

NMRA BULLETIN

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2023 NMRA National Convention Dates and National Train Show Reservations:
Dallas, Texas August 20 – 26, 2023 (<https://www.2023texasexpress.com/>)
Train Show Booth Reservations—Jenny Hendricks Registrar - P.O. Box 1328, Soddy Daisy, TN 37384-1328
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• 2024—Long Beach, California

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ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

NMRA AP CERTIFICATE REPORT NOVEMBER 2022 GOLDEN SPIKE

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Jadon Wilson, Dustin, Arkansas

Pacific Northwest Region

Doug MacDonald, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Jim McKay, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Sunshine Region

Frank Pecere, Vero Beach, Florida

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Niagara Frontier Region

Tony Kerr, Oakville, Ontario, Canada

MASTER BUILDER - STRUCTURES

Mid-Central Region

Donald Cipolla, Hurricane, West Virginia

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Rich Mossholder, Santa Rosa, California

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Robert Jekel, Kennewick, Washington

Pacific Southwest Region

Carl Heimberger, Corona, California

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Mid-Central Region

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Stan White, Louisville, Kentucky

Midwest Region

Thomas Cain, Indianapolis, Indiana

North Central Region

John Hanske, Syracuse Indiana

Pacific Northwest Region

Robert Jekel, Kennewick, Washington

Pacific Southwest Region

Carl Heimberger, Corona, California

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Lone Star Region

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Mid-Eastern Region

Christopher Conaway, Moorestown, New Jersey

John Griffith, Lorton, Virginia

Pacific Northwest Region

Robert Jekel, Kennewick, Washington

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Mid-Central Region

Jim Heary, St. Marys, Pennsylvania

Pacific Northwest Region

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Patrick Williams, Pasco, Washington

Pacific Southwest Region

Harold Helland, Rancho Mission Viejo, California

Rocky Mountain Region

Robert Rothgery, Aurora, Colorado

Larry Stephens, Thornton, Colorado

MODEL RAILROAD AUTHOR

Midwest Region

Robert Hanmer, Glenview, Illinois

Niagara Frontier Region

Ron Guttman, Thornhill, Ontario, Canada

Pacific Coast Region

Jon Schmidt, San Rafael, California

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER®

MMR® #722 Gary Reynolds, East Amherst, New York

MMR® #723 John Griffith, Lorton, Virginia

MMR® #724 Christopher Conaway, Moorestown, New Jersey

MMR® #725 Marc LaChey, Richardson, Texas

AP QUESTIONS: If you have questions about the AP program or requirements, start with your local or Region. If you still have questions, contact Frank Koch at fjkoch@hotmail.com.

RICHARD STEINMANN

EARNs

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #719

Like many others, my model railroad journey began with my dad's Lionel train set. He had it when he was growing up, and for my first Christmas, he bought me (at seven months old) a new engine and some cars to add to the fleet. Since we lived in an apartment, the trains only came out to run around the Christmas tree.

Once we moved to our first house in New Jersey, my dad built our first permanent layout. It had to fit in a very dark basement under the oil tank, but it was great! It had a working crossing gate and a milk unloading platform. Just before we moved again, I discovered HO scale and the fact that more trains would fit. A trip to E.J. Korvette (one of the first discount stores in the New York area) resulted in a small HO set, which, of course, had to include one of those rubber-band-drive Athearn switchers. We converted the 4x8 layout to a simple HO loop, and the Lionel trains returned to their boxes again to come out only at Christmas.

We moved to Morris Plains, New Jersey, to a newly built house with a much more commodious basement. Dad and I soon found a copy of Linn Westcott's "HO Railroad That Grows," and we worked through all the steps in the book. In late 1963, I got my first copy of *Model Railroader*, which really expanded my horizons. I still have every copy of *MR* from then forward. I just can't part with the old paper, even if it takes up a good chunk of shelf space under my current layout. I have great memories of hard-shell scenery (still not sure how to get all the balls of newspaper out from under the mountain once the plaster sets) and zip texturing. The railroad was named the Parker and Watnong Valley (P&WV). I made up the name Watnong Valley since Watnong Creek flowed through Morris Plains, and Parker is a small town west of Chester, New Jersey. Much later, and to my surprise, I discovered that my totally fictional road followed the long-lost Rockaway Valley Railroad route.

