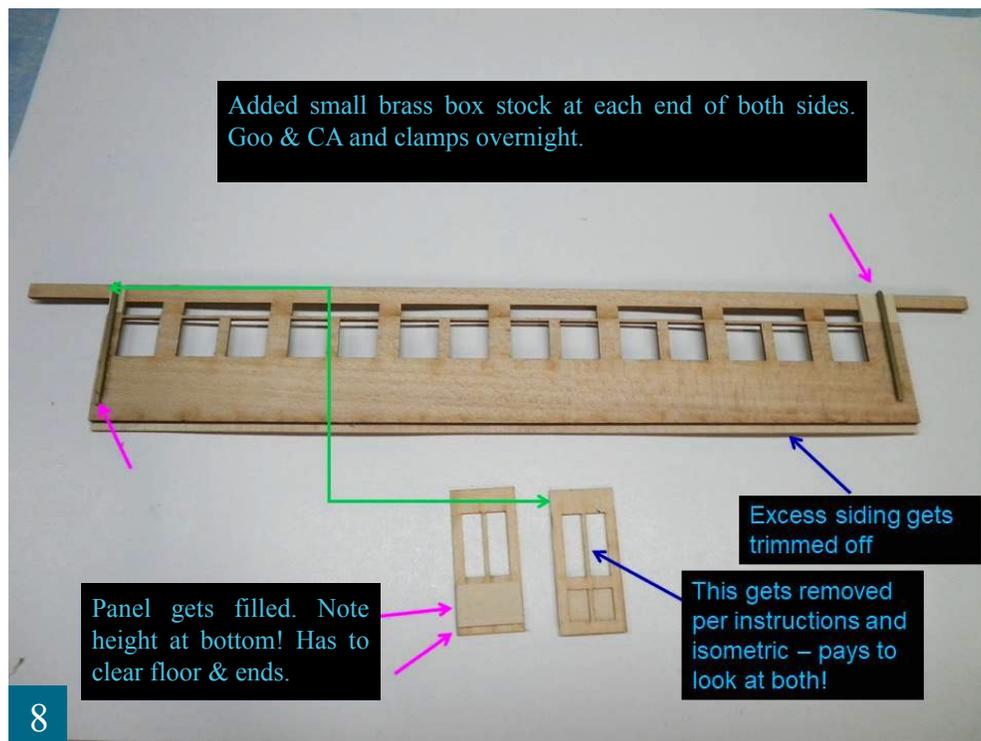
1



The instructions call to assemble the sides first. The two bases get scribed siding applied at bottom and center, There are milled column sections between the windows and at the ends, and more stripwood mullions between each window. These center milled column sections match the profile of the milled sides and have to be cut apart. You have to match these parts up against the illustrations in the instructions to identify the parts and understand where they go on the sides. Getting those parts together and sorted out, and then prepping them to fit revealed an immediate problem (Photos 6, 7).



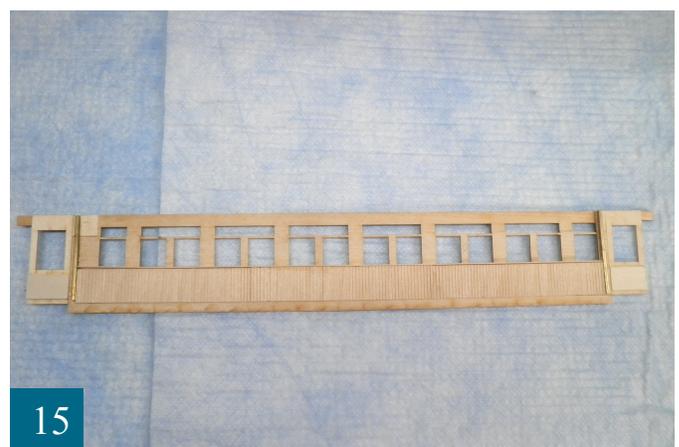
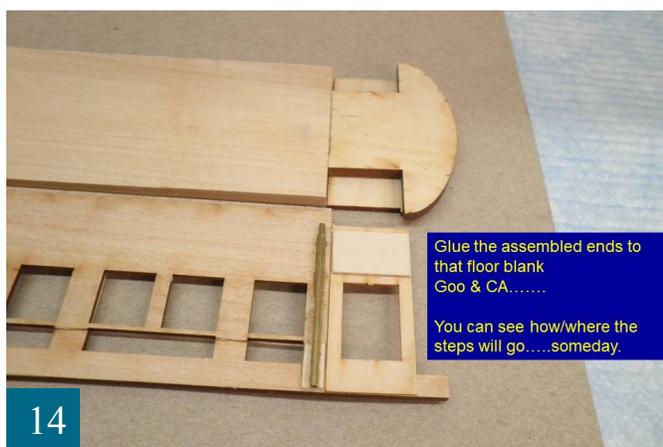
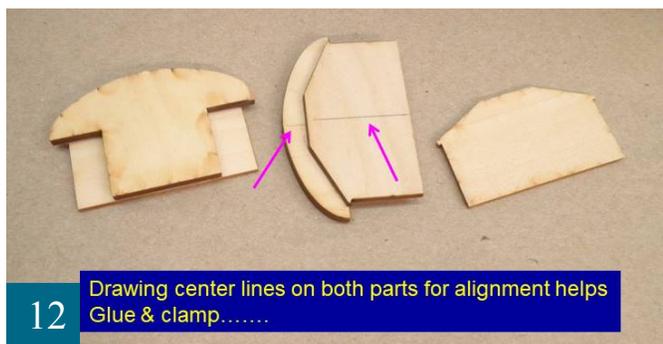
One of the sides was 1/32" thicker than the other. Knowing how these sides get assembled into the body translated into some concerns as to whether I would have to narrow the floor and roof. Doing that to the floor is pretty easy, but narrowing the roof is next to impossible without invoking thaumaturgical skills that I no longer possess. Given that condition, I chose to ignore the 1/32", but wait, there's more. The thinner side was cup warped. The solution here was to add some small brass stock inside the sides back from where the doors would get installed (**Photo 8**). So, we're off and running now. Everything rolled right long after that intervention, gluing (Titebond) all the parts in place as directed. And then I ran out of the scribed siding (**Photos 9, 10**). Scrambling about through my stock of 1/32" thick scribed siding and left over scraps got me enough to fill the gap and continue



