

# NMRA BULLETIN

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2022 NMRA National Convention Dates and National Train Show Reservations:  
St. Louis, Missouri August 7 – 14, 2022  
Train Show Booth Reservations—Jenny Hendricks Registrar - P.O. Box 1328, Soddy Daisy, TN 37384-1328  
423-892-2846 • [ntsreg@nmra.org](mailto:ntsreg@nmra.org)  
• 2023—Dallas, Texas

rev 7/27/21

# ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

## NMRA AP CERTIFICATE REPORT JULY 2021

### GOLDEN SPIKE

#### British Region

Andy Ambrose, Wickham, Essex, UK  
Peter Bowen, E. Harrington, Somerset, UK  
Bryan Clarke, Diss, Norfolk, UK  
David McLaughlin, Upton Cheyney, Bristol, United Kingdom  
Mick Moignard, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, United Kingdom  
David Nicholson, Nr. Glastonbury, Somerset, United Kingdom  
Neil Rogers, Coventry, Warwickshire, UK  
Mike Ruby, St. Budeaux, Plymouth, Devon, United Kingdom  
Ian Watton, Gillingham, Kent, UK

#### Lone Star Region

David Paul, Sugarland, Texas

#### Niagara Frontier Region

Frank Pastore, N. Tonawanda, New York  
Paul Miller, Williamsville, New York

#### North Central Region

Alwyn Johnson, Interlochen, Michigan

#### Northeastern Region

Edward Stoltenberg, Norwalk, Connecticut  
Wayne Woodland, Bedford, NS, Canada

#### Sunshine Region

Andy Zimmerman, Tallahassee, Florida  
Robert Feuerstein, Tallahassee, Florida

### MASTER BUILDER - CARS

#### Lone Star Region

Kelly Russell, Houston, Texas

#### Northeastern Region

Kenneth Nelson, Scotia, New York

### MASTER BUILDER - STRUCTURES

#### Mid-Central Region

John Witt, Rocky River, Ohio

#### Mid-Eastern Region

Robert Cook, Chesapeake, Virginia  
Jack Dziadul, Sanford, North Carolina

#### North Central Region

Barry Hensel, Canton, Michigan

#### Pacific Southwest Region

Wayne Pierce, El Cajon, California

#### Southeastern Region

Michael Cummings, Alpharetta, Georgia

### MASTER BUILDER - SCENERY

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John Witt, Rocky River, Ohio

#### Mid-Continent Region

Thomas Katafiasz, Salina, Kansas

#### Mid-Eastern Region

Robert Cook, Chesapeake, Virginia

#### North Central Region

Kenneth Scherer, Berkley, Michigan  
George Van Duyne, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

#### Pacific Northwest Region

Warren Smith, Meridian, Idaho

#### Pacific Southwest Region

Wayne Pierce, El Cajon, California

#### Sunshine Region

Richard Miller, Gainesville, Florida

### MODEL RAILROAD ENGINEER - CIVIL

#### Lone Star Region

Robert Ashcraft, Pearland, Texas

#### Mid-Eastern Region

Robert Cook, Chesapeake, Virginia

#### Northeastern Region

Thomas Emmett, Newport, Rhode Island

#### Pacific Northwest Region

Max Magliaro, Oregon City, Oregon  
Larry Sebelley, Chilliwack, BC, Canada

#### Pacific Southwest Region

Wayne Pierce, El Cajon, California

### MODEL RAILROAD ENGINEER - ELECTRICAL

#### Lone Star Region

Joe Leising, Hurst, Texas

#### Mid-Central Region

John Witt, Rocky River, Ohio

#### Mid-Eastern Region

Bryan Kidd, Nokesville, Virginia

#### North Central Region

William Wemhoff, Decatur, Indiana

#### Pacific Northwest Region

Larry Sebelley, Chilliwack, BC, Canada

#### Pacific Southwest Region

Wayne Pierce, El Cajon, California

### CHIEF DISPATCHER

#### Mid-Central Region

Jim Braum, Monongahela, Pennsylvania  
James Montgomery, Centerville, Ohio

#### Sunshine Region

Allen Scott, Lake City, Florida

### ASSOCIATION OFFICIAL

#### Lone Star Region

Christopher Palermo, Austin, Texas

#### Niagara Frontier Region

John Wagner, Baden, Ontario, Canada

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#### Lone Star Region

Tom Greco, Duncanville, Texas  
Pete Leach, Tomball, Texas  
P. J. Mackey, Fort Worth, Texas

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Mike Hughes, Worthing, West Sussex, UK

#### Lone Star Region

C. Randall Wilson, Kingwood, Texas

#### Pacific Northwest Region

Richard Kurschner, Beaverton, Oregon  
Errol Waters, Meridian, Idaho

### MASTER MODEL RAILROADER®

MMR® #687 Lynn Daugherty, Silver City, New Mexico  
MMR® #688 Kenneth Nelson, Scotia, New York  
MMR® #689 Kelly Russell, Houston, Texas

AP QUESTIONS: If you have questions about the Achievement Program or requirements, start with your local or Region AP manager. If you still have questions, contact Frank Koch at [fjkoch@hotmail.com](mailto:fjkoch@hotmail.com). If you prefer to write, contact Frank at 4769 Silverwood Drive, Batavia, OH 45103.

**JONATHAN A CHISHOLM SMALL EARNS  
MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #675**

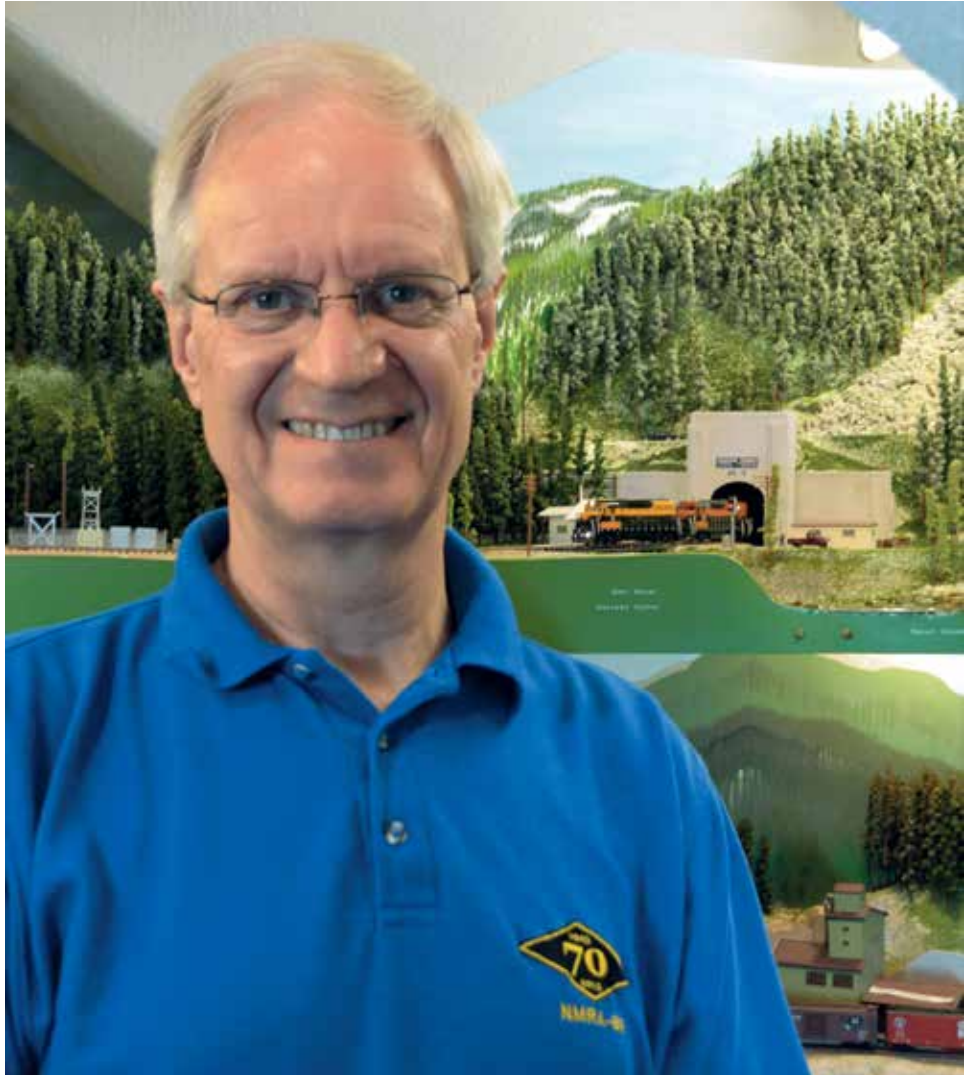
**My Journey to MMR®**

**I**t really is a huge honor to join the company of Master Model Railroaders®. I'm especially delighted to become just the eighth MMR® from the British Region, and I know more will come very soon. This last year has seen a big upsurge here in interest and participation in the Achievement Program, thanks in large part to the explosion of online gatherings at which members can directly assist and encourage each other — surely one benefit of the last year or so that will last long into the future.

I had the usual beginning to my model train story: toy trains, O-scale tinplate clock-work trains, then Hornby Dublo as a child — including a diesel engine with a cast body shell that was heavy enough to demolish furniture upon derailment — then assembling an extensive floor-running collection with my best friend in our teens. At age 16, however, something happened that really changed my modeling life. My interest in model railways came to the attention of the headmaster of my school in Ilford, Essex. We schoolboys knew him as Frank Young, but in the hobby and NMRA (though I had never heard of it then), he was known as “Cliff.” I later learned that Cliff Young was quite renowned in the hobby at the time, and his work had been featured in several books and magazines I have since come across.

One day, I was summoned to Cliff's office, attending in some trepidation only to receive a kind invitation to visit his model railway if I were interested. I leaped at the chance. I imagined an oval or two of track with a few sidings and some LMS steam engines or some such. “Well, we have operating sessions [what!?] on Sundays, so you'd better come next Friday for your induction.” *Induction? How complicated can it be?* I thought.