In 1966, my family and I spent a summer in Switzerland. The strong dollar and a healthy dose of Swiss train travel re-



sulted in purchasing a whole bunch of Fleischmann trains and a love of heavy electric railroading. When we got back, the Vollmer catenary got added to the railroad. How a little suburban short line in Northern New Jersey ended up operating European electric equipment is left to the imagination.

As with others, college soon interrupted progress on my layout. However, modeling continued at the Lehigh University Model Railroad Club. We had a small layout in the basement of a classroom building. Progress was slow as things (such as studying) got in the way.

After college and graduate school, I moved to Northern Virginia. Living in an apartment limited how much modeling I could do. However, I found time and space to put together a circle of plywood modules, which rested on the floor around my bed. Somehow, this didn't scare off my future wife when she came to visit. A move to a townhouse produced a spare bedroom, and I began working on a small layout. This time I decided to return to an American prototype, and the European equipment went back into boxes. But another move to a single-family house halted progress on that layout and the start of another one. Once again, there was a spare bedroom. But then came children, and progress slowed to a crawl. There is just so much

to do when you have kids, like school events, kids' sports, etc., that there just wasn't time for modeling. My kids did get to play with Brio wooden trains. Sadly, the railroading bug never took with them.

A move in 1989 presented the best opportunity for a good-sized layout. I started in what had been the basement workshop of the previous owner. I decided to highlight my hometown, Morris Plains, which allowed me to focus on the Erie-Lackawanna as my prototype. I also decided to model the early 1960s, just after the Erie and Delaware, Lackawanna & Western merger in 1960. Having a specific prototype and model date helped me focus my model shopping. That way, I wasn't tempted by all the wonderful new models being released! The design was basically a large, folded loop with a double-track main line and minimal staging. At the time, I had only a cursory idea about operations, and I was pretty much a lone wolf modeler. The layout was primarily for my enjoyment and to replicate some places I remembered from my high school days.

In the mid-1980s, I met Doug Gurin, who happened to work in the same building I did. He was just starting the Layout Design Special Interest Group. I helped set up the original mailing list and managed the circulation of the LDSIG publications for quite a few years. Doug

introduced me to several other modelers in the area, including Paul Dolkos. I got a chance to operate on his beautiful Boston & Maine Railroad, which introduced me to a whole new world of model railroad operations. Conversations with Steve King about Timetable & Train Order operation also piqued my interest. I also became more active in the Dixie Division (now Potomac Division) and Mid-Eastern Region of the NMRA. Slowly but surely, I made more local contacts and began to operate more frequently on their layouts.

Since my children were still at home, progress on my Erie Lackawanna Morris and Essex Division was slow but steady. By the early 2000s, I became more and more active in operations. Mat Thompson, MMR[®], started a round-robin group among local operators. Each month, one of the layouts would be open for a session on a Saturday morning. Over the years, the group has expanded, and there are sessions on two Saturdays per month. I also joined the Operations Special Interest Group to provide more inspiration for my operations.

These sessions made it clear that I needed to improve my layout to accommodate operations better. I began to see how to expand into the remaining unfinished basement area. The first iteration added a new staging area. That soon got converted into a model of Wharton, New Jersey, as the staging area shifted into the area around the furnace. While the track arrangement for Wharton is based on the prototype, Wells on Paul Dolkos' Boston & Maine inspired the idea of a large switching district. Then things really got moving when my son finished college and my daughter's interests no longer involved using the basement playroom. I expanded into that space — essentially, the whole basement was mine! The design of the new section was inspired by the layout of the late Bob Warren, who showed me how much could be done with simple layout construction techniques. Information from the Erie Lackawanna Historical Society helped me ground my layout in the prototype.