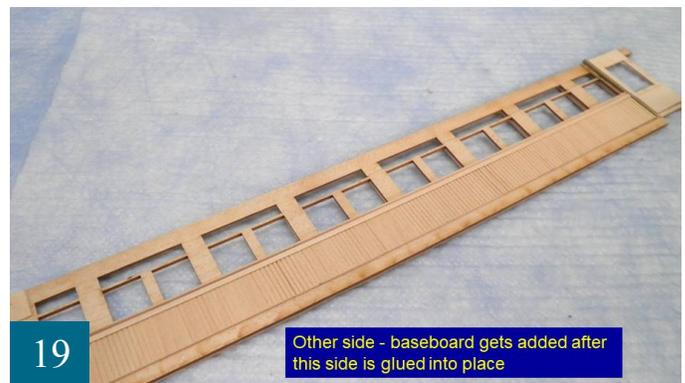
The doors got modified as per the instruction. Removing the upper divider created a larger window. Some flat stock got added at the bottom to create a closed panel, but that has to be done with enough clearance to account for the floor stock. The excess scribed siding that overhangs the side also got trimmed off (**Photo 11**).



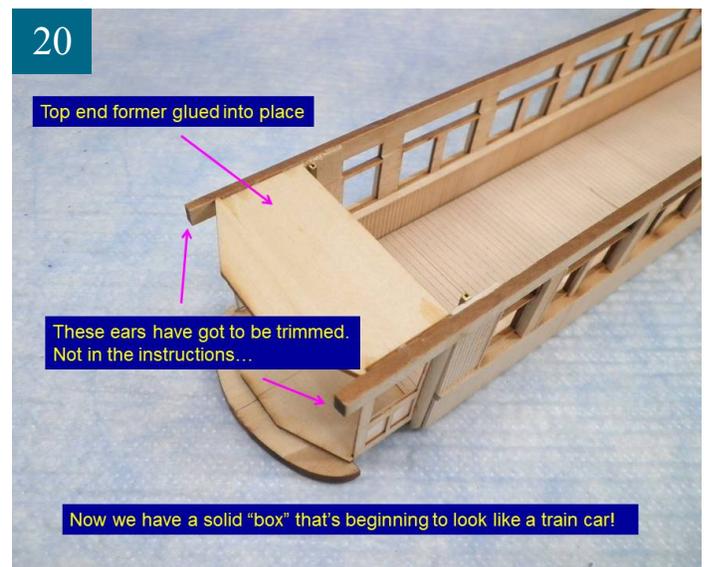
Next up was assembling (laminating) the end blocks to accommodate the space for the doors and steps (**Photo 12**). Those end blocks got glued to the stock basswood floor. Being an end grain joint, I used Goo combined with CA to make a good solid unit from end to end (**Photo 13**). You can see how this recessed area lines up with the doors at the ends of both sides (**Photo 14**). This gives one a solid base to build up the car body and time to muck about with some interior additions. I added a chair rail (HO 1” x 8” on edge) and scribed siding below the interior window line. One just has to remember to



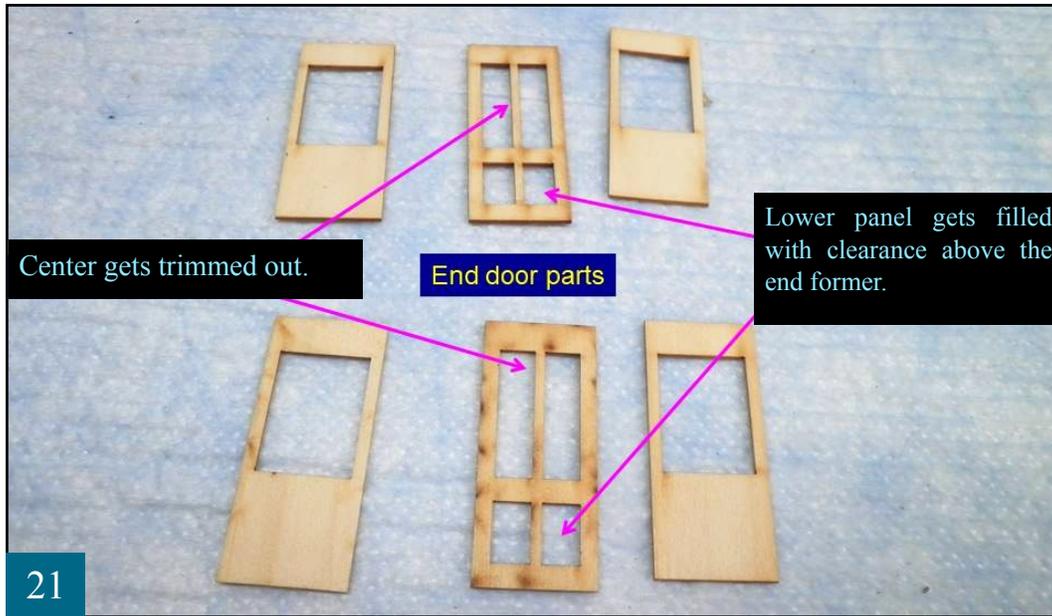
Having foreshadowed the next step, I glued one of the sides to the floor (**Photos 16, 17**)! Before adding the opposing side, I glued in 1/32" thick 3/32" scribed siding for flooring. Baseboard and under rail trim (HO 1" x 6") was added after floor was completed (**Photo 18**). The gap at the near edge is to give space for other side to be glued into place accounting for the interior scribed siding. The other side was similarly trimmed out except for the baseboard section which was added after this side was glued to the floor (**Photo 19**).