Intrigued, I arrived at Cliff's house in semi-rural Essex, was shown upstairs into his railway room via a duck-under — and was amazed! Here was a 21x8-foot representation of Denver, Rio Grande & Western in the Colorado Rockies, the line from Denver to Moffat Tunnel, with a western yard beyond. A fast clock, way freights, thru freights, 2-6-6-2 steamers, FA-



hauled streamliners, and car card and way-bill switching — all the elements of what I now know to be first-rate American model railroading were there. Induction successfully completed, I operated on Cliff's layout a dozen times or so, graduating to yardmaster in due course.

I literally had no idea this was what model railroading could be. I was hooked, especially on the operations side of it. Although I was set on my path, studying hard to become a professional oboist and building my musical career, I kept those experiences very fresh in my mind.

In 1982, I married my wife, MaryAnn. We had met playing in the Scottish Opera Orchestra in Glasgow. She comes from Maryland, and her father was a great train enthusiast too, having grown up in Oneonta, New York — an important railroad town. He had an N-scale layout and a superb collection of railroad china and philately. On my first visit to Washington, he took

me to the NMRA National Convention in Washington, DC, whence I came away with my first American cars and locomotives.

I was recruited to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic a few years later and have been here ever since. This career has been fortuitous for my modeling as I have been able to build my layout and keep improving it alongside a very busy working and family life. I converted the top floor of our Edwardian house into quite a spacious railroad room. We don't have the cavernous basements many enjoy in the US and creating home layout spaces in the UK other than in lofts or garages can be a challenge, so I have been very lucky there. I wanted to get a layout built and operating so that I could enjoy trains while busy with family — our two sons were born quite soon after — so that they could enjoy it with me.

I set about designing a layout that would allow me to run long N-scale passenger and freight trains and switch way-

freights too. It will come as no surprise that my layout follows many ideas learned from Cliff Young. I managed to build the bulk of it to a basic level over the next two years and got trains running fairly quickly. Some of us prefer operations, while others prefer modeling. I guess I'm about 50/50 there, and I find operations tend to highlight areas for improvement unless you're a design genius who can get everything right the first time! So, the layout has evolved while retaining much of its original character.

Around this time, I joined the NMRA British Region. I saw a very small panel ad in the back of *Continental Modeller* publicizing the BR Convention held that year near Blackpool, not far from my home. I went along and joined at the door. I knew no one at first but quickly met and made lifelong friends.

Sometimes having to move to a new home can be a blessing in disguise because you have the opportunity to learn and start over with a new layout. In my case, staying in one home for many years, I've instead remodeled much of the layout, some sections several times, and added an upper deck — N-scale trains look very good at eye level. I'm very interested in the macro aspect of layout design, how it works in space as a design project, and how it all

fits together. I love multi-decking when it is done well, and my upper deck added about a third to the length of the mainline run. Most importantly, the upper deck forms a return loop so that with the yard loop at the western end, there is never the need to reverse or switch a long consist. We run 14-car streamliners like this and 30-car freights.

From the vantage point of the U.S., you might well ask, why model the Great Northern when you live thousands of miles away? Well, why not? Anyone modeling American railroads has to make choices. The influence of Cliff's layout pushed me toward a line in the mountains, and I guess I just like that setting anyway. Being a keen mountain walker, it combines two of my favorite enthusiasms. I love streamliners too, and Great Northern's Omaha Orange and Pullman Green scheme strongly appealed to me. The more I learned about the GN, the more I liked it. I joined the Great Northern Railway Historical Society, have been a member for more than 30 years, and now have quite a library of GN books and information sheets. I've found it incredibly rewarding to bring back to life trains such as the *Cascadian* that I've only ever seen in books or videos and to create a miniature world for them to run.

Having an American wife and family has afforded me many opportunities to experience U.S. railroading first hand, beginning at Garrett Park, Maryland, excursions to Point of Rocks and Brunswick, Maryland, and later on train trips out West, including visiting the Durango & Silverton, crossing the Cascades on the Amtrak *Empire Builder*, and the Rockies on the *California Zephyr*.

I began to get involved with the Achievement Program around 1999. A visit from Steve Park, our AP Chair at the time, led to my unexpectedly receiving my Golden Spike. Steve had quietly assessed my layout without letting on. That award was a great encouragement, and I got down to business. Back in the 1980s, there was definitely a sense in the BR that you had to be working in HO scale or larger to succeed in the AP, which simply acted as a spur to me! I'm quite proud now that all my MMR® models have been in N scale.

Planning is vital to get to your MMR®, and I had identified a path to gain the required seven certificates fairly early on, integrating this with my plans and needs for my layout and, of course, finding ways to volunteer for the NMRA. Currently serving as vice president of the British Region, I've held a role in Region advertising and am also an AP assistant and assessor.

I can't adequately describe how proud I felt to receive confirmation of my MMR® in April. It's taken me more than 20 years working on and off, it's been great fun, incredibly rewarding, and as so many MMR®'s say, the challenge is always to yourself to become the best modeler you can be. I truly believe the AP is one of the NMRA's most important and attractive features, and it's my ambition to sell it to many more of our British outline modelers in the UK, thereby increasing interest in, and hopefully membership in, the NMRA.

I want to thank Steve Park, Keith Webb, and Mick Moignard of our AP team, my family, and many friends in the NMRA for their encouragement and support.

**Certificates Earned**  
**Jonathan A Chisholm Small,**  
**MMR® #675**

**Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical**  
**Master Builder – Cars**  
**Association Volunteer**  
**Chief Dispatcher**  
**Model Railroad Author**  
**Master Builder – Scenery**  
**Master Builder – Prototype Models**

## Improve your modeling with a few sheets of paper.

That's exactly what happens when you participate in the National Model Railroad Association's Achievement Program. One Merit Award here, another there, and pretty soon you're on your way to becoming a Master Model Railroader. All the while learning and having a ton of fun.

The Achievement Program is modelers helping modelers become better modelers and get the most out of their hobby. And it's yet another benefit of NMRA membership.

Visit [www.nmra.org](http://www.nmra.org). Then improve your skills. And your hobby.



**We make it even more fun.**

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4 2 3 - 8 9 2 - 2 8 4 6



**JAMES C. DEMARCO EARNS  
MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #678**

**T**rains were a gift for Christmas. I received my first one in 1948, at the age of 6. It came complete with a 4x8-foot sheet of plywood to anchor the oval of track. I continued to have fun with it, and by the age of 10, my mother helped me build a 6x12-foot table. Now, I could run two Lionel trains at the same time.

Since my interest in trains continued, Mom introduced me to modeling. We started with stick airplanes. When I'd become fairly good with the stick building, she introduced me to modeling for my railroad. My new layout soon had streets, scenery, and, best of all, buildings to add to my enjoyment as I operated it. Interest in the hobby was cemented.

When we moved once more in 1958, I was thrilled to find an open basement. I put it to use, holding my new 8x15-foot layout. I also decided to switch to HO trains, which meant I could once again practice my skills on buildings half as big but just as detailed as those I had before. A new interest in building freight cars emerged. I used Silver Streak, Roundhouse, Central Valley, and Ambroid kits. Of course, good rolling stock needed good engines to pull them. I expanded my modeling to building steam engines. First was a Tyco 0-4-0, followed by a Varney 4-6-0. As time went on, I added Bowser and Roundhouse engines to my collection. High school graduation and working for a living filled in much of my time, and model railroading became more of a weekend or vacation hobby.

Marriage occurred in June 1968. My wife and I moved to Kendall, New York, and rented a home for 3½ years. My railroading was a small shelf switching layout 12 inches deep by 12 feet long during this time, and most of my things were packed away.

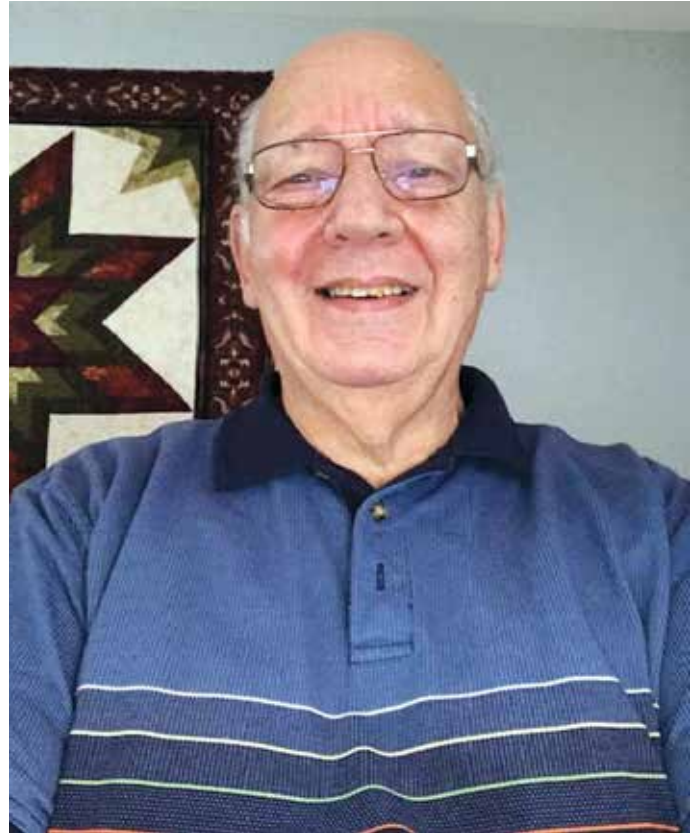
We built our new home and moved in January 1971. I could now begin to railroad again. The first layout was 6x16 feet, and I designed it so our two sons could run trains on part of it. We had a lot of fun running trains and slowly adding scenery, buildings, and landscaping to the area.

By 1993, the boys had pretty much lost interest, so I decided to build my "dream" HO layout. Doing so made it necessary to rework the upper and lower

track to go around the 18x26-foot train room. In 2010, I added 17 feet of staging tracks on the east wall of the basement. Finally, in 2016, I completed the perimeter of the 26x40-foot basement with more track, a new J&K Steel Mill, towns, and businesses. I now had the areas and industries I needed to do switching and develop operations for the layout.