I continued to make slow progress on the railroad. Then, in late 2019, at one of our round-robin group operating sessions on my railroad, Mat Thompson, MMR[®], the Potomac Division AP Chair, noted I could get pretty far along toward

Master Model Railroader[®] just from what I had already accomplished on the railroad. Then came COVID-19. While that put a damper on our operating group, it allowed for more progress on the railroad.

By the end of 2020, I was ready. I started with completing the documentation for Master Builder-Scenery. I picked the Morris Plains and Morristown scene and put together a description with pictures showing what I had done on my railroad, together with prototype photos. Next came Model Railroad Engineer-Civil. Since I had handlaid some of the track in Wharton, I had in place all the track structures I needed. And I already had a track plan in hand. What needed to be done was just documentation describing the required elements. Then came Model Railroad Engineer-Electrical. While I initially wired the railroad for DC block control, I later rewired the railroad for Digitrax DCC. Documentation involved developing a circuit diagram and describing how the railroad and required elements were wired. Chief Dispatcher was a little more complicated. While I had put together my own operating scheme and operated on many railroads and dispatched on a few, I really did not have much in the way of records of those operator hours. Here is where my friend Bob Rodriguez, MMR[®], was invaluable. By June 2021, he had started remote operations over the internet on his Nickel City Lines. I participated in quite a few of his remote sessions, including remotely dispatching using his CTC system over Team Viewer. His meticulous documentation and some of my own provided what I needed. By early 2021, the pandemic had eased sufficiently that a judging team could visit and confirm I had done what was necessary. I now had four of the seven certificates.

I got another hint from Mat Thompson, MMR[®], who noted that since I had scratchbuilt or kitbashed quite a few of the structures on my railroad, I probably had what was needed for Master Builder-Structures. After making some improvements to some of my models, I put together the documentation and had another visit from a judging team. I achieved that certificate in early 2022.

Then came Master Builder-Cars. While I had put together, detailed, and weathered many craftsman-level kits, I

had never scratchbuilt a car. Here again, Mat Thompson, MMR[®], was invaluable. He provided encouragement and suggestions that got me started. The best part about it was working alongside Pete LaGuardia, MMR[®], and Bob Rodriguez, MMR[®], to keep things moving. We gave each other hints and ideas and kept each other motivated. Finally, by September 2022, things were ready. Another judging team from the Division evaluated the cars. Fortunately for my nerves, I was out of town at the time. But I had done enough and received the certificate.

While I was putting all this documentation together, it dawned on me that I have plenty of the material necessary to put together a website <https://richardsteinmann.wixsite.com/elrr-m-and-e-div> and some articles for the *Potomac Division Flyer* and *Mid-Eastern Region Local*. The first of these was published in the June-July 2022 *Flyer* and even got a shout-out in the *NMRA MAGAZINE*: <https://www.nmra.org/sites/default/files/sr202208-hometown.pdf>. My work in 2022 was enough to qualify for the Model Railroad Author Certificate and complete the requirements for Master Model Railroader[®].

I must reiterate my thanks to folks such as Doug Gurin, Paul Dolkos, Steve King, the late Bob Warren, Mat Thompson, MMR[®], Pete LaGuardia, MMR[®], and Bob Rodriguez, MMR[®]. Without their inspiration and support, I would never have achieved this goal. There are others I haven't named but they were also instrumental in various ways, and they also have my thanks.

Certificates Earned Richard Steinmann, MMR[®] #719

Master Builder - Scenery
Master Builder - Structures
Master Builder - Cars
Chief Dispatcher
Model Railroad Author
Model Railroad Engineer - Electrical
Model Railroad Engineer - Civil

GARY REYNOLDS

EARNs

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #722

Like many model railroaders, I had a Lionel train set in my younger years. Although this kept me extremely busy and happy during elementary school, I got out of the hobby during middle and high school. In 1965, I graduated and went to college. I was strongly influenced by JFK's push for technology and putting a man on the moon. I was very career-focused and graduated in 1972 with a Ph.D. in engineering; and, yes, I was one of those guys who actually carried a slide rule on my hip.