Once that interior detail and sides were completed, the top end former was glued into place (**Photo 20**). Adding this part really firms up the car body. Those “ears” from the sides protruding out over the ends have got to be trimmed. Oddly, that step was not in the instructions. This goes to remind one that looking at the drawings in the instructions of the final built car is important. The instructions can also be downloaded from the LaBelle website. Having extra copies to slice & dice, or spill paint, glue, or coffee on is handy.



Building the ends has always been my challenge for trolleys, and this kit did not disappoint. Then again, perhaps it was very disappointing depending on one’s perspective. The isometric drawings in the instructions combined with the one of the entire trolley are very useful in building up the ends. Studying these more than a wee bit prior to diving in to the deep end of the pool is advised. The ends are built up from three sections that require adding backing panels, which then are glued into place to the end formers (Photos 21, 22). The added panel has to be placed with adequate relief to set the center section back against the former. There’s no suggestion of it but beveling the edges a bit with a



21

The next step calls for using the piece of stripwood with one end colored blue above the door (center of each end) and then over the two window sections of the ends. Nope. Not present and accounted for, but there is a piece of stripwood with both ends colored blue that seems to be correct. We’ll adapt and overcome going forward in the next installment of this story.

[Look for Part 2 of this 3-part series in the next issue of The Local.-Ed.]



22



HO Covered Hopper from the Cincinnati Division

Hello once again to NMRA, MER, Division Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, Directors, News-Letter Editors, Web Masters, Facebook Managers and members in-general.

I last reached out to you in the Fall of 2022.

I am getting in touch with you once again with a request to publicize and promote Cincinnati Division 7's limited-edition, HO scale, N&W HC-46 ACF 2-Bay Covered Hopper cars that we have for sale. This car is unique in that it is a repaint scheme with patched-out data.

The following link provides details about it as well as pricing, shipping and ordering information.

<https://division7mid-centralregionnmra.godaddysites.com/car-projects>

It would be greatly appreciated if you would make your membership aware of this limited-edition freight car by publicizing it in your Region's and/or Division's web page, newsletter or email blast.

We thank you in advance for your support!

Paul Maciulewicz

NMRA; MCR; Cincinnati Division 7

UPCOMING CONVENTIONS



2025 NMRA National Convention

Station No.VI - hosted by the North Central Region of the NMRA



July 14-19, 2025

2026 NMRA National Convention

July 27 to August 2, 2026



NATIONAL CONVENTION



www.facebook.com/NMRATakesChatt

nmra2026.org

Lessons Learned from a First Time NMRA Event Judge

By Dan Peele

Allow me to start by saying this past MER convention was my first NMRA event of any magnitude. WOW! What an eye-opening weekend it was. Considering that I had grown up with the Seaboard Air Line through various mergers ending with CSX via family ties as my father, his eldest brother, and an uncle on my mother's side were all working for the railroad, I thought I had a rather good idea about railroading. Maybe I do, but what I know about modeling railroads was found to be limited. The knowledge of both 1-to-1 scale and modeling members that I had the pleasure of seeing, meeting, and talking with was borderline overwhelming. What a GREAT weekend!



Besides all the friendly people I met, quite possibly the highlight was the contest room on Saturday. The knowledge of prototype railroads and skill to translate that knowledge into a model was amazing. I was provided with the NMRA's Achievement Program Judging* Guidelines and a few other documents to review in preparation for my experience. This guideline clearly states, "The key questions to be answered in judging are: 1. What did the modeler try to do? 2. How well did the modeler do it?" I also liked the comment in the first paragraph of the guidelines, "Judging is basically positive in that points are awarded for work that has been done, rather than for subtracting for shortcomings compared to a theoretical perfect model." This comment came to heart even more as I evaluated the various models with my two more experienced judges. Verbally, the judges were instructed on recusing themselves for certain things, i.e. do not judge anything in the category where you have a model to be judged. I took this perhaps a bit far as I minimized my comments for models when I knew the modeler. After all, the guidelines state, "Judge the model, not the modeler." I may not have that luxury in the future.

Perhaps the largest disparity between models was the information on the entry forms. Some had little, if any, explanation for the model while others resembled a book. Fortunately, even the "books" were divided into sections so that only the section being evaluated may be read. I must admit, it would have been nice to read all the documentation. However, with five teams, one for each category of judging, and the number of models, evaluation time was limited. One place where I disagree with the guidelines is the statement that contest judges are not required to review the supporting documentation. The Conformity category comes to mind, if the builder has supporting prototype pictures for his model and his modeling matches the photo(s), does this not show proof of conformity? If it is not looked at, how can you possibly say it does or does not conform to the prototype? It also states that, without that photo, documentation points are recommended to be limited to 15.