Over the years, I had joined NMRA but let the membership lapse. The last time I joined was April 9, 1998. In 2015, Rochester Institute of Technology had an NMRA show. My wife and I went, and I discovered the Lakeshores Division. At last — somewhere to go for meets. At one of the meets, the Superintendent, Dave Durr, talked about home layouts, then turned the meets over to the AP chairman Ned Spiller. Ned talked about the Golden Spike Award. I had never considered this since I couldn't remove scenery, etc., to be judged. However, as Ned explained this program, he said that a team would go to homes to judge work already done. He was sure many members already had enough work done to receive the Golden Spike Award. Ned came to my house, reviewed my railroad, and I received the Golden Spike Award. I was still basking in the joy of this award when Ned asked why I was not working on my structures award as I already had achieved some of the requirements for it. That was the beginning of the path to Master Model Railroader® for me.

Ned advised me as to which certificate would be the next logical choice. I discovered the skills used to achieve one area (e.g., structures) were used again, and new skills were added. As I progressed, some requirements were easy to check off, but each level presented new challenges that encouraged me to add to my knowledge.



To me, some of the best aspects of the program are:

- (1) It gives credit for skills used on items already constructed.
- (2) The willingness of a team to come and assess the existing layout and encourage participation in the program.
- (3) The encouragement to not only continue progressing in a logical sequence, but also challenge the development of all skills.

I am thrilled to have received the Master Model Railroader® Award. However, without the help of Ned Spiller, Bob Mortinen, Raymond Howard, and members of the Lakeshores Division, I am not sure this would have happened. Thanks to all who encouraged me along the way.

**Certificates Earned  
James C. DeMarco, MMR® #678**

- Master Builder – Structures**
- Master Builder – Scenery**
- Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical**
- Master Builder – Cars**
- Model Railroad Engineer – Civil**
- Association Volunteer**
- Master Builder – Motive Power**

GARY D. LOISELLE EARNS  
MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #681

**M**y model railroad adventure did not really begin until my wife gave me a train set for our second Christmas together. In September 2021, we will celebrate our 50th anniversary.

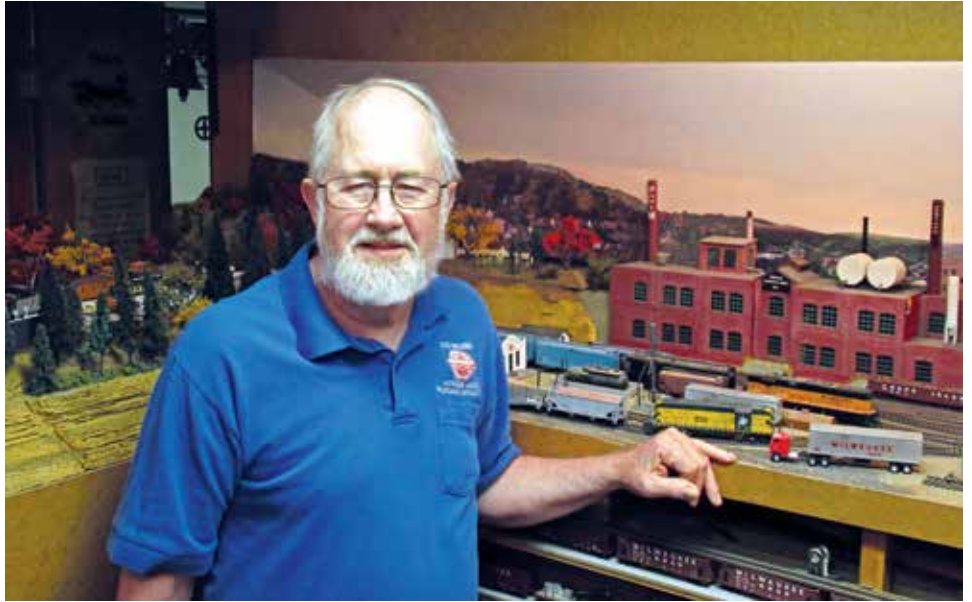
Yes, I had a train as a kid. I remember seeing black & white photos of myself sitting on my bedroom floor in the center of an oval track. I was recuperating from my second brain tumor surgery, so participation in sports was not an option. I also remember seeing that train boxed up and for sale at a garage sale.

During junior high and early high school, my hobby interests turned to model trucks, cars, and ships. How many remember Revell's Cutty Sark, Thermopylae, and Kearsarge?

Just by chance, when I got my train set for Christmas, our next-door neighbor in the four-unit townhouse also got a train set. His name was also Gary, so we hit it off right away. He found a hole-in-the-wall train store in town. He also got us an invitation to a "model railroad." Our host lived in a duplex. He and his wife occupied one-half of the ground floor. His mother or mother-in-law occupied the other half. One half of the basement was his family room, and the other side was his train room. He modeled Chicago to Denver from one end of the basement to the other.

We moved from the townhouse apartment to our first house. I built a small layout that circled around the furnace. With a growing family, we next moved to a larger house four houses down the street. My layout now was built in an alcove at one end of the basement. Our next move was to the house we have occupied for 34 years. My new 12x32-foot layout space is at the basement's far end, which was once a utility room. I did acquire a little more room for freight/staging areas on the other side of a wall between the train room and what was a sewing room when we added a first-floor laundry/sewing room and one-and-a-half car garage.

I honestly cannot remember how I got acquainted with the Rock Valley Division. My best guess is hobby shop flyers or ads in *Model Railroader* magazine. I then attended annual train show open houses and monthly meets. Finally, I transitioned from attend-



ing clinics and home layout tours to giving clinics and hosting layout tours.

For a number of years, the Division has had an HO Track modular layout for displaying at train shows. I had built a 10-foot module loosely based on Rockford and stored my section at home. The Division's sections were stored in the basement of a full-size train store. The annual packing, unpacking, getting everything out of the basement and back again took a definite toll on "volunteers." The demise was inevitable.

I now have a 1x8-foot portable switching layout to take to our shows. It can be carried, assembled, and operated by one person (me). It can also be stored under my home layout.

The first NMRA National Convention I attended was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1985. A group of us commuted each day from Rockford. The next National Convention I attended was in Eugene, Oregon, in 1987. Anytime my wife and I reminisce about that trip, we are amazed how the Convention Committee had teamed up with the local college summer program to provide entertainment for visiting youth. Education would be a better description.

Subsequent conventions my wife and I have attended have not, for the most part, included our four now-grown children. The conventions have given us reason to travel to places we probably wouldn't have visited. They have allowed us to travel on Amtrak and meet new friends from across the country and beyond.

Thinking back, I'm not sure when I first joined the NMRA. However, my Life Member certificate is dated 1994. I do know that each month when I would get the *NMRA BULLETIN* (*SCALE RAILS*, now *NMRA MAGAZINE*), the first thing I would open to would be the "Open Loads" feature by Tom Persoon. I'm glad to see Bob Frankrone continue the feature "Love Those Loads."

I saw a car with a load of steel beams spotted in a yard here in town. After a few pictures and a research visit to a local structural steel supplier, I set out to make a load. Plastruct brand shapes were oversize based on the info I had. Evergreen didn't have what I needed, so I fabricated one from styrene strips. I did a write-up, took some photos, and sent my submission to Tom. Much to my surprise, my article showed up in the *NMRA BULLETIN*. I authored a total of ten open load articles and co-authored one with my dear friend Charlie Wickhorst. Even more surprising, some of my submissions were included in the NMRA publication, "Modeling Open Loads," and one of the insert photos on the front cover was from yours truly.

My enthusiasm for open loads has provided the opportunity to share my interest with clinics presented at Regional and National NMRA conventions. Of equal interest, I've authored a clinic titled "Extended Service Equipment." Some refer to this as "recycled" equipment.

As an aside, the 2010 NMRA National Convention in Milwaukee was a three-day

event for me. Tuesday, I went on a tour of layouts. At one multi-room layout, I saw a chair with the name “John Mellowes” on it. Okay. Wednesday, I went on an industrial tour. (My favorite part of any convention). The tour was to Charter Steel in Saukville, Wisconsin. My heart started racing when we pulled into the parking lot, and I could see large rolls of “wire” lined up on the ground. It beat even faster when our bus tour guide said cameras were allowed. We were greeted inside by NMRA member John Mellowes, the company owner. Result: an unforgettable tour and open loads clinic — “Open Loads: Where’s the Point.”

Scrap metal from Rockford is shipped via rail to Charter Steel. Charter Steel processes the scrap to produce these large coils. The coils are shipped in gons or dedicated flatcars back to a company in Rockford that draws the wire down to a customer’s specs. The customer then turns the product into fasteners. Rockford once held the title of “Screw Capital of the World.” By the way, I had to leave the convention to get home, pack my suit and

tie, and get to Minneapolis for my son’s wedding on Saturday.

My journey to MMR® #681 probably started with a nudge from Bill Lorence, MMR® #45. My Golden Spike certificate has his signature as AP Chairman. Bill also was a judge for my trestle requirement of the Structures certificate and a judge on my last certificate: Cars.

John Mann, MMR® #213, was instrumental in leading our Division through a number of structure projects that helped me meet the requirement. John also started the Division, and me, on the way to Master Builder – Cars. This project was a scratchbuilt wood boxcar with a Rockford connection. I also got some helpful car-building tips and techniques from RRVD Superintendent Ken Mosny.

Al Potts, MMR® #103, of the South Central Wisconsin Division (SCWD), developed a rolling stock project and structures project that aided me in each of those categories.