During my 20s and 30s, I was career-oriented. Like many tech engineers, I worked 60-plus hours per week and partied on the weekends. Several major things happened in the mid-1990s that significantly changed my life. I met Matt Bierl, who got me building craftsman kits and talked me into joining the NMRA so we could attend a few conferences. I even entered a modeling contest and won a merit award, but at that time, I had no idea what that meant. More importantly, however, I met my soul mate, got married, and moved into a new house.

My professional career was picking up, and they had me traveling worldwide. I drifted away from the NMRA, but Matt and I continued to meet whenever I had time to continue to build Fine Scale Model kits, and I even started a layout.

In 2009, I finally retired from work and started two major activities to keep me busy. First, I joined Habitat for Humanity and became the chief electrician coordinating all electrical work on their houses. Second and more important to this article, I focused on my layout. I continued to attend any train show in the area, and it was in Syracuse that I met someone who would become instrumental in my train life. I was waiting for a clinic to begin and started talking to a guy standing next to me. He was Andy MacVie, and it turned out he lived only a few miles from my house. We arranged to visit each other's home layouts and attended several Fine Scale Modeler Expos together.

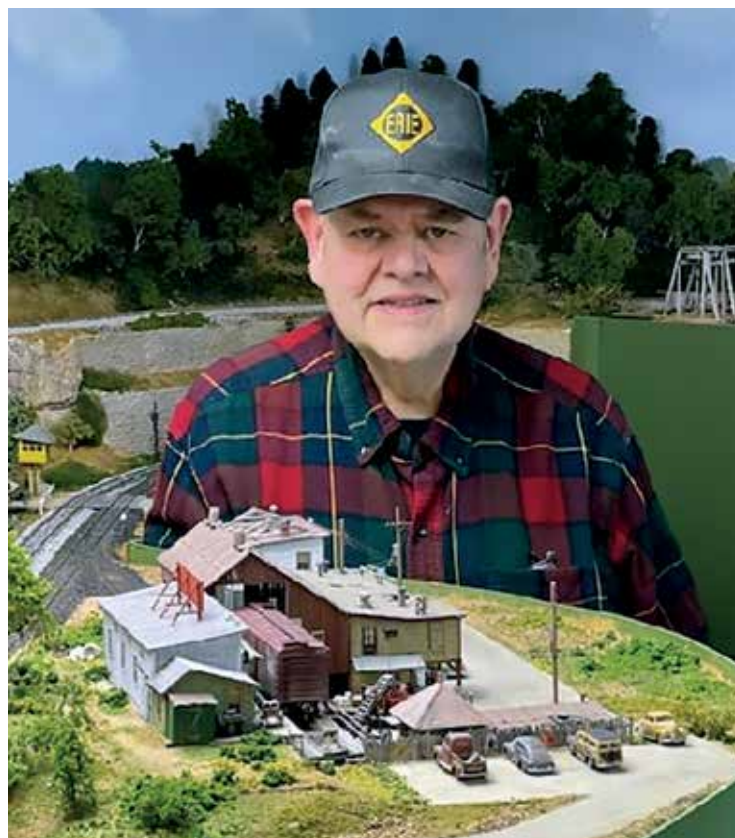
One day I received a call from Andy, who said that he and Frank Pastore were

rebuilding the NMRA Division in our area and wanted me to be a part of it. At that time, the NMRA in western New York was part of the International Division of the Niagara Frontier Region. We were the only part in the United States; the rest of the region was Canadian. Once COVID hit, travel to and from Canada was banned. The railroaders in western New York felt like orphans and were not active in the NMRA. Andy had me rejoin the

NMRA and worked hard to make us an independent Division of the Niagara Frontier Region. In 2020, we became our own Division (the Western New York Division), and Andy was our first Superintendent. Andy quickly made me the Achievement Program (AP) chairman.

I was honored, but remember, I was out of the NMRA for a while and did not know what the AP chairman was supposed to do. I quickly found out that the divisional chairman reports to the regional chairman. I contacted Richard Hatton, who was not only the regional AP chairman, but also the regional president. Richard was very helpful in not only explaining my duties, supplying me with appropriate documentation, and setting me up with a communication channel for submitting certificate applications.