Only the lead judge was allowed to handle the model. I found it surprising how dirty his white gloves became by the end of the day, although I should have expected it due to the various weathering

techniques. I also found this limited handling complicated the evaluation. From just a casual observation at the convention, the majority of the attendees could easily be classified as “Senior Citizens”, myself included. Speaking upon personal knowledge, my eyes are not what they once were. I will confess, I had a good lead judge and he took the time to move the model into any position or location for his two assistants to see any detail we desired. He also took the time to point out certain details. This helped increase my knowledge immensely.

Judge’s comments are required for every model and every category. Per the guidelines, “These comments might indicate where and why points were deducted, and how to improve the model.” Comments need to be constructive. Granted, the modeler may have left off a part that would make the prototype non-functional; however, wording for that comment should not be negative. For example, comments like “no brake lines”, or “roof line does not line up,” could be replaced by a more positive comment such as, “adding brake lines would increase complexity and conformity,” or “construction quality may be enhanced by aligning the roof lines.”

In summary, I had a wonderful experience judging in the contest room. If you have not done it in the past, I would recommend it. I look forward to judging again and having my models judged. I will be bringing additional lighting and possibly a magnifier. Motel conference rooms were not designed to have the best lighting. It may be adequate for meetings, but I found it very lacking for being bright enough to see some of the details clearly.

One final note is that not every category of model was represented in the contest room. Several only had one entry. Numerous models achieved merit awards. Some first place category winners did, but some did not reach this level. Nevertheless, they still took first place in their category.

**Note: A recent decision by the NMRA will require the wording about “judging” to be updated. Once this has officially made it into the policy manuals, a “judge” will thereafter be called an “evaluator.” “Judging” will be changed to “evaluating.” The “process of judging” will be called an “evaluation.”*
-Ed.



November

Building Your First Resin Automobile Kit

By Alan Mende

Many years ago on a Sunday when I stopped off at the corner store to buy the paper, I met a former neighbor of ours who asked if I still fooled around with old cars. I told him, yes, and that I was currently working on a 1926 Model T Ford one-ton truck. He then asked me if I was interested in an old car for twenty-five dollars. Only after I said yes did I ask him what kind of a car it was to be told it was a 1938 Plymouth four door sedan. My brother (who went in halves with me at \$12.50 each) and I towed it home with my girlfriend's (now wife of 50 years) 1970



We got it running, though we never got around to fixing the brakes, and sold it to a local fellow for \$200. Our big mistake was not buying it back from him after he painted it in its original tan color and offered it to us for \$190. Even now, I sometimes kick myself for not taking him up on his offer, though by then we had bought a 1937 Packard Model 115-C touring sedan.

When I saw a Sylvan Scale Models 1938 Plymouth four door sedan kit

Photo 1: 1938 Plymouth

(No. V-094), I had to buy it, not just for the sake of nostalgia, but also because I model 1953 in central New Jersey. Photos I have of the town that I model, Dunellen, New Jersey, from that time period show cars from the late 1930s still being used either as regular transportation or as “station cars” for commuters (**Photo 2**). If you’ve never built a resin automobile kit, follow along; I’ll tell you what I did.



Photo 2: Dunellen, NJ

LET'S GET STARTED

Resin kits differ from styrene kits in that they must be assembled using cyanoacrylate adhesive (CA). They also must be thoroughly washed for paint to stick to them. As a first order of business, carefully remove the flash from all the pieces. Be careful that you don't damage any of the fine details like door posts and vent windows. Mostly, I use a No. 11 blade in a hobby knife, but I also use a variety of needle files. For the rubber tires, I use an Emory board to remove the parting line along with a sprue cutter to remove the remnants of the sprue (**Photo 3**).

WASHING AND PAINTING

Sylvan recommends using their Resin-Prep for cleaning all the parts with a soft brush and then rinsing the parts with warm water. After the parts were dry, I painted the underside of the frame black. Because our Plymouth was poorly painted a dark green over its original tan color, I painted the body with Floquil Foundation. Floquil Foundation (which is no longer available) dries flat, so I sprayed the body with Tru-Color satin. The seats I painted gray with grimy black for the floors. I painted the wheels the same color as the body (**Photo 4**).

All the parts of the car that would have been chrome plated, I painted silver with a very fine brush (**Photo 5**). I could have replaced the molded headlights with MV lenses, but I didn't have any the correct size.



Photo 3: Resin Kit



Photo 4: Semi-finished Model



Photo 5: Chrome painted with silver color

FINISHING UP

Sylvan includes a driver and some clear styrene for windows. Since Plymouths had flat glass all around, I carefully measured the window openings and cut the styrene to fit, securing it in place with canopy glue. For the rear quarter windows and the rear windows, I used G-S Hypo cement in much the same way you can use Microscale's Micro Krystal Klear. You just get a glob of the cement on a toothpick and spread it around the window opening until it fills the opening.

COMPLETED MODEL (Photos 6 and 7)



Photo 6: Finished Model



Photo 7

Bill of Materials

Floquil

Foundation

G-S Supplies Inc.

G-S Hypo cement

Sylvan Scale Models

V-094 1938 Plymouth 4-Door Sedan KIT

Resin-Prep

Testors

Silver paint

Tru-Color Paint

TCP-009

Grimy black



*Guide to Promoting National Model Railroad Month
(Download PDF)*

Styrene Fascia

By Bob Gamble

At the recent MER convention, I had a chat with Martin Brechbiel, MMR, who suggested I submit a short piece for *The Local*. I was telling Martin how I used 1/8" styrene for the fascia of my layout upper tier.