I was encouraged, more than once, to continue this journey by Jim McQueeney,

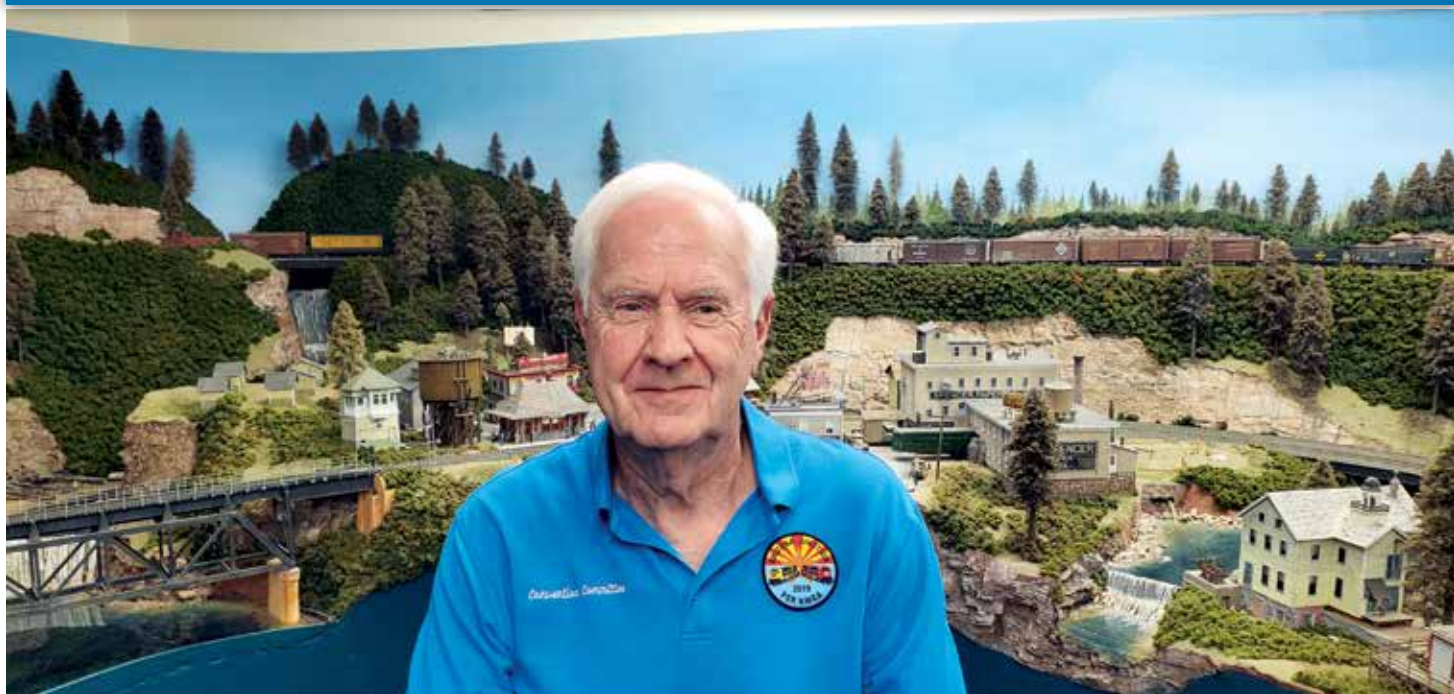
MMR® #477, of Rockford, and Marion Brasher, MMR® #370, of the Illinois Valley Division. Both were instrumental in getting some of my projects judged. I need to acknowledge scenery “guru” Tom Maladecki of Rockford for setting the bar. I know I will never match Tom’s magic touch with scenery, but his mentoring has helped many of us (myself included) to aim higher. I have also learned to see things with more detail.

Getting to this point has been challenging, fun, rewarding, and quite humbling. I lost my friends Charlie Wickhorst and Marion Brasher during the pandemic. I can’t physically share this with them, but they are not forgotten.

### Certificates Earned Gary Loiselle, MMR® #681

- Association Volunteer
- Association Official
- Model Railroad Author
- Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical
- Master Builder – Structures
- Master Builder – Scenery
- Master Builder – Cars

## MMR EARNED



### FRANK BAKER EARNS MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #683

I grew up on a dead-end street in Little Falls, New Jersey, four houses and a vacant lot away from Erie Railroad’s Glenwood Lake Division. Several times a day, a steam train with passenger or freight

service passed through the cut. I loved to watch the belching monster go by.

My neighbor was Grif Teller, the artist who painted many calendars for the Pennsylvania Railroad. He presented me with the newest calendar for many years, several of which I still have framed. His boys had a Buddy L train, which resided

in their garage for the most part. I can still recall the set was large and heavy. From time to time, Grif would let me take the train to my backyard and play, but it had to be back in his garage by the end of the day, or that would have been the end of the use of the Buddy L.

At about the age of six, I received a Lionel train for Christmas. I believe it was a Lionel 600 passenger train set, and looking back, that was quite an impressive train for a six-year-old. I was in that exploratory phase of wanting to see what made them run. I was proficient at taking them apart but not skilled at putting them back together. When I was nine, my dad lost his business, and we moved to an apartment in Morristown, New Jersey. I started the fourth grade and forgot about trains for several years.

I occasionally experimented with model airplanes. For 25 cents, you could buy a balsa wood kit. Using a safety razor blade, I would cut all the components out of the printed patterns on the wood. Duco Cement was the glue of choice to put the plane together. Then you had to apply tissue paper material on the body and wings to fill out the shape of the plane. Propulsion was by a rubber band. Upon completion, I would wind up the propeller, light a cherry bomb, drop it into the plane, then throw the plane out the second-story window to see how far it would fly! The neighbors sort of put the end of that hobby, and trains reappeared.

Our apartment had a basement with space for me to build a layout during my teenage years. The basement was my laboratory for working on trains, airplanes, and the like. The apartments were not well built, and sometimes the basement flooded with several inches of water. I started my first layout with a Lionel set on a 4x8-foot piece of plywood, some track, and two switches. You can't do much with a 4x8 piece of plywood, but I tried.

In 1958, my parents decided to build their dream home. My Lionel layout was dismantled, never to be seen again. The Lionel trains were stored away. After graduation from college at Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1966, I started my professional career with Honeywell Information Systems in Boston, Massachusetts. A couple of years later, I was transferred to a new division in San Diego, California. Another couple of years went by, and I transferred to a new facility in Oklahoma City. Frequent employee transfers were commonplace back then. Model train magazines continued to keep my interest in the hobby.

In 1975, another move brought me to a new company in Phoenix, Arizona — the city of the mythical bird that rises from the ashes. It was here that I met the love of my life, Phyllis, and we were married six months later. Two months after

we were married, she surprised me with a brass locomotive for my birthday. It was then I realized this woman was a keeper!

While on vacation in Hawaii, we discussed adding on to our house so I could have a layout and a place to run that beautiful brass engine. I got the green light, and by the time we boarded the flight home, I had a suntan and a design for the house extension and layout.

During this period, I found out that one of my customers, Russ Henzel, was also interested in trains. I asked him if he would be interested in helping me build a layout, which turned into a Sunday afternoon ritual for many years. That friendship continues still today.

Fast-forward a couple of years. During a dinner conversation with Russ and his wife, Bonnie, we mentioned looking for a bigger house somewhere in the East Valley. Bonnie mentioned that there was a house on their street that was for sale. It was a fixer-upper and priced accordingly. I won't bore you with all the details, problems, repairs, etc., that existed with the house, but I can assure you the list was long, but the price was right. In addition, my mother became part of this equation. She wanted to move from the East Coast and enjoy the Arizona climate. I told her I would build her a guest house on our property so she could live with us. While visiting us that spring, a realtor showed her Sun City / Sun City West, a local retirement community. Mom moved to Sun City West, leaving me with a 1,000-square-foot building for my railroad. *Whoopie!*

While building my layout, I joined the NMRA in 1995. Allen Gross, MMR® 286, gave a wonderful presentation at a Division meet in Tucson about his Master Model Railroader® adventure, so I decided to start my journey.

Lenny Smith — a friend and long-standing member within the NMRA — also suggested contacting Allan Gross to discuss one of my models. I departed his office with several pages of handwritten notes. Mind you, these were not critical comments but suggestions on how to improve my overall modeling skills. I was getting into kitbuilding, kitbashing, and scratchbuilding. After a couple of these meetings, they confirmed I really liked scratchbuilding and was hooked on structures. Allan's kind words set me off on a structure-building craze.

My neighbor and train buddy, Russ Henzel, had an O-scale layout in Pine,

Arizona, about two hours away. Before I retired, I told Russ, now an NMRA member, that driving to Payson to play trains was a bit of a stretch. I suggested we add onto his house, change scales to HO, and start afresh. After some deliberation, he concurred, and we proceeded with designing his layout. We also learned about the Big E swap meet in Springfield, Massachusetts, from Jim Sacco, an NMRA member and owner of City Classics. Jim mentioned that the Big E was the best, and he was right. Russ and I made several trips over the years to fill out his equipment roster. I added some items to my roster as well!

Over the years, the Arizona Division has played an important part in developing my layout, skills, and friendships. I have held several positions within the Arizona Division, including editor and Division Director. I enjoy sharing my interest in structures with NMRA Division members in Arizona, California, and other states. Recently, I have started presenting clinics on structures to NMRA members, primarily in the Southwest NMRA Division. During COVID, I held a Zoom meeting over four weeks with several Division members in Arizona, California, and Washington who signed up for my class. At the end of four sessions, they all had completed their beautiful models.

My wife has played a key part in this wonderful hobby. Besides painting people, she supported my efforts to achieve my MMR®, build friendships within the hobby, and complete my layout. She loves to show people the layout and gets excited when something like animation is added.

My layout continues to get closer to completion if there is such a thing. It is a pleasure to share what I have learned during this journey with fellow NMRA members and friends. For those interested, this link goes to a YouTube video of my layout in a recent Zoom meeting with fellow NMRA members in Utah: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6dww5M6Cws&t=425s&ab\\_channel=NorthernUtahDivision%2CNMRA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6dww5M6Cws&t=425s&ab_channel=NorthernUtahDivision%2CNMRA)

**Certificates Earned**  
**Frank Baker, MMR® #683**

**Master Builder – Cars**  
**Master Builder – Structures**  
**Master Builder – Scenery**  
**Model Railroad Engineer – Civil**  
**Association Official**  
**Association Volunteer**  
**Model Railroad Author**



DAVID SYDNEY NICHOLSON EARNS  
MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #684

**M**y model railway journey started more than 70 years ago, but not for the usual reasons. Yes, I was introduced to railways by my father and grandfather, and though neither had any real connection with the hobby, they both encouraged my interest. By the time you reach my age, most of those who influence you have regrettably passed to the great engine shed in the sky.