Even though we are a small Division (only two counties in New York), we became very active with monthly Zoom meetings, which included clinics and actively recruiting new members. We also partnered with our neighboring Division, Lakeshore (Rochester and part of the Northeastern Region) and Division 12 (Erie, Pennsylvania, and part of the Mid-Central Region).



Since travel between the US and Canada was banned, I could not use any judges in our Region to qualify me for any AP certificates. In discussing this situation with Richard Hatton, he said I could use judges from our neighbor Division even though they were in other Regions. I decided to attend a few Divisional meetings in Rochester (Lakeshore Division). They were still meeting despite COVID (meetings were held outside with masks and a six-foot distance between people). It was here I met Ned Spiller, their AP chairman. He was extremely helpful, taught me a lot, and became my mentor for all things concerning the Achievement Program.

I decided to go for AP Electrical and AP Scenery right away. I had complete electrical documentation for my layout. Since I had pretty much completed my layout, picking an area for the scenery requirements was fairly easy. All I had to do was a little writing, and I was on my way. Ned picked up two other judges from Lakeshore and drove two hours to my house to qualify me for these certificates, which I received in 2020.

Next, I decided to apply for AP Structure and AP Cars. Structures was

easy since I had a lot of highly detailed craftsman kits on the layout. AP cars, however, presented a slight problem. I built many plastic cars but never scratchbuilt one. Ned suggested I get a few LaBelle car kits because they would show me how to build a car. As a good student, I followed his advice and decided to scratchbuild a ten-car circus train. That should give me enough to qualify for the certificate. I was concerned about what to include to make them super-detailed. I turned to my mentor Ned again, and he suggested that I add a brake system, grab irons, and cut levers.

However, I made a big mistake in constructing the cars. You see, I didn't know what cut levers were at the time. A search on the internet indicated they were used to uncouple the cars. I even saw a few pictures, so I figured I could make them for my cars. Unfortunately, I mounted them on the wrong side of the couplers. Who knew there was a correct side? (I guess everyone except me.)

Over the last year, Ned taught me how to judge, which was very helpful when constructing any model since you know what the judges are looking for during an evaluation. He also indicated the judges only award points for things well done. They never deduct points for bad workmanship or mistakes. Ned and a few other Lakeshore judges drove two hours to my house again to qualify my structures and cars. Fortunately, I had enough positive points to allow me to qualify. So, in 2021 I was certified in both AP Structures and AP Cars.

COVID was still in full swing, and everything seemed to be closed down. Many people were getting antsy about staying home. Not me; I was in my glory, sheltering in my basement every day and working on my trains. I thought I would give AP Civil a shot. The paperwork was straightforward: I had to scratchbuild a few switches and a crossover. After watching the Fast Tracks videos several times, I got the gist of constructing these items. After a few false starts, I got the hang of it and built a small switching setup. This time I drove to Ned's house in the latter part of 2021 for an operating session and had him qualify me for AP Civil.

I knew I needed one certificate in the service category, but I felt the AP Associate and AP Volunteer certificates

would take too long. Since I was on a fast track to receive my MMR, I decided to try for AP Author. I wrote an article on how I constructed my circus train. Ned, my mentor, said to include a lot of pictures to maximize points earned. I included CAD drawings of the cars and details on how each was built. I even added circus train trivia to round out what I thought was a great article. I submitted it to several national magazines since I knew this would maximize the points needed to obtain this certificate. Everyone rejected my article. I was heartbroken, especially since I really wanted to publish it in the NMRA Magazine. To be honest, the pictures were not of the best quality, but I tried. I did receive a letter from Cinthia Priest suggesting I try my Divisional or Region newsletter. Taking her advice, I cleaned up the pictures the best I could and submitted the article to the Niagara Frontier newsletter. Not only did the editor like the article, but he asked if I had any more he could use. By September 2022, I had enough points for the Author certificate.