My layout is approaching 30 years of age but like most layouts there are parts much younger than that. A couple of years ago, I reworked the central peninsula, separating it into two tiers (**Photo 1**).

The upper tier, being new, needed a fascia. Since this upper deck is somewhat key-hole shaped, I needed a material that could follow these tight curves. I had used 1/4" Masonite on my lower tier and was all too familiar with its limitations. I had bent Masonite around curves on the lower deck by intermittently soaking and bending it until the desired shape was reached. This was tedious and wasteful with the inevitable breakage.



Photo 1

Another issue with Masonite became apparent when I applied adhesive Velcro strips to the lower inside lip of my panels to hold drapes. It was not long before these peeled off with a nice fuzzy layer of Masonite fibers covering the adhesive. I had to seal the Masonite with polyurethane and glue the

strips on. Since I wanted to apply LED strip lighting on the inside lip of the upper tier fascia, I needed something to which it would stick reliably.

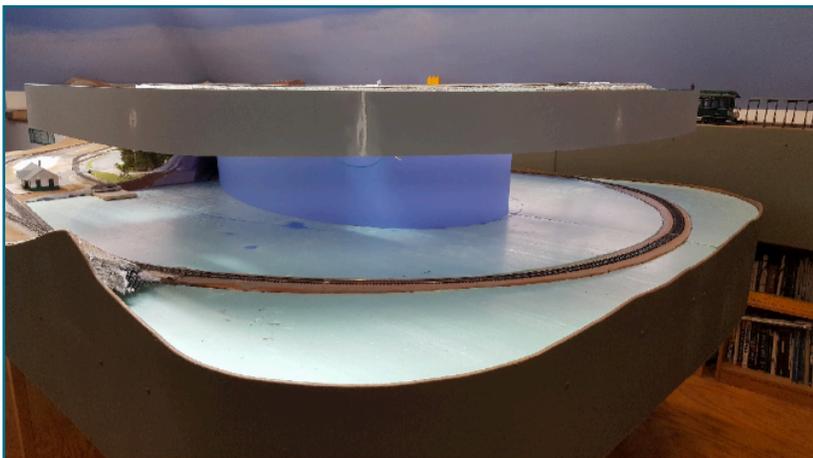


Photo 2

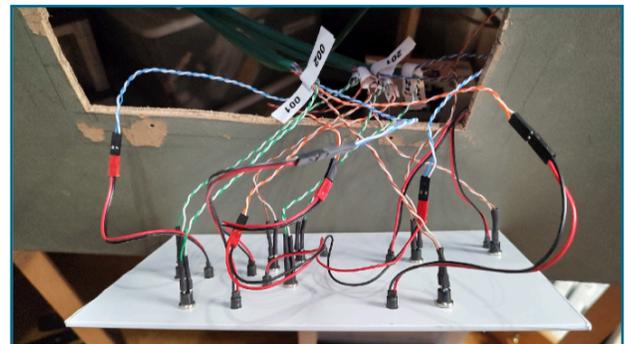
It is difficult to keep the edges of Masonite clean and so the joints between panels will be seen (**Photo 2**). We all work with styrene in our modeling and know how to join, fill, sand, and paint it.



My upper tier fascia is seamless. That is important since it is at eye level (at least, my eye level) (Photo 3).

Photo 3

The last major benefit was when I installed turnout control panels for the upper deck. I use buttons and LEDs in my panels. These have a maximum panel mounting thickness of 1/8.” Whereas on my lower fascia I *built* a panel that I *mounted* to the fascia, the upper fascia can act as this panel (Photo 4).



All I have to do is drill the holes and mount the switches and LEDs. This makes for a very clean look (Photos 5, 6).

Photo 4

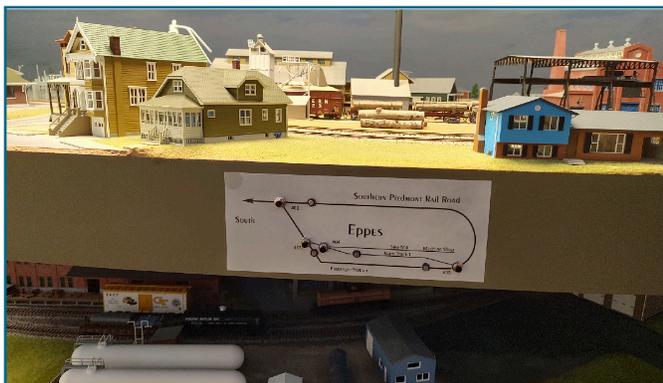


Photo 5

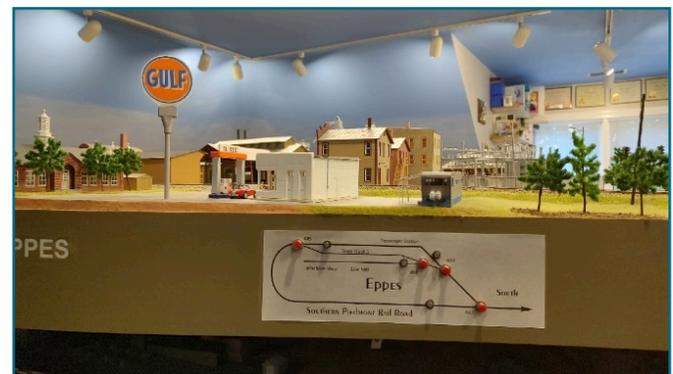


Photo 6

So how did I do it? I found a local plastics distributor (Piedmont Plastics here in the Raleigh area) that had counter sales. I bought a sheet of *.118X48X96 WHT OPAQUE H.I. STYRENE and had them rip it lengthwise into strips to my specifications. They did this for free. I had four strips 4.5” wide for the fascia and two 10” wide strips for the backdrop on the lower tier. The remainder was a little less than 10” and has been very useful.

