

THE COUPLER

NORTHEASTERN REGION NATIONAL MODEL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION

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A pair of Allegheny and Western 2-6-6-2's drag a westbound freight near the town of Tipton on the West Island Model Railroad Club's new layout. Read about the club's move to new quarters after more than three decades at their former home on Page 9. *(Photo by Vincent Lee)*

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www.nernmra.org

THE COUPLER

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SUBMISSION DEADLINE FOR COUPLER #243 IS May 13

We want to hear from you — Contact Editor Phil Monat at phil@philmonat.com

First, I have to say how proud I am to be a member of the NER. Our Board of Directors voted to send a \$750 donation to the Diamond Project at National Headquarters. For those that are not familiar with this project, the National is scanning all of its pictures, slides and other images into digital format so NMRA members can view them online. We feel this is a great cause that will make research and enjoyment of the hobby much better.



Larry Canon MMR, our NER treasurer, suggested we make the donation after reading about other regions' donations in Mike Brestel's letter in the *NMRA Magazine*. One region donated \$1,000 and challenged the other regions to match it. I felt the NER could surely match and beat the \$1,000 donation challenge. My idea was for the NER BOD to go ahead and do the \$750 donation, but then I challenged our 11 divisions to donate \$75 each to match (and hopefully exceed) the NER BOD donation. I am extremely proud to announce that the divisions have donated almost \$850 creating an NER donation totaling \$1600! I just want to say thank you very much to everyone that helped to really make this a group effort and show how committed the NER is to each of us and the hobby.

Earlier this year I appointed Vice President Henry Pierce as the director of membership. His job is to help boost our membership numbers and to see what the region can do for the divisions and for you on the local level.

Henry had our first superintendents (or presidents) round-table a few weeks ago at Seacoast Division President Bruce Robinson's house for the divisions in the northern part of the

region. From what I have heard from everyone, it was a very informative meeting. There was no structure to follow, just a round table of discussion where ideas and questions were exchanged back and forth all afternoon. Everyone said it was well worth the time and drive to attend, and they can't wait until they get together again. We are looking forward to our next round table with the remaining divisions in the southern and eastern half of the region.

A few house keeping items... I think we are going to completely change our Web site from the "Blog" look it has had, and return to a rich HTML look. So the job of Webmaster has been filled. Thank you to all that contacted me interested in the position.

In an effort to try and keep the cost of conventions to a minimum, we have reworked the formula that we use to figure the registration cost. We will now base the pricing on 150 attendees instead of 125. Since we have switched to only one convention a year, our attendance has held steady above 150 attendees. Hopefully (depending on convention location), this will create about a \$5 reduction in the registration fee. We have also purchased three 8'x8' projection screens for the clinic rooms. This will save us from \$600 to \$900 per convention in rental fees and that translates to another \$5 reduction in the registration fee.

My last note is that after attending the Springfield show and talking to many members, I really want to try and organize some inter-division meetings and operating sessions. If you are interested in hosting an operating session for members from another division, or if you would like to be the co-coordinator for such an event, please contact me. Until next time, keep your eye on the signal and your hand on the throttle. ☒

EDITORIAL

Nice Ideas and New Ideas

By PHIL MONAT
Coupler Editor

Like many of you, I could not resist the pull of the recent Amherst show in January and traveled to Springfield for the day. I dropped by the NER booth and ran into several of our new officers, including President Youst who promptly handed me a nametag – *Phil Monat, Coupler Editor*. How nice, I thought. Identifying the folks who work for the NER . . . nice idea!

In fact, ever since the NER election last fall, I have seen many nice suggestions and new initiatives from our new NER Board. One of them you will find in these pages – a new page dedicated to NER

Director observations and activities within their region. Cheaper conventions, new and more efficient use of our NER funds and resources, better ways to reach out and communicate with our members – all of these things have come up recently. Your new Board is obviously working hard on pushing the NER forward.

Past President May and his leadership group did a wonderful job of steadying the NER and moving it forward as well. This editorial is in no way meant as a slight to their excellent leadership over many years. But new blood is always needed to push any organization forward, especially one that is entirely volunteer based. The reasons are before you right now – new

ideas, new programs and a fresh approach are all bearing fruit and hopefully improving your modeling lives.