Getting the hidden elephant in the goods shed out into the open, I am severely dyslexic though it was not diagnosed until my early 20s after applying to Southampton University. Numbers, engineering in general, and electronics, in particular, were never a problem for me. In the 1950s, however, unless you were reasonable at English, schoolteachers basically wrote you off as a low achiever, lazy, or even stupid. I, therefore, retreated into something I knew I could do and enjoy: modelmaking. I suppose it was to avoid developing low esteem of myself.

My first railway was a large second-hand Hornby clockwork O-gauge system with three small coaches, some wagons, and two clockwork locomotives with 100 feet of track and five turnouts. The track, I remember, had only three sleepers per length. Apparently, this annoyed me so much that, according to my mother, I made brown paper sleepers to fill the gaps and stuck them to the rails with gum glue at the age of four.

At seven, I persuaded my parents to trade all this in and purchase a pre-loved Hornby-Dublo electric train set, 4mm scale, three-rail system. However, my parents were unaware that it was very worn out, and it turned out to be a very poor runner. My father was a cabinet maker, and electricity was as foreign as you could get to him, so little help was coming from that quarter. A holiday visitor, who I knew as “Uncle Ron,” gently taught me the fundamentals of electricity at the age of eight. Despite my newfound knowledge, the railway still did not function well. In the end, I used the parts to build non-functioning dioramas, and it was from this experience I discovered that I get more pleasure from building scale models than running them!



At the age of 12, my parents sent me to boarding school in an attempt to improve my spelling. It was a miserable experience, but I managed to build a few 4mm scale rolling stock items from the Gem and Airfix kit ranges. Based in Torquay, Devon, I soon found George’s Model Shop.

George, who ran the place, had been invalided out of the Royal Air Force during World War II. At the top of a long hill not far from Babbacombe, his shop had a counter made from old beer crates piled from floor to ceiling with a two-foot-square serving hatch. George paid kind attention to his young customers, and his encouragement was incredible. Whatever you purchased with your Half Crown (12.5p today), he asked you to bring it back and show him when it was finished. The standard of work produced by a few of us was such that he would hand us kits worth up to five or even ten shillings for our half-crown, on condition that we returned it, finished, within a month! He would then give us back our money plus the same again to spend in his shop and provided a lot of free teaching, constructive criticism, and encouragement.

The returned finished kit then went in the window with a price tag of twice what he paid us. He was happy, but more importantly, so were we — his small

group of modelmakers. By the time I left technical college at 18, I had gained considerable experience and skill in assembling white metal, plastic, and card kits, the wiring of motors and pickups, and much more. I was by then regularly building and painting Gem locomotive kits, each worth a few pounds for George and occasionally myself. After I left college, I lost contact with George, but I have never forgotten the generous and encouraging approach he took looking after his young workforce. His eventual passing was a great loss to us all.

In my last year at school, I entered the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and chose to do railway modeling as my hobby pursuit, which was initially refused on the grounds that it was “childish and just playing with trains.” I was so angry that for the first and only time in my life, I wrote a letter to a gentleman I knew of, but had never met, who lived in Seaton, about 12 miles from my home, asking for his help.

His name was Cyril Freezer — the long-serving editor of *Railway Modeller*. He stepped up to the plate, argued the case with the authorities, and won. I was the first person in the DoE award’s long and prestigious history to undertake railway modeling as a real hobby. Cyril then mentored me for the next two-and-a-half

years until I left to start a degree training scheme with the Plessey company near Portsmouth.

Under his tutelage, I built my first 4x8-foot, 3mm scale Great Western layout that included a motive power unit, wagons, and trackwork with hand-built pointwork. The sleepers were painted mounting card, the chairs electrician's brass tacks and solder, the rail was rescued from some old Hornby three-rail trackwork, but it all worked. And I gained a good friend (and my DoE award).

During this time, I became a founding member of the Ex-Model Railway Club. Here a dozen retired old men met in a builders loft every Friday night and tried to teach a sixteen-year-old teenager, who knew it all about model railways. Despite my attitude I learned a great deal and we had a lot of good fun. I made many good friends, sadly now all long gone. They did not judge you by anything other than the models you made and the person you were. Most importantly, I was taught never to judge, only to encourage — and how to drink Shandy!

There was little time for railways during my seven years of training, marriage, and the renovation of our first house. Once I was qualified as an electronic design engineer, I joined EMI, moved to the West Country, and started a family. Another house move and four children later, my youngest son came home one day from infant school clutching an armful of old 16.5mm gauge, OO-HO scale track, donated by his teacher. This sight rekindled the embers of my love for railways, and we started to assemble a layout in the loft. My son soon lost interest and moved on to other distractions, but there was little to stop me from moving forward, and here I am almost 40 years later.

Through our local model shop, I was introduced to a new group of modelers who called themselves the Mendip Model Railway Group (MMRG). Under their influence, I kept the same 4mm scale but changed the gauge to the more accurate P4 and thrived on the kindred company of skilled artisans. In the early 1990s, I became a founding member of the Scale 7 Group (S7), which now has more than 300 members worldwide.

I had finally found a gauge/scale that I was really happy with; S7 met all my wants and needs. I started planning a layout to encompass the two railways that had always interested me: The West

Somerset Mineral Railway and the Lynton & Barnstaple narrow gauge railway, both located on the Blackdown Hills and the edge of Exmoor.

Going back to my 11th birthday, my grandfather had taken me on a field trip to the North Devon and Somerset border. He was 66 then, but together we walked the 11-mile length of the West Somerset mineral railway, including the incline that was in a very poor state of repair by that time. He gave me a copy of Roger Sellick's little red book called *The West Somerset Mineral Railway and the Story of Brendon Hill Iron Mines*, and I still refer to this book to this day, though I now have other supporting reference material.

We then drove down to the village of Lynton, set high on the coastal cliffs of the Severn estuary, where he told me all about the narrow-gauge railway that used to run across the edge of Exmoor and down to the market town of Barnstaple. We agreed we would walk that route the following year; however, he suddenly passed away the next March. Life can be very cruel at times.

Five years on, two old school friends and I walked the 19 miles one furlong and five chains of the trackbed up to Lynton. The beauty and wild nature of the landscape seared its place in my heart, and I vowed I would never forget it, nor that I had been introduced to it by my grandfather, who so clearly loved its solitude.

So it seemed natural when I came back to railway modeling more than 20 years later that my thoughts should turn to this of all railways. My first attempt was to assemble a white metal kit of the American narrow gauge Baldwin locomotive, named Lyn, after the local river. The scale was 4mm, running on hand-made 8mm gauge track, but I was not happy with the running performance. After attending the inaugural S7 meeting in 1990, I switched to modeling in 7mm to the foot with a true 4-foot, 8½-inch track gauge of 33mm.

That same year, I started a company specializing in Servo Control Systems, but that's another story. Suffice to say, this work took me all over the world. In 1995, I became acquainted with a company called ZTC, an early pioneer of DCC in the UK. I was so impressed that I not only bought a controller, but also bought the company a year later.

ZTC Controls traded for 12 years before I retired when I sold the busi-

ness as a going concern. The company did a great deal to promote DCC in the UK. Amongst our many innovations was the introduction, in conjunction with SoundTraxx, of the first DCC sound decoder with English recordings to appear in the UK.

My good friend Rutger Friberg introduced me to the NMRA. Over the following years, I attended several conventions in America, joining DCC working groups in Europe and the USA. Approaching retirement, I investigated the Achievement Program intending to become a Master Model Railroader®. In May 2007, I earned my Master Builder – Motive Power award.

Most of my efforts at this time went into supporting the S7 group. I served on its committee as Technical Officer and later chairman — a post I then held for five years. I have also been chairman of the MMRG for the past 18 years. I started a new national S7 group show, have written many articles for various journals, and have produced and held many DCC, locomotive, and track-building workshops.

My good friend James Lucas, a member of the S7 Group, persuaded me to rejoin the British Region, which in the meantime had become much more open and welcoming to non-American modelers such as myself. This change was important to me because I wanted to pursue the Achievement Program. Keith Webb, Mick Moignard, and Jonathan Small encouraged me to submit my work relating to the various AP modules to gain my MMR®. With their keen assistance, I quickly completed six certificates in a little over a year. Having done most of the modeling work previously, it was largely a matter of collating the required models and documentation. Master Builder – Scenery was my final challenge, and it was good to have that spur to complete a large area of my layout.

My layout, Gupworthy Junction, was planned over a period of 35 years, but actual work on it started as a millennium project in 2000. A house relocation in 2010 meant starting over. (One word of advice: avoid storing model rail baseboards in a sealed shipping container!) Disappointing though that was, it meant I could correct some minor errors that had crept in along the way. The layout is now housed along with my workshop in a purpose-built 40-foot-almost-square building, gifted to me as a retirement present by my wife, June.

The 7mm scale S7 layout is classed as a “might-have-been” and is based on actual proposals presented to Parliament by the two companies, Lynton & Barnstaple Railway and the GWR. The lines were never built, probably due to the cost and difficulty of construction involved through the challenging terrain of North Devon and Somerset. Almost everything on the layout is scratchbuilt, and it will probably take at least another ten years to reach an acceptable stage of completion. (I share the view that layouts are never really completed.) Having completed my MMR®, I have now started on a new challenge: seeking to master 3D CAD, laser-cutting, and printing.

The journey has been long but most enjoyable. There have been some cracks

in the track along the way, but the latest chapter has raced by, especially over the last 12 months. I have been encouraged and assisted by many people along the way, all of whom unstintingly shared their knowledge, expertise, and patience with me. Most of all, none of my railway journey would have been possible without the support of my wife and family. To them and everyone else who has assisted me, I offer my sincere thanks.

In conclusion: over the past 40 years, I have sought to promote the hobby and assist others wherever and whenever I can. I will continue to do so because we are the hobby for now, but those just coming into the fold today are its future. This wonderful, disciplined, and educa-

tional pastime, with so many facets to occupy each one of us, needs new members, and they must be nurtured, helped, and developed, just as we were, or the hobby will perish.