I started working on the AP Dispatcher certificate back in 2020. All the paperwork was done; I only needed to put in more hours running trains. You guessed it — when COVID hit, all operating sessions stopped. As luck would have it, part of my job as AP Chairman

was visiting my Division's layouts to see if anyone qualified for a Golden Spike Certificate. Doing so is how I met Gary Pagels. He mentioned he was part of a weekly round-robin group, and I asked if I could attend one of their operating sessions. I met the other guys in his group and had a great time, so I invited them to my layout for a session. In addition to Gary Pagels, Joe Kubic and Borys Sharvan showed up and invited me to join their group. With running trains every week, it didn't take long to accumulate the hours required. By the end of 2022, I earned the Dispatcher certificate.

I am extremely thankful to Andy MacVie for getting me back into the NMRA, and to Ned Spiller for guiding me through the Achievement Program. Through these two people, I have made several new friends and have become an active member of a great Division, the Western New York Division of the Niagara Frontier Region of the NMRA.

Certificates Earned Gary Reynolds, MMR® #722

**Model Railroad Engineer - Electrical
Master Builder - Scenery
Master Builder - Cars
Master Builder - Structures
Model Railroad Engineer - Civil
Model Railroad Author
Chief Dispatcher**

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JOHN GRIFFITH

EARNS

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #723

I guess I got hooked on trains riding the switcher in the yards in Great Bend, Kansas. Both my parents worked for Santa Fe. The engine was huge, dirty, and smelly. I was allowed to blow the whistle and ring the bell under the supervision of the engineer. What wasn't to like for a kid? The following Christmas, Santa brought me my first train set; you know the story from there.

Dad built a 4x8 table in the garage for my trains. I laid and wired track, then added some scenery and structures. It wasn't more than an oval with a couple of sidings and never really got finished. Then Virgil Spangler introduced me to model airplanes. What does that have to do with trains, you ask? Over a period of years, he taught me so much about quality workmanship that has been put to use throughout my lifetime.

Then "life got in the way." Cars, girls, high school graduation, and getting drafted left no room for airplanes or trains. I discovered I enjoyed the Army, and 24 years later, of which eight were overseas, two of which I spent in Vietnam, I retired. I found a position in Northern Virginia, basically doing what I had been doing in the Army. But my wife Barbara became sick during our last tour in Japan and required care. Other than work acquaintances, I had few friends and no real interests; something was missing.

Model railroading saved my life. My health wasn't good, and I needed an escape from what was happening. I went to a local train show and was introduced to a new hobby shop owner, Doc Thatcher. It was a friendly, well-stocked place, and the staff was informative and supportive. I hadn't built any models since high school, but I tried building a couple of structures from scratch. I took them to the hobby shop for critique. After examining them, Doc Thatcher suggested I enter them in the AP contest at an upcoming Potomac Division meet. That was 25 years ago. I met many new friends along the way and became part of the group.

I asked the superintendent, Clint Hyde, how I could help, and became the Editor of the *Potomac Flyer* newsletter for



almost five years. Along the way, I served as the Senior Assistant Superintendent for the Division. I continued to build structures, cars, and several pieces of motive power, as well as becoming an author in the newsletter and having an article on resin casting published in the *NMRA MAGAZINE*. I never thought I would ever be a Master Model Railroader®. I just enjoyed building things and the people I met at conventions and meetings: Ed Price, the AP chair; Mark Andersen, paymaster; John Drye, Superintendent; Noll Horan, Martin Brechbiel, and Bill Day — mentors and guides for all things model railroad who were instrumental and supportive on my journey.

Stuff builds up, and the AP folks encouraged me to apply for five AP categories along the way. One of the great high points came in Cincinnati, Ohio, at the National Convention. A group from the Potomac Division went (all had been mentors and friends for a while). Some of us took models for the contest. Mine was a steam-powered scratchbuilt sawmill. It was awarded first place for offline structures. Not too shabby for my first National Convention.