That is why it's critical we have a steady turnover of our leadership, and our members are willing to occasionally step forward to serve the NMRA. Without that, this fellowship of model railroading would wither and die. So the next time you see an opening for an elected post, consider serving. The next time you see a NER Board member with a name tag, say hello. Ask them a question, give them a suggestion, or just say hello! I will proudly wear mine and hopefully the nice and new ideas will keep coming. ☒

GARDEN STATE DIVISION

The New York Society of Model Engineers will hold its 85th. Anniversary Exhibition in Carlstadt NJ. Yes, that is 85 years of running trains! It will be the three weekends — April 1-3, 8-10, 15-17. Fridays, 7-10; Saturdays and Sundays 1-6 pm. See <ModelEngineers.org> for additional details. This club also seeks new members. Anyone with an interest in model railroading is welcome to drop by the club any Wednesday night, 7-10 pm at 341 Hoboken Road, Carlstadt NJ.

May 1- Spring Meet – held at the Model Railroad Club in Union NJ on May 1. There will be clinics, model judging and perhaps an operating session.

METRO NORTH DIVISION

The Division meetings have been surviving the snow with about 40 members attending. Our clinics have been well received and our clinicians have come well rehearsed and prepared with excellent topics. Our next meeting is **March 19**. Clinics are: "Building Craftsman Kits" and "Weathering Rolling Stock." Our friendly show and tell model contest is on member-weathered cars or locos. Winners receive a poorly designed certificate and a round of applause. See up-to-date Web site at <MetroNorthNMRA.org>. All NER members, as well as people interested in the hobby, are invited to attend.

SEACOAST DIVISION

Terrific news to pass on to the membership of Seacoast Division. The meeting held in South Portland ME. on January 8 was a great success due to 1) Peter McKenney and Jerry Angier teaming up on presentations on the BAR; 2) "Ask Neil" (bring your modeling questions to the meetings); and 3) Mike Grahame showing how he organizes his modeling space. The 36 members who attended got some quality entertainment, some new techniques to take home and some good fellowship. There was some great input from members during the business meeting.

The Seacoast Division is also starting a modular group. Many members at the meeting showed a strong interest in forming this group using the *Free Mo* style of modular construction. The goal is to have a portable modular layout that could be brought together at meets and shows and showcase the efforts and talents of Seacoast Division members. Please contact Tom Jones at <tajones@comcast.net>.

Seacoast Division patches are again available for \$4.00 each. Division shirts and other apparel with the Seacoast Division logo embroidered will be available soon.

The Division will be submitting a bid for the Northeastern Region's convention in 2013 and will need volunteers to fill positions on the committee that will handle the convention planning. Positions that need to be filled right away are the four convention committee chairs: Convention Chair, Publicity Chair, Inside Activities Chair, and Outside Activities Chair. If you would like to join the team, contact Bruce Robinson at <brobins85@comcast.net>. The bid package must be completed by April 1.

April 9 - Division meeting at the Rochester Community Center, Rochester NH. Contact Bruce Robinson.

NUTMEG DIVISION

April 17 – Willimantic CT. The Connecticut Eastern Railroad Museum will sponsor a "Model Train And Die Cast" show on April 17 at the Windham High School, Willimantic. Hours are 10- 3. Donation: Adults-\$6.00; Children (8-12)-\$1.00; Children (Under 8)-Free. Contact Joseph Sokol at 860-872-2240.

Nutmeg Division has gone to TWO regular meetings a month. The second Saturday we begin at 10 am and have two clinics, a lunch/hobby shop break and then two or three layouts to visit in the afternoon. The first Wednesday, we begin at 7 pm and will have one or two clinics. The location for February and March meetings is

the Wethersfield Police Station. The dates are **March 2 and 12, April 6 and 9**. The April meeting locations will be announced.

CENTRAL NEW YORK

Plans are in the works to hold two Achievement Program (AP) clinic Saturdays for division members, one in April and one in July. This is a continuation of a clinic series begun more than 10 years ago promoting the various AP certificates and helping members fill out the required paperwork.

In the past few years, our clinics have focused on the requirements for earning a particular certificate and actually completing several of the required tasks during the clinic.

For example, two years ago a "Scratch Build" clinic Saturday was held where members made a scratch built wood structure from plan to final weathering in one day. Last year, the AP Clinic Saturday was all about track and turnouts. Division members spent the day making scratch built HO scale turnouts in standard and 3 foot narrow gauge using several Fast Tracks® assembly jigs the division purchased for use by members. All materials for these clinics are provided by the division and the clinics are offered to division members at no charge.

The clinics are paid out of the proceeds from a raffle held at each division meeting and is just one more benefit our local members receive from their NMRA membership.

April 10 – OPSIG Sunday, 2-4 pm. Operations on the layouts of Drew James, Dave Martini and Bernie Messenger.

May 21 – Meeting at Bob Vickery, Baldwinsville.

June 12 - Railfan Day, 2-4 pm, Central Tractor Supply, East Syracuse. A day of prototype train watching.