**Certificates Earned**  
**David Sydney Nicholson,**  
**MMR® #684**

**Master Builder – Motive Power**  
**Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical**  
**Master Builder – Structures**  
**Model Railroad Engineer – Civil**  
**Master Builder – Scenery**  
**Master Builder – Cars**  
**Model Railroad Author**

## MMR EARNED

**ALEX BELIDA EARNS**  
**MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #685**

**M**y joy in model railroading dates back to my childhood in the 1950s when my dad was stationed in Germany with the U.S. Air Force. He and my mother bought me my first train set, an HO Trix steam engine and passenger cars that I still have. I purchased several German buildings for a small floor layout, including a Bahnhof (station) and Rathaus (city hall). I still have those as well, although they’re stored away like the Trix and a Fleischmann train set I also got. Maybe someday I’ll try to revive them.

With all our moving around, I never had time to build a real layout. But my interest in model railroading never died. As a teenager in the 1960s, I blew \$25 in savings on an HO brass engine — a PFM United 0-6-0 switcher that I had custom painted — and set up a small, temporary shelf operation. I still have the switcher and occasionally run it.

I kept acquiring little bits and pieces, including some kits whose sticker prices now seem as ridiculously low as the cost of that brass engine. But my career as a newsman, including multiple stints abroad in Europe and Africa for a total of 25 years overseas, coupled with my growing family responsibilities, kept me from building a layout.

I knew it was time when I finally retired several years ago as a senior executive at the U.S. international broadcasting organization, the Voice of America,



and our three grown children moved out, freeing up a bedroom. In 2017, I started my HO-scale Eureka & South Pass Railroad, a name I conjured up as a teenager, and started building.

It’s a modest shelf-style layout, just two feet wide along three walls of a 10x12-foot room, depicting a mining town in Nevada in the late 1890s. But it’s mine! And it led me to the NMRA’s Potomac Division and a host of new acquaintances, who encouraged my involvement in various activities and got me to embark on the skills-building tests of the Achievement Program.

I welcomed the AP challenge because I wanted to improve my modeling, learn new techniques, and expand my skillset. With guidance from our Division’s capable judges, I obtained my Master Builder certificates for Scenery and Structures, two of my favorite aspects of model railroading, in 2019.

But what could I give back? As a retired writer and editor, I first offered to assist in the production of Division’s guide to the 2018 Mid-Eastern Region convention, which Potomac hosted in my hometown of Rockville, Maryland, and I opened my layout for convention visitors.

I had been blogging about my modeling (<https://esprblog.wordpress.com>), but I also started writing for the Division newsletter, *The Potomac Flyer*, and the Mid-Eastern Region newsletter, *The Local*. The benefit of that engagement was that I also earned my Model Railroad Author certificate in 2019. (I even managed to produce an article for the *NMRA MAGAZINE*, “Railroad Reporting – A Former Newsmen’s Approach to Modeling,” published in September 2019.)

That’s when the demanding work began, and the COVID-19 pandemic provided the stay-at-home motivation to press on.

Although some in the NMRA regard it as the most challenging, I first went for and achieved my Master Builder – Prototype Models certificate in 2020. I had built a replica of the old (and no longer in service) Woodsboro, Maryland, depot after one of my sons bought a house about 100 yards away from it. The depot is the home of the local historical society. After prowling through their archival photos and other documents, I decided to create a 2x3-foot module with the depot in the center and an old mill and a warehouse/hardware store across the tracks — just as the scene looked back in 1900. I super-detailed and added a couple of old, weathered PRR freight cars, an RPO, and an ancient 4-4-0 like those that ran on the old Frederick and Pennsylvania route through Woodsboro. I also added a couple of houses, trees and bushes, a dirt road, horse-drawn wagons, workers, and passengers. I have since taken the diorama back to Woodsboro and let the historical society display it for visitors.

Next up was the Master Builder – Cars challenge. My other son introduced me to 3-D printing, which enabled me to use his printers to craft some basic car frames and other parts that I built on with stripwood to create two Denver & Rio Grande Western maintenance-of-way cars, one of which received a Merit Award. I also made two Merit Award-winning 1865 Densmore tank cars, one short and one long. (Those Densmores put me in touch with two kind and helpful veteran MMR®s with the information I needed: Richard Senges, MMR® #483 and Harold Russell, MMR® #14.) The kitbashed and super-detailed vintage LaBelle RPO used in my prototype submission won my fourth Merit Award. I

also submitted two additional scratchbuilt pieces of rolling stock — a log flat car and a well-beaten gondola — and two of the PRR freight car kits used in the Woodsboro diorama. Another success in 2020!

Although I’ve heard others say Cars and Prototype Models are the toughest, my hardest was getting my Civil Engineering certificate in 2021. The requirement for hand-laying track fixtures turned into a real struggle. I’ll admit I almost gave up. But with steady encouragement from my Division’s AP Coordinator, Mat Thompson MMR® #595, I kept at it, analyzing the problems and fixing them one by one until my engines could run freely through the gauntlet, crossover, and turnout I made. Thanks, Mat!

My last certificate, also in 2021, was for Association Volunteer, with points largely earned for my work as Editor of *The Flyer* and as a proofreader-assistant editor for *The Local*. I’ve also conducted clinics to encourage members to write for *The Flyer* and to start blogs and to write layout histories for family and friends. More recently, I was elected to our Division’s Board of Directors.

I have enjoyed engaging with Potomac Division members to get them to write articles and take photos for *The Flyer* — a task made easier by the pandemic that kept so many at home, hard at work on their models. We’ve boosted

our newsletter output from four issues a year to six. We generally run well over 50 pages per issue, highlighting in-person Division activities, our popular virtual clinics, member layout information, modeling projects and tips, and lots of photos.

I’m honored to join the ranks of all those who have earned the MMR® certification since its inception in 1961. But most of all, I am truly grateful for the friendship and support I have received from members of both the Potomac Division and the Mid-Eastern Region, including Division Superintendent and MER Secretary Martin Brechbiel, MMR® #629; Brian Sheron, MMR® #469; John Paganoni, MMR® #615; Ernie Little, MMR® #647, and the late Marshall Abrams, a past Potomac Division Superintendent who was Publisher of *The Flyer* newsletter when I joined the NMRA. I must also give enormous credit to my family. They have cheered me on all the way down the tracks.

**Certificates Earned  
Alex Belida, MMR® #685**

**Model Railroad Author  
Master Builder – Scenery  
Master Builder – Structures  
Master Builder – Prototype Models  
Master Builder – Cars  
Model Railroad Engineer – Civil  
Association Volunteer**



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MAX MAGLIARO EARNS  
MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #686

### On Earning My MMR®

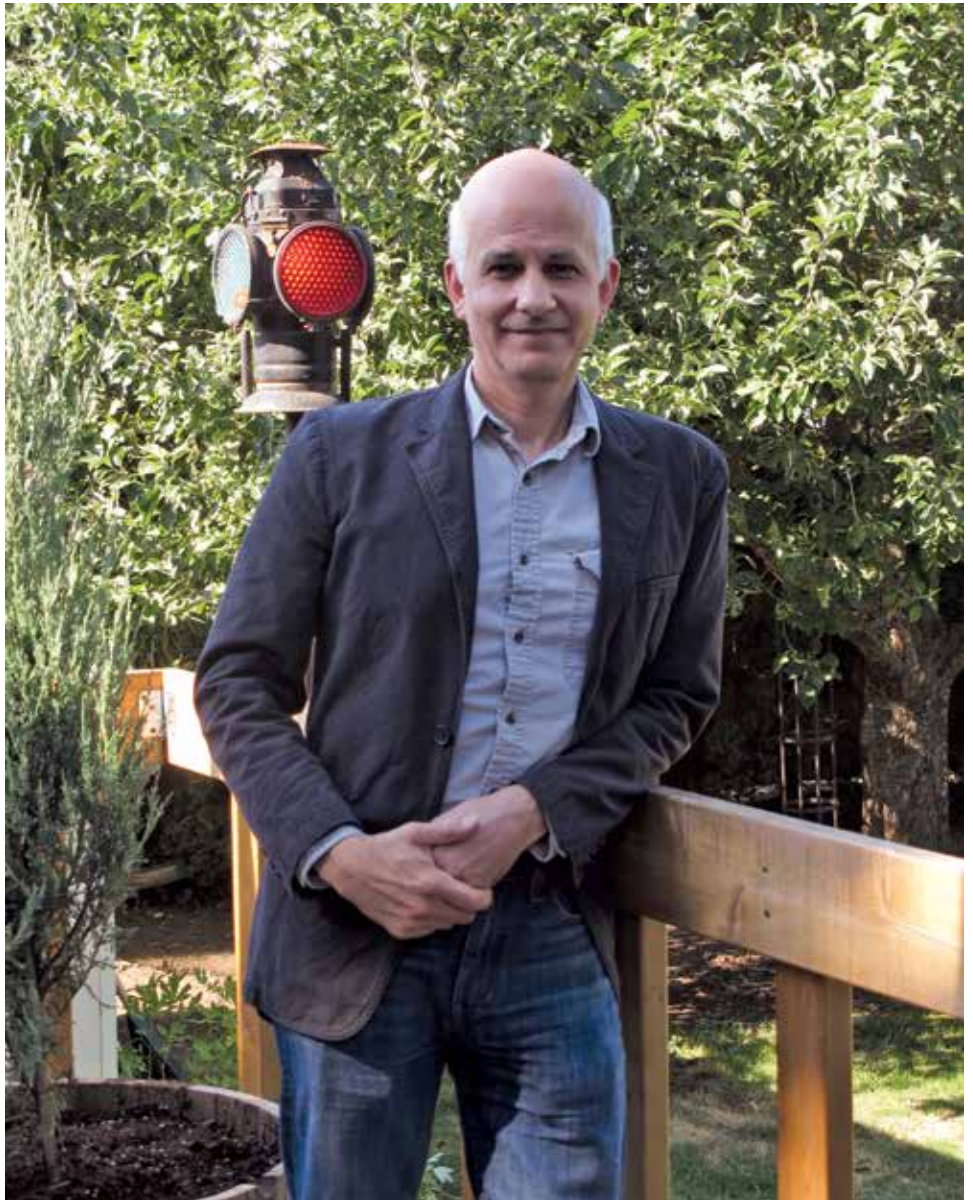
**M**odel railroading has been an important part of my life since I was a 6-year-old playing with a hand-me-down set of Lionel trains. To me, it represents artistic expression, scientific challenge, and striving for personal goals. And, of course, it's just plain fun. My tale meanders through multiple homes, scales, and states. Luckily, I crossed paths with the NMRA along the way.