My first wife had been a reluctant supporter, and she never gave me grief for my hobby. Unfortunately, she passed away too young. Here was that "life gets in the way" stuff again. I lost interest in

a lot of things around then. I didn't have room for a layout and would never be able to complete my Civil or Electrical Certificates. Years passed, and I remarried a woman with whom I traveled to six of the seven continents. However, she always asked when I would get a hobby. I explained that I needed a layout to go further with model railroading. She removed that obstacle by rearranging a portion of the basement. At about the same time, Mat Thompson, MMR®, the current AP chair for the Potomac Division, contacted me. He had been reviewing my qualifications and said I only needed two more certificates to qualify for MMR®. It took another two years to build, wire, debug, learn about DCC, and get the layout to run. Mat provided contacts to answer my questions and support and encouragement to get 'er done. I am now an MMR®. The journey continues.

Certificates Earned John Griffith, MMR® 723

Master Builder – Structures
Master Builder – Cars
Association Volunteer
Model Railroad Author
Master Builder – Motive Power
Model Railroad Engineer – Civil
Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical

MARC LACHEY

EARNs

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #725

Wow! Who would have thought I would ever earn my Master Model Railroader® designation? Certainly not me.

I did not start out life inspired by model trains during my youth, as have so many other model railroaders. While I have childhood memories of receiving a train set for Christmas one year, that was a short-lived experience. Further, I have no recollection as to what happened to the train set. Rather, my father started me, at about age seven, building plastic model airplane kits. So, from that early age until leaving home to attend Baylor University, I built model airplanes.

During my time in college, I became interested in photography. During a year in Japan as an exchange student, I had the opportunity to buy my first single-lens reflex camera. Since those days, photography has remained with me. My interest in photography, combined with my parents living in Albuquerque, New Mexico, led me to photograph hot air balloons. This interest, in turn, led me to buy a hot air balloon and earn my pilot's license. Some years later, in response to my mom's annual question regarding my Christmas wishlist, I suggested a train set as my Christmas gift. Sure enough, there was a train set under the tree that year.

After setting up the train set and running it around the tree a few times, I set out to find more cars and a second engine, which led me to Bobbye Hall's Hobby House — a legend in Dallas, Texas. From there, I started attending

local train shows. At a train show, I was introduced to the Spring Creek modular group, which took me in and provided me with a basic understanding of model railroading. I owe a debt to Spring Creek club members Glenn Diefenbach, John McBee, Eric Mumper, and others.

In 1978, I rode the Denver & Rio Grande Western narrow-gauge train from Durango to Silverton, Colorado, while on my honeymoon with my first wife. In 1984, I participated in a hot air balloon rally in Gunnison, Colorado. The launch field was just across the street from the Pioneer Village Museum, where D&RGW engine No. 268 was displayed. Then, there were trips to Chama, New Mexico, to ride the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad. These visits to narrow-gauge country sparked an interest in narrow-gauge steam railroads. When I joined the Spring Creek modular club in the late 1980s, I started modeling the D&RGW in HO standard gauge. I continued that for about ten years. My desire to model the narrow gauge remained. But how?

During a Saturday trip to Fort Worth, Texas, with some fellow members of the

Spring Creek club, I mentioned my interest in narrow gauge, along with my frustration about an early attempt modeling in HO_n3. A friend, Eric Mumper, asked

Left: (From left to right) Jerry Hoverson, MMR®, Hal Carstens, and Marc LaChéy at the 2009 Lone Star Region Convention. Marc started work toward his first AP Certificate-Volunteer by bringing Mr. Carstens to the convention as guest speaker.



if I had considered Sn3. I said Sn, what? Eric said to look at the back cover of the *Narrow Gauge Gazette*. I did, and that started me down the path of modeling Colorado's narrow gauge in Sn3. Following my interest in Colorado narrow gauge, I connected with a couple of other area modelers with similar aspirations of modeling narrow gauge in Sn3. Gary Rush, Keith Stamper, Paul Cleveland, Tom Petrick, and I started construction on a small modular layout with the goal of showing what could be done in Sn3. At about the same time, I began to plan my layout for an 11x12-foot bedroom.