For further information, contact Ed Olszewski <eolszew1@twcnny.rr.com>

HUB DIVISION

April 2 – Spring TRAINing, Holiday Inn, Marlborough, MA. Includes HUB Modular RR Display

April 15 – RAILFUN Meeting, 8 pm, Cambridge School of Weston, Weston, MA. Presentation by Northeastern Scale Lumber

May 20 – RAILFUN Meeting, 8 pm, Cambridge School of Weston, Weston, MA. Electronics Hands-On Project, presented by Shack

June 17 – RAILFUN Meeting, 8 pm, Cambridge School of Weston, Weston, MA. "Signals: NMRA Beta Testing & Approaches," presented by Dick Johannes.

HUDSON-BERKSHIRE DIVISION

April will be our "Making Tracks" Month. Five Capital District (Albany NY and surrounds) layouts will be open on a Saturday. Once a year, we do this in a rotating geographic area within the Division. Last year in May, we toured six layouts in the Plattsburgh area. No firm plans for May yet. June is tentatively a visit to Clark Dunham's new model railroad museum in North Creek, if it's ready. Keep checking our Web site and *Form 19*.

SUNRISE TRAILS DIVISION

April 9 – Sunrise Trails 2011 Spring Meet: St. Davids Lutheran Church, 20

Clark Blvd., Massapequa Park, NY.

May 7– Saturday Participation Clinic, 10 am to 4 pm, St. Davids Lutheran Church, 20 Clark Blvd., Massapequa Park, NY. Steve Perry, John MacGown, and Walter Neuman will show you how to build your own water tower, including painting, decaling, and weathering techniques. Pizza and soda available during lunch break. \$20 for NMRA members; \$25 for non-members (includes cost of Bar Mills kit and clinic). For more information contact Steve Perry (631) 744-6462 or <seperry@optonline.net>.

LITTLE RHODY DIVISION

An International On30 Convention will be held in Newport RI in 2012. A dedicated group of Little Rhody Division modelers will host this seminal event from March 28 through April 1 at the Newport Harbor Inn on the oceanfront in Newport. The convention is co-sponsored by Carstens' *On30 Annual* and Bachmann Trains.

Convention Chair Andy Small has all the contracts in place, including possible overflow space at an adjacent hotel. Carstens will support the event with a full-page color ad in this and next year's *On30 Annual*, as well as with a partial page ad in every other issue of *Railroad Model Craftsman* from now until the convention.

Bachmann has been a major contributor to the On30 segment of the hobby and will have a significant presence at the event.

The committee is largely staffed by members of the "Narragansett Bay Railway & Navigation Co.," the largest On30 modular group in the NER and one of the most widely known. The dealer show will be limited to dealers and suppliers of O and On30 craftsman level products. For additional information call Justin Maguire at 401-246-0381.

OTHER EVENTS

April 10– Nashua Valley Railroad Association's 46th Annual Railfair and Open House in Shirley MA. ☒

IN MEMORIAM

GEORGE REITZE

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of George Reitze, former secretary of the Nutmeg Division and a model railroader of the Connecticut Western, a railroad he constructed after his retirement from Pratt & Whitney some 30 years ago. • George also worked as a railroad engineer after his retirement and built and operated his own steam launch. • A superb craftsman, his layout had more than 50 structures. • His rolling stock was superb. • He hosted operating sessions regularly up until shortly before his passing. ☒

GEORGE BISHOP

George Bishop of SMP Industries in Bolton MA died Dec 19. George was a member of the NMRA for many years. He was a charter member of the Nashua Valley Railroad Association and manufactured a very fine line of decals (Accu-Cals and Accu -Paints) George was an avid model railroader, railfan and rail photographer. He inspired many to get involved in the model railroad hobby. ☒



HUB Members Dan Fretz and Frank Sandstrum man the table while Bill Goldthwait peers over the backdrop on the HUB's large modular layout that they bring every year to the Amherst Railroad Hobby Show in Springfield MA. More about the the show on Page 7. (Photo by Phil Monat)

NER 2011 Convention

Planners on track for “The Roger Williams Express” in Rhode Island



By KEN MAY

In October, the Northeastern Region will return to Providence, Rhode Island for the “Roger Williams Express”. The weekend of October 13 – 16 will feature operating sessions, layout tours, clinics, contests, non-rail tour to Wickford, a banquet and an auction.

The convention hotel will be the Crowne Plaza Hotel at the Crossings in Warwick, a few miles south of Providence. Located just off I-95, this hotel offers beautiful sleeping rooms for \$109 per night and will provide three large clinic rooms, a contest room, hospitality room and display room all located in the same part of the facility.



The Crowne Plaza at the Crossings in West Warwick RI is the NER convention hotel for this year's “Roger Williams Express.”