As a teenager, I graduated through bigger and better HO train sets and basement layouts until the trains went on hiatus when I went away to college. I had no idea what the NMRA was all about back in those days. I would read through the pages of *Model Railroader* magazine, see the layouts and announcements for NMRA conventions, and think, "There's no way I'll ever build anything like that."

After college in the 1980s, I started experimenting with N scale. I had little space in an apartment, and N scale seemed like a good solution to my problem. I discovered I had an aptitude for working in this small scale. My initial experiments grew from a 4x6-foot sheet of plywood with a couple of track loops into a 10x14-foot room layout, part of which followed me when I moved to a house.

In the early 1990s, I decided to try my hand at photographing my models and writing for the model railroad magazines. My initial attempts were very amateurish, but I persevered and eventually published an article in *N Scale Magazine* in 1991. I kept at it, landing articles in *Railroad Model Craftsman* as well. This opened a door to the NMRA that I never expected. A nearby N-scale modeler, Jim Brown, saw my name in the magazines, and invited me to operating sessions. After a few years, our informal group created the new Allegheny Plateau Division (Division 11) of the NMRA Mid-Central Region in 1994.

Our fledgling group visited each others' layouts, had small Division modeling displays and contests, and gradually branched out to put on displays at shopping centers and county fairs. During that same period from 1993–1995, a few of my NMRA Division friends and I went



to the NMRA National Conventions in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; and Atlanta, Georgia. I was enjoying the NMRA social aspects and the exchange of ideas. I even managed to "scrape over the goal line" with a score of 88 to earn my first Merit Award for a kitbashed steam locomotive in 1995. But I was still an enormous leap from that to thinking about something as bold as earning an MMR®. That would require a nudge, which came from a fellow NMRA Division member.

Our Division AP coordinator, Gary Lasher (who is still at MCR Division 11 today), approached me one day about all the articles I had published. I wasn't particularly interested in "awards," nor did I relish filling out forms. But Gary

correctly pointed out that I had already done the hard work of writing all the articles! He helped me fill out the paperwork, and in short order, I had earned my first certificate, Model Railroad Author, in 1997. Many years would pass before I earned another one, but this moment was crucial because I realized achieving an MMR® was possible. Thank you, Gary.

I was raising a family, so beginning in the late 1990s, my involvement with model railroading and the NMRA was spotty. But I did manage to keep building more detailed locomotive models, more realistic structures, and better layouts. My philosophy has always been to just try to build the best models I can, challenging myself to see what I can do. That belief can take you a long way. Don't think

about awards. Don't think about being "first." Just try to do better than the last time. This idea is the very essence of the NMRA Achievement Program, although I didn't realize that at the time.

In 2011, I relocated to Oregon. My old layouts from Pennsylvania were gone, and an entirely new and better one lived in my new home. The thing I most love doing is scratchbuilding steam locomotive models, so I built this layout with the idea that it would be a pretty backdrop for my engines, which would be the "stars." I had crafted a model of a Spokane, Portland & Seattle 4-6-2, and in 2015, the NMRA National came to Portland, Oregon. I re-upped my NMRA membership, attended the convention, entered my locomotive in the model contest, and held my breath. I placed third in the steam locomotive category. Years of practice and watching what other good modelers were doing had paid off!

By 2018, I was more regularly attending my local Pacific Northwest Region Division 2 meetings, and I built an even more precise, entirely scratchbuilt, steam locomotive model: an all-brass 0-6-0. I attended the convention in Kansas City and tried the AP contest again. I felt like I had a strong entry, but I think my wife, Cari, had more faith in it than I did. When the time came for the award ceremony, we found the right room at the convention hotel, and she plunked us down in the front row and said to me, "I know you're going to win. I want to get a good picture." It's wonderful to have people like that in your corner. And she was right. I won first place in locomotives. At this point, once again, other NMRA members intervened, in a good way, on my behalf.

With the locomotive scores from 2015 and 2018, I qualified for the Motive Power certificate, but I was not thinking beyond that. Two fellow Division members, Ross Ames and Gary Lee, both MMR<sup>®</sup>s themselves, encouraged me in the same way Gary Lasher had done back in the 1990s. They told me that they thought I would probably qualify for other AP certificates if they saw my layout and my other models. I wasn't so sure, but I was happy to have them over to look.

I had been putting off two layout projects: super-detailing some of my favorite structures and adding an independent throttle to a yard area. Knowing

these projects would also be key features for AP certifications, I decided I may as well get them done before Ross and Gary came to judge my layout. For somebody like me, who had always said, "I'm not going to go building things just to win awards," I had to admit that trying to raise my models to some of the AP standards had gotten me to complete projects, improve my models, and make my layout better.

Well, Gary and Lee were right. Their encouragement gave my trip to the MMR<sup>®</sup> a kick forward. I qualified for Scenery, Electrical, and Structures. With the Motive Power category I had recently finished, and the Author category from years ago, I suddenly found myself with five of the required seven certificates for an MMR<sup>®</sup>.

Having gone through two long locomotive projects in a row left me wanting to do "something else" for a while. I had toyed with doing some SP&S logging cars and a Northern Pacific radial roof boxcar for my freelanced Pacific Northwest-themed layout. And since "Cars" was one AP category I didn't have, this seemed like a natural fit. I would build something I had been wanting, and it might get me another step toward the MMR<sup>®</sup>. By November 2019, I had finished them and scored high enough to earn my sixth certificate.

I saw that the most sensible path to finishing my MMR<sup>®</sup> was to complete the Civil category. My layout already met all the qualifications except for the required three pieces of scratchbuilt trackwork. My local NMRA Division Superintendent, Jeff Schultz, and Ross Ames (our AP facilitator) had acquired Fast Tracks N-scale turnout jigs and tools that could be loaned out to Division members to work on their layouts and AP certifications. At one Division meeting, Ross approached me with a very heavy bag and handed it to me. Inside it were all the Fast Tracks tools. He wasn't going to let me make any more excuses.

One would think by this point, after 25-plus years and six categories down, that I would just dive in and "get this thing done already," especially since this was right in the middle of the COVID pandemic when we were all shut in at home anyway. I got encouraging emails from Ross and Regional AP Chairman Jack Hamilton, MMR<sup>®</sup>. Then fate inter-

vened for the final push. A curved commercial turnout had plagued my layout since the day I installed it — always requiring adjusting, shimming, and repairs. I had always intended to replace it with a scratchbuilt one that would be much more reliable. The darn thing acted up again, and that was my "last straw." I ordered a Fast Tracks curved turnout jig, and using that and the point and frog tools provided to me from my Division, I finished off a nice replacement in about a week. Quick on the heels of discovering that scratchbuilt trackwork wasn't so bad after all, I made a spring switch and a crossing. At long last, on May 15, 2021, I completed the qualifications for my Civil AP category and MMR<sup>®</sup>.

I have learned much about model railroading, about myself, and about the people who support the NMRA AP. First, they all want you to succeed! I got this message loud and clear from NMRA National Contest Chairs Bob Hamm, MMR<sup>®</sup>, and his successor, Bill Brown, MMR<sup>®</sup>, when I spoke to them at National Model Contests. And I saw it in the people at my NMRA Divisions, both in Pennsylvania and Oregon, who tugged, pushed, pulled, and encouraged me to keep going.

The second thing I learned is that the NMRA Achievement Program is not just about awards. Getting an award is always a nice pat on the back. But at every step, I had to admit that despite myself, striving to meet the AP criteria was causing me to learn, improve, and make models that were more accurate and more beautiful. So, in addition to a heartfelt "thank you" to all the people I have mentioned in this story, I want to close by repeating what I said earlier, and what I wish every modeler would take away about the NMRA and the AP because, for me, this is what meant the most to me and what made me a better model railroader: Just try to do better than the last time.

**Certificates Earned**  
**Max Magliaro, MMR<sup>®</sup> #686**  
**Model Railroad Author**  
**Master Builder – Motive Power**  
**Master Builder – Cars**  
**Master Builder – Structures**  
**Master Builder – Scenery**  
**Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical**  
**Model Railroad Engineer – Civil**

**KEN NELSON EARNS  
MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #688**

On Christmas Eve, when I was eight years old, my father and “Uncle Pete” made sure I was asleep and then built a 4x8 table with a circle of track on it in HO gauge, which ran around the Christmas tree. This was my first train, and unlike so many other model railroaders who got started with Lionel Trains, I got my baptism in the size I would stay with for the rest of my life.