I first joined the NMRA in 1996. Besides reading the monthly magazine, I did not do much with the NMRA until sometime around 2001, when the Lone Star Region held its 50th Anniversary convention in Dallas. That NMRA Regional convention was my first. I met some nice folks and slowly began to find ways to volunteer and learn more about model railroading. During the 2009 LSR Convention, I again volunteered and helped bring Hal Carstens, publisher of



Railroad Model Craftsman, to attend the convention as our keynote speaker. I earned my first Achievement Program certificate in 2013 when I served as Chair of the Lone Star Region's annual convention. But I still did not seriously consider pursuing the Master Model Railroader® designation.

Commensurate with my increasing involvement with the NMRA, our local Sn3 narrow gauge group was evolving. Keith Stamper returned to Canada in 2004, Gary Rush pursued an interest in modeling in On30, and we sold our first portable layout to another group member. Our group briefly explored building a second portable layout in On30, but the project never got beyond the benchwork stage. In 2009, with inspiration from books by Ian Rice and articles in *Railroad Model Craftsman* by Trevor Marshall and Pierre Oliver, our little group started work on our third Sn3 layout: the Elk Canyon & Western. To support this project, I recruited MMR®'s Charlie Kirk, Duane Richardson, and Jeff Palmer to join our band of brothers.

As it just so happened, Duane Richardson, MMR®, also served as our Regional chairman for the Achievement Program. Thus began the cajoling, arm-twisting, and encouragement from Duane to seriously pursue my MMR®, which resulted in my earning my second certificate in 2016 — this time for Scenery on my home layout, the Cripple Creek & Tincup Railroad. In 2016, I was elected to the Board of Directors of the Lone Star Region, earning my Achievement Program certificate for Official in 2019.

A consistent theme in Duane's encouragement to pursue the MMR® was that it would make me a better modeler. While I was initially skeptical and felt like my modeling skills were already pretty good, I now acknowledge Duane was right. I submitted structures and cars to the LSR Regional Convention contest room. Although I didn't always agree with the judges' comments and critiques of my models, I did begin to learn how to improve my models. My standards for what I would accept of myself moved up a few notches as I worked on scratch-built cars for my Cars Certificate. For example, I spent six months working to figure out how to design and then fabricate the cars. I recall spending several weeks and at least three different at-

tempts to fabricate scale jump rings used to attach chains to the logging bunks on logging cars I was building. My determination to keep after this aspect of the project surprised me. I discovered "good enough" was no longer acceptable to me. My modeling did improve as I earned my Structures Certificate in 2021 and my Cars Certificate in 2022.

With five of the minimum of seven required certificates in hand, I turned my focus to the Civil and Electrical certificates. I had purposely left these two certificates until last, as I felt that I had most of the work done to earn these certificates. As it turns out, I was short one piece of trackwork. So, on the advice of Charlie Kirk, MMR®, I fabricated two gauntlet track turnouts and a tangent gauntlet track, which was the final piece required to submit my paperwork for Civil and Electrical, plus that for the Master Model Railroader® designation. Thoughts remain to pursue certificates for Author, Chief Dispatcher, Prototype Models, and maybe even Motive Power. I'll admit, however, that pursuing the Motive Power certificate still looks daunting.

For those who have read this article, you may recall that I earned my first certificate in 2013. It took me nine years to earn enough certificates to achieve my MMR designation. Could someone else achieve the MMR designation faster than I did? Absolutely, it can be done — either using work you put in before you considered the Achievement Program or having a plan to maximize your effort. For

example, our regional AP Chair, Duane Richardson, MMR, often suggests that anyone starting out look at the Prototype Modeler certificate first. He points out that while working toward the Prototype Modeler certificate, one could easily include Civil, Electrical, Scenery, Structures, and even Cars on the same project. They all do not have to come from separate projects. All it takes is a plan.

Final question: was it worth the effort? The obvious answer for me, personally, is yes. I have become a better modeler while also spending time supporting the NMRA through my time as a volunteer and Regional official. That said, with only 725 folks since 1961 having earned the MMR® designation, there are a lot of folks out there who, for any number of reasons, have neither started nor completed the program. For those thinking about starting, I encourage you to do so. For those thinking they can't earn the seven certificates required, just remember the old joke about how to eat an elephant — you do it one bite at a time.

Certificates Earned Marc LaChey, MMR® 725

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

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