Once you get your strips they need to be primed. Take them outside on a nice day and spray them with gray automotive primer. After priming, I joined them with backing strips. I then mounted them using Fuze*it® (Photo 7) and screws.



Photo 7

I built the upper tier as foam board over L-girders resulting in no edge other than foam upon which to fasten the fascia. I did have a few points where a girder could be used but this was only good for initial stability. Once the adhesive set, I removed the screws and filled the holes. The final step was to paint over the primer with latex paint of my desired color. The turnout panels were added later after operating sessions taught me the importance of placement.



In Memoriam

Two of our friends and model railroaders have passed on recently. Please consider a moment of silence, prayer and thoughtfulness for these and for all those who have fallen before us.



W. Calvin Reynolds, a Life Member of NMRA and MER and a former MER Treasurer from 1992 through 1996, died this morning (October 23, 2024). He also chaired at least one MER convention in Greensboro, NC (1984 and/or) 1987).

From Ken Montero

Max Robbins, Tidewater Division, a lifelong model railroader, affectionately known to us as “the train doctor.” He could fix anything that ran on rails. We traded train tips with him every Wednesday at lunch at AJ’s. From Greg Warth.

It's Harvest Season for Scenery Foliage

By Lee Stoermer
(All photos by the author)

I am always on the lookout for various items and materials that can be repurposed for railroad modeling, as I am sure most model railroaders are. My family will readily attest to that. Uses have been found for all kinds of trinkets that have been acquired for everything from structure details, to loads in rolling stock. This past weekend we had some decent weather after several weekends of rain, so I had to take advantage of it and get outside to complete most of my autumn yard work before winter rushed in (**Photo 1**). Work on the railroad had to wait... at least for a few hours more.

While I was busy trimming trees and generally cleaning up the yard and garden, I was listening to one of the model railroad podcasts. They were talking about projects they were working on and my mind was wandering as to what projects were in my priority order once the yard work was finished. My thoughts included questions like what materials would be needed for those projects and how quickly I could get done with the yard work to get back to some quality modeling time later that evening. While doing this I discovered something that significantly delayed my return to the basement that afternoon. It was right in front of me...a pile of yard waste. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, or in this case, the eye of the discoverer of new options for scenery material. And it is free, so even better!

Now I am sure you are saying, “yeah, yeah,” we all know about tree and brush yard trimmings for tree armatures and such. You are close but that's not it. Take a look along any place where a stream, railroad or street cut through the terrain. Besides the common rock outcroppings that we model you will find along the embankment that the vegetation has grown right up and out of the embankment. Weather, and gravity to a degree, continues to wear the embankment, washing the soil away and further exposing the roots of these nearby plants and trees (**Photo 2**).



Photo 1: The source of our base material this day.



Photo 2: Nearby eroded embankment showing exposed roots of the plants and trees growing nearby.

Some of these such as grasses can be included with static grass or such material, but the root structure of trees and bushes are definitely visible and the topic of our review. Here is how I take this ‘yard waste’ and convert it into some scenery super detailing along my creeks, embankments and tree areas with just a little effort, minimal time and a little creativity. You may have other processes that work for you, so feel free to vary this and even share with us so we can learn different forms and see what works best for you (**Photo 3**).

The first thing is to find some appropriate material. You will have to do some detective work of your own to determine what works for you and what you may have available at hand, but for my modeling in HO scale, some plants that work great are marigolds and sunflowers, which will be our emphasis in this article (**Photos 4, 5**).



Photo 3: View of the Sunflower plant as it is being pulled from the ground during yard work that caught my attention.



Photo 4: On closer examination this is what really caught my eye and got me to thinking.

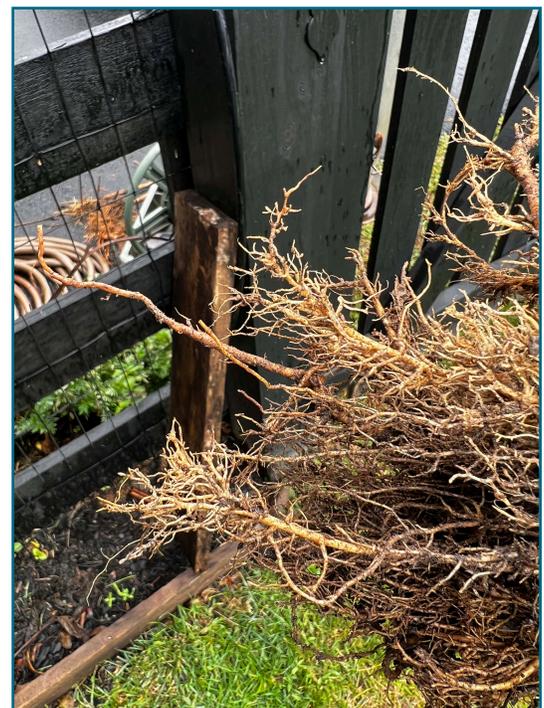


Photo 5

You are really looking for some of the fine, delicate material, but you should not discard anything that is larger, as I will explain later much of it is usable. While trimming the base material into manageable sizes, save some of this larger sized root material with its attached finer threads for a future use. Note that different plants, growing in different soil, will have varying colors. Don't sweat it as that can be adjusted later, right now we are looking for the general 'structure' shapes and features (**Photo 6**).