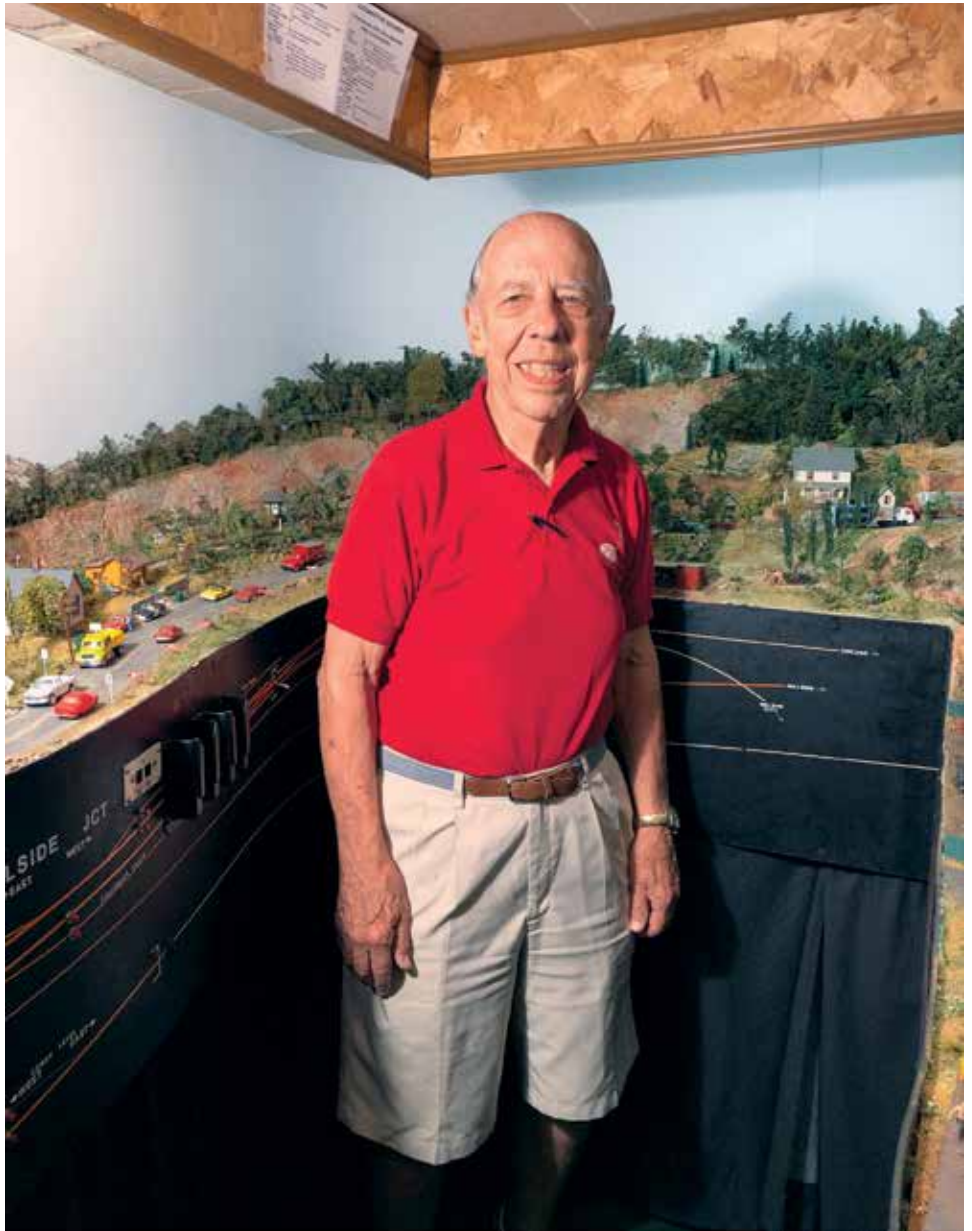
Uncle Pete was neither an uncle nor a Pete, but a family friend whose name was Paul Chambers. He worked for the Mantua Metal Products Company in New Jersey. While my parents completely supported my love of anything that ran on rails, neither knew much about trains. Whenever I had a question about the railroad, I would be on the phone with Uncle Pete.

And as an eight-year-old, I had a lot of questions. “How fast does a train go? What is the proper order to place cars in a train? Do all the box, or tank, or hopper cars go together, or can they be mixed up?” Uncle Pete always knew the answer to all these questions and hundreds of others.

My first engine was an HO American Flyer 4-8-4 steamer, which ran on AC and was powered with a transformer that my dad had built. He worked for RCA Victor and knew a lot about electronics. It could not back up, but nobody cared; I had my train. Tru Scale wood roadbed supported hand-laid brass track that guided several freight cars, all Mantua, of course, and all with hook and loop couplers.

When the holidays were over, the layout was taken to the basement. Over the next few years, several turnouts and more track were added. After receiving a Mantua Pacific, a power pack was purchased that would run DC locomotives.

Of course, high school, college, and girls consumed a lot of hours, but I never gave up trying to find time here or there to run my railroad and learn more about trains. I rode on a Reading Rambler through Pennsylvania behind steam and loved every minute of it. In college, I met my wife Barbara and was very happy to find that she also liked trains. She had had a boyfriend in high school who loved the



railroad, and they had ridden on several Reading Rambles together. We may have been on the same train, completely unaware of each other.

After college graduation, we married, and our first home was a four-room apartment in Pennsylvania. The fourth room held a sewing machine for Barb and a train layout for me. One day, while working on scenery, she came in and said, “Oh, look at the little valley.” Now, I had been trying to pick a name for the railroad, and since both of us were musicians, the word “poco,” meaning “little,” came to mind. Poco is a word used in music as a direction to tell the performer how the music is to be played: a little louder or a little slower. We named the

railroad the “Poco Valley.” After 60 years and four different layouts, it still has the same name.

A friend and I visited the New Hope & Ivyland Railroad with the hope of getting a ride in the cab of their steam engine. Instead, the superintendent told me they were looking for help, and soon I was offered a part-time position. As a teacher with a growing family, I accepted. He pointed out that people who worked for the railroad could ride the cab every day. Since they had no union or brotherhood, I was instructed in many different duties. I would sweep out dirty coaches one day and be a brakeman the next. I learned to fire a steam engine, how to make a brake test, and the duties of a conductor.

Every Saturday night, we would pull a mixed train with a coach behind a number of freight cars and run to Ivyland to interchange with the Reading, switching a few industries along the way. One such evening, I was given my first opportunity to be a conductor. Fortunately, I had a good engineer who helped me along the way, and the night was successful. As time went by, I even got to paint a prototype ten-wheeler, No. 1533. The railroad still runs today, but unfortunately, 1533 is in the shop for repairs the railroad can't afford.

While living in Pennsylvania, model railroads were built in several houses, but in 1967, we moved to New York state. I hated leaving the NH&I, but since a part-time job was also needed in New York, I soon worked in the summer for the Delaware & Hudson as a fireman. In the five years I worked for them, I qualified as a passenger fireman and a hostler. I got to run RS-3s, Centuries, and PAs, and I will never forget all I learned on the D&H.

By now, we had three children who all enjoyed helping me run the railroad and who, with my help, built a railroad of their own. In addition, I was fortunate to find the time, in short spurts, to build another version of the Poco Valley and to write an article about it which was published in *Railroad Model Craftsman*. I have always freelanced because it gives me the freedom to do what I want. No prototype was found that did everything or had all the equipment I have learned to love. No one can tell me my railroad never had RDC cars, ran a Chesapeake & Ohio Allegheny, and operated both steam and diesel engines that far into the 1960s.

As I continued teaching music and serving my church as the Director of Music for 38 years, I completed my second Poco Valley in New York state. I wrote an article about it for *Model Railroader* magazine and later completed several articles for *RMC* and the *NMRA BULLETIN*. About this time, I became interested in NMRA's Achievement Program. I had joined the Hudson Berkshire Division and served as its president for several years, which made it possible to earn the Association Volunteer Certificate. I also wrote a monthly column for the newsletter, *Form 19*, and this, together with the articles I had written on the Poco Valley for *RMC* and *MR*, earned me my Author Certificate. Since the PV had hosted operating sessions for several years, I quickly

did the paperwork and became a Chief Dispatcher. My certificate for Scenery came soon thereafter. This certificate was followed the same year with earning the Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical certificate. I was told that if I wanted to earn the Golden Spike Award, it would have to be done before becoming an MMR®, so two NMRA officers were invited over to see my railroad, and they indicated I had already met the requirements. I had my Golden Spike and was moving along toward the ultimate prize: Master Model Railroader®.

In my mind, I looked forward to smooth track ahead, but in reality, it turned out to be a bumpy ride with a lot of roadblocks. Several scratchbuilt structures had already been built and were entered into contests at various NMRA conventions. Each time the judges would suggest things that would bring the model up to "Merit" status. The models would be carried home where I would carefully follow each suggestion, only to haul them to another convention and still not make "Merit." One structure was judged, several tips were offered to bring it up in score, and after I spent hours following each tip, the next convention earned me an even lower score. Needless to say, I was becoming both discouraged and frustrated.

Meanwhile, I joined the Adirondack Live Steamers, began helping a close friend fire his steam engine, and the two of us visited several other clubs, running his engine and giving rides to others. I got the opportunity to learn how to lay track in this scale, ballast it, build and wire signals, and soon became the editor of their newsletter, *Whistles in the Woods*. I purchased my own locomotive and a few cars and started having operating sessions on ALS trackage. Having the opportunity to actually ride the train you are operating makes a huge difference. We now run three prototype operation sessions per year at ALS, and they have become very popular.

After writing the book, *The Story Behind the Poco Valley Railroad*, I tried again to work for my MMR®. The judges came to my home this time since two of the structures were bridges that could not be transported very easily. After two visits, I finally earned my Certificate for Master Builder – Structures. This one had taken 12 years. I counted the number of cars I had scratchbuilt and realized several

more would be needed. Visitors to my railroad would occasionally make positive comments on some of the models I had scratchbuilt, which boosted my confidence. So I built several more cars and eventually took them to contests. The same thing happened that had been experienced before. I would carefully follow the judge's suggestions, but it was never enough. One car was awarded first place in the People's Choice Award in two different conventions but did not earn Merit. Again, disappointment took over, and I gave up for a time.

Then the COVID pandemic hit, conventions were canceled, and it became questionable if I would ever get my last certificate. Finally, with the help of several judges from Florida and two in New York, I earned my last Certificate: Model Builder – Cars.

I know that judging by its very nature has to be subjective, but there were many times when I felt that the subjectivity went a bit too far. One judge tried to tell me that "all pipe transported on a railroad is green." Having worked for two railroads, I knew this was not true, so I just ignored it. I did find that if you can have the same two judges evaluate your models each time, they will not disagree with themselves, and you will make progress faster.

Having been a member of the NMRA for more than 30 years, I can honestly say that my membership and activity in this organization have provided me with many years of fun, educational offerings, opportunities to serve, new friends to acquire, and, at times, some frustration. I do think that the first four greatly outnumber the fifth. Perhaps the most important thing the NMRA has done for me is providing the opportunity to make many friends. In my opinion, model railroading should never be a solo activity. There is too much fun to have with others.

**Certificates Earned**  
**Kenneth R. Nelson, MMR® 688**  
**Model Railroad Author**  
**Association Volunteer**  
**Chief Dispatcher**  
**Model Railroad Engineer - Electrical**  
**Master Builder - Scenery**  
**Master Builder - Structures**  
**Master Builder - Cars**