Photo 6: This photo taken a couple days after 'harvesting' shows several root structures that have dried and can be further cleaned. Note how the upper root ball is a darker color than the other two which are much lighter. Different plants will give you this variety.



Photo 7: This is what I collected on this day. I had quite a garden of sunflowers this year. There's plenty more and enough to share.

Wash it well outside with the garden hose to remove most of the dirt, mulch and other debris. It is probably best not to send this much material or coarseness of dirt down your household drains but during a second rinse that shouldn't be a problem. Also now is the time to check for critters. I had quite a collection of earthworms that came out (**Photo 8**).



Photo 8: After some trimming, this is a sampling showing the selection of materials that you may have available, in various stages of being trimmed and sorted.

After washing, allow the material to dry. I find that about a week outside on the porch out of the rain or inside the garage gets it dry enough. The main thing is to have it dry enough so that it doesn't get on your layout and start decomposing. If it is trimmed down into smaller more manageable pieces, it will also dry quicker but that does take away some of the options of larger choices, something to consider in larger scales. But you can always get back outside and find some more possibilities with other vegetation.

Trim further into manageable sizes that maintain the majority of fine branch structure and sort as to size and continue to clean out foreign material. You will find other plants that work and those that don't. Try other plants and see what their root structure looks like. Once you find one, give it a few days and see how brittle it gets. The key thing with the sunflower roots, marigolds and possibly others, is the roots stay fairly pliable even after they have dried. If the ones you have get really brittle quickly, there's still a chance that they might be usable, especially if it is of a unique coloring that is desirable, and we will review that later. You will need



Photo 9: Here trimming continues on more of the main pieces. Don't stress if it breaks or if you get too small of a section. There's more to be had and these will come in handy. Save large and small pieces. Discard mulch, waste and dirt.

to experiment

with what you have on hand to see how it works for you.



Photo 10: Close up of the middle stage of being trimmed. You can see the random angles and shapes of the fibers.

It is possible to treat these natural materials in a couple ways to preserve their flexibility if you feel the need. A couple ways I have heard about are with glycerin, mod podge, matte medium or white glue, or you can choose not to worry about it. I prefer matte medium as it preserves, dries clear and keeps it flexible. If you have used Super Trees and worked with that material for your tree branch structure, this is the same method. Sometimes I do it, sometimes not. Primarily I will do it on the larger pieces that have a lot of really fine hairlike fibers that I want to preserve, as I will show you later. It just depends on how brittle the material is so you will have to determine if you need to go through this step or not.

When I have chosen to, I use a dilute mixture of matte medium at a 10:1 water to glue ratio mix, with just a drop of dish soap as a surfactant to help it break the surface tension and allow it to soak in better. I will dunk the pieces in, give it about 15-20 seconds, remove and give a little shake and set aside to dry. The time to dry varies based upon the humidity where you have them stored. They stay soft enough to flex after this. When manipulated, they can still bend if brushed against and cut easily when needed. If I am using this within a creek bed and it's going to be encased in gloss medium or other scenery material, then you won't need to do this step.

I have a small box lid to use as a work box, holding the materials, cutters and tweezers. Start by selecting an appropriate size piece, trim to size and then glue in with white glue, modge podge or other adhesive of your choice. You could use hot glue if you like but I find for this kind of work it leaves too many 'glue strings' and the associated burns are avoidable from this fine work. I have made trees out of this root material, similar to how you do with Scenic Express's Super Trees where you can use hot glue or ACC to attach the finer pieces to a larger core trunk structure. Again, you should try a couple different methods to see what you get.

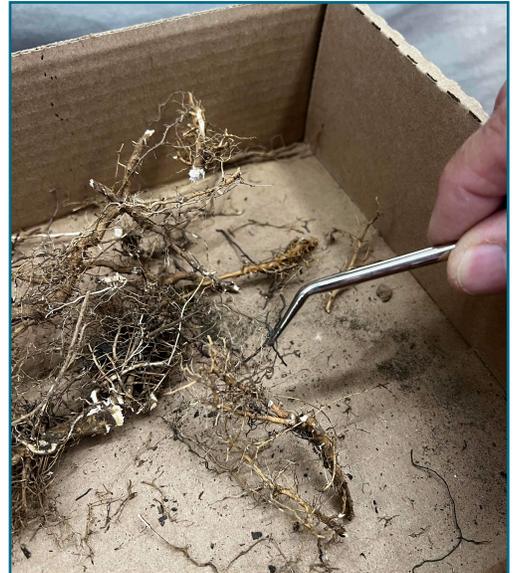


Photo 11: Here is my work box of these pieces as I am installing them. I can grab a piece, trim as desired, and the unused pieces fall back into the box tray to be used elsewhere.



Photo 12: A work in progress along a stream. Note varying sizes and colors for a random natural look.

For most of these natural materials, the inherent coloring seems to fit in well with the scene. For the stream or embankment areas I find it isn't necessary to do any color corrections unless you want it to blend in better with your soil coloring. Occasionally you may need to do some color adjustment, using thinned craft paints in a wash format similar to weathering rolling stock and structures. Craft paint works very well and it doesn't take much to blend a whole scene together if you feel the contrast is too stark, or you are looking for a muddier appearance.

On the larger pieces you can actually paint it with the craft paint or spray paint (**Photo 13**).



Photo 13: Work In progress. Note the area between the two tracks and along the far embankment where our harvested material is being put to use as exposed roots and also as dead bush / tree branches.

Remember those larger pieces that I said to set aside with some branch root materials still attached? Those make great dead trees that are scattered throughout the forest. Take a look at any tree line and you will see trees in various life stages, even some that are dead but have not yet fallen (**Photos 14, 15**).



Photo 14



Photo 15: Sample of what a dead tree in our forest starts out as.

Use a similar process for these larger pieces as you did with the smaller ones. Get an appropriately sized section, do a little trimming (but not too much) and ‘plant’ it. Every forested area can handle a few of these scattered throughout (**Photos 16, 17**).



Photos 16 and 17: Two views of some dead trees mixed in among the forest. These will be given a little grey weathering to blend in better.



These can sometimes stand having a little coloring applied to give them a weathered grey appearance, as when they are fresh the root material can appear more of a tan or a lighter colored wood, but not always as is noted in one of the sample photos (Look back at Photo 6). If you decide they need some darkening, break out your craft paint selection and apply either by lightly spraying or brushing with a thinned mixture, although brushing will be more difficult and may lead to some damaged branches. Color and tint to your taste. These should be colored prior to the matte medium application to get the color to saturate into the natural material, and you may find that it then does not need the matte medium treatment to remain flexible and preserve it as the acrylic craft paint achieves a similar result. Again, experiment with a few pieces to determine for yourself the best results before trying it for the first time on your NMRA Achievement Program grand prize model display. Just savin’ (**Photo 18**).



Photo 18: Scene down along the tracks showing the treatment so far along the embankments and also between the main and siding tracks.

Since this initial ‘Aha’ moment, I have found that not all plant root material works out well, and some work better than others. I have pulled and tried several other roots with mixed results, and these two offered here worked best for me. You will have to explore around your home and nearby areas to see what your options are and which you can safely harvest. Be aware of what could be toxic though, such as poison ivy. Poison ivy has a great appearing fine structure, but the consequences of making contact with this plant far outweigh any benefit! I have an ample supply of sunflowers and other plants that regrow for me every year!

Now is the best time to get outside and gather your scenery materials to last you through the next several months, although you can find this material any time you are out in the yard working. I probably have enough now for the rest of my entire layout although railroad model layouts seem to devour scenery materials. I will be looking forward to hearing about your own results with using this and other techniques you may develop on your own.

Until next time, Happy Rails!

Correction from the last issue of *The Local*:

This Barlow’s Barbecue structure which appeared in an article entitled “Editor’s Picks” was erroneously labeled as “scratchbuilt.” Since then, Keith indicated that it was actually built from a kit. It still shows great work and lots of of detail. Thanks for the correction, Keith.



Barlow's Barbecue ~~scratchbuilt~~ kit-built by Keith Iritsky

From the Divisions...

Branch Lines

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 and to their Division Websites for easy access:

Divisions	Newsletters
1 - New Jersey Division	<i>Train Orders</i>
2 - Potomac Division	<i>Potomac Flyer</i>
3 - Philadelphia Division	<i>The Dispatcher</i>
4 - Tidewater Division	<i>The Callboard</i>
5 - James River Division	<i>Crossties - Index</i>
10 - South Mountain Division	<i>Wheel Report</i>
11 - Susquehanna Division	<i>Sidetracks</i>
12 - Carolina Southern Division	<i>The Brass Pounder</i>
13 - Carolina Piedmont Division	<i>The Herald</i>
14 - Chesapeake Division	<i>The Relay</i>

Reminder: Here's how to access the [Digital NMRA Magazine](#):

1. Go to <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.
5. If you need help, watch the [YouTube Video](#).

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Back on Track...

Be Tankful and Have a Hopper Christmas!

The Holidays are upon us again - a time for joy, fun, giving, thankfulness, goodwill, peace, wonder, magic, happiness and love. At least we all try to make it so no matter how many conflicts there are in the world and in our lives. Nevertheless, I think our hobby really helps us to focus on the happy things over and above the stresses, especially this time of year. Trains have been associated with this season throughout the world for almost 200 years. I am grateful for this and the fact that they do help to bring joy to so many children of all ages. So let's forget about the Grinchy stuff and build more trains around our trees.



*Christmas train passing through a village, Generated by AI,
By João Macedo. (License purchased from Adobe Stock.)*

some of your cars. Ask your kids to find as many Holiday related items on your layout as they can. Invite some friends over to see your layout. Bring a train to work during November, model railroad month. Let's all take a few minutes to be thankful for the blessings that we have while we can still enjoy them.

We should all take advantage of this time of year and enjoy it as much as we can. Let's get together for some fun at one or more of the many train shows that happen during these few weeks. Let's have some more operating sessions. Take your children or grandchildren somewhere to see some trains. Decorate your own layout: make some pipe-cleaner wreaths for your locomotives and structures. Place a Santa at your layout store or station. Wrap some of your evergreens with battery-operated fairy lights. Attach a small Christmas tree to the top of

We hope you enjoyed this issue of *The Local*. Please continue to send in your original articles. Let us know what you are working on. Whatever it is, if it's related to model railroading, I am sure it will be of interest to the rest of us. If you want to learn more about any particular topic, let us know about that as well. We'll do our best to research it and write about it.

Thanks again to our fantastic [editorial staff](#) for their assistance in putting this together. The quality of these issues is largely due to their expertise, wisdom and "eagle eyes."