If you choose to come to Providence by rail or air, Providence's Amtrak station and T. F. Green airport are nearby. Shuttle and taxi service to the hotel is also available. Reservations at the Crowne Plaza can be made by e-mail or telephone. The e-mail address is <reservations@providenceri.crowneplaza.com> or <www.crowneplaza.com/warwickri>. When you make your reservation use the group code “NER.” The hotel reservation department can be reached at (401) 732-6000. Please identify your affiliation with the Northeastern Region of the National Model Railroad Association when making your reservation, or you may not receive the special rate. Please be sure you make your reservation prior to September 13, 2011.

Rail Clinics

Our Clinic chairmen have put together an exciting clinic program. Panel discussion topics include: Operations, Helix design and construction and Construction of lightweight modules. While the schedule is still being finalized, here is a partial list of our expected clinicians.

Scott Mason Building Craftsman Structures
John Pryke Detailing and Weathering Steam Locomotives
John Sacerdote . . Hand-laying Track
Neil Schofield . . . Selective Compression
Andy Small Rhode Island Narrow Gauge Military RRs
Earl Smallshaw . . Middletown and Mystic Mines
Brian Whiton New England Mills

Marine Railroading

Elliott Janofsky . . . Modeling Transfer Bridges, Modeling DUMBO in HO
Bill Nesbitt Kitbashing a Walther's Carfloat
Ron Parisi Car Floats

Extra Fare

George Barrett . . . Building a Model Truck
Scott Mason Learning to Paint and Weather with an Airbrush
Walter Kabalo . . . Building an Electrical Panel

Plus at least 16 more! It's too soon to list them just yet.

Operating Sessions

Operating sessions are planned on several layouts throughout the weekend. A full schedule will be available in the next issue of the *NER Coupler*. At this time, Don Irace's Providence and Worcester and Bob Davis' Mashamou Valley and Western are two fine layouts that we know will be hosting sessions.

Layout Tours

At this time we have 10 layouts committed to be open at the convention.

Providence and Worcester	Donald Irace
Western Maryland	Anthony Donatelli
Quebec and New England	Jim Reddington
Aquidneck Valley	Ed Silva
Old Colony and South Shore . .	Cliff Coutinho
New England and Western	Bill Robertson
Mashamou Valley and Western .	Bob Davis
Providence and Northern	Ray Schofield
East Bay and Westerly Railroad .	Justin Maguire
Old Colony Model Railroad Club .	Dennis Ingalls

Non-Rail Program

The committee is planning a full weekend program for those interested. On Thursday evening, they will be holding a 'Meet and Greet' with refreshments. On Friday, there will be a tour called "A Culinary View of Providence." The group will tour a unique historic bakery where light refreshments will be served before proceeding to the Johnson & Wales University Culinary Archives Museum. Then in the evening, they are again planning a program featuring a speaker or a hands-on presentation. On Saturday, they are planning a trip to the charming seaside town of Wickford to view historical buildings, have lunch on your own, and perhaps some shopping too.

Contests

The Roger Williams Express will offer the full complement of Model and Photo Contests. Bob Hamm and his staff will welcome all models into the judged contest. Both scratch-built and kit-built models will be included. For those who do not wish to participate in the judged contest, the Model Showcase is open to all who wish to share their modeling skills with others.

(Continued on next page)



NER a BIG presence at the BIG E!

Members hard at work! Notice that NOBODY is carrying any purchases ...YET! From left, President Scooter Youst, VP Henry Pierce, Metro North Division Superintendent Franklin Lang, member Lee Davy, Seacoast Division Superintendent Bruce Robinson, NER Office Manager Mark Harlow, and member Erich Whitney.

Photo by Phil Monat

By PHIL MONAT

Coupler Editor

Every time I attend the *Amherst Railway Society Railroad Hobby Show* at the BIG E (Eastern States Exposition) in West Springfield MA, I am amazed at the size of the event and the number of people who attend. It draws from all over the northeast, and that is, of course, our region!

Your NER directors and several other organizations within our group make a considerable effort to get the word out, meet new people and attract new members. Particular thanks must go to Ken May of the HUB Division, and Bruce Robinson of the Seacoast Division, whose eight members staffed the booth during the two-day event in late January, along with help from the Little Rhody Division.

The NMRA booth does a wonderful job of reaching out to people, putting a face on the organization and growing the hobby. Many of your officials and fellow members participated in the activity, promotion, hard work, and fun as they "walked the walk" and "talked the talk" of the NMRA and the NER. And then they shopped until they couldn't carry any more. . . ! ☒

(Continued from Page 6)

Roger Oliver and his staff will welcome all photographs into the Photo Contest. All photographs will be accepted in the Prototype and Model categories.

Auction

The Roger Williams Express will feature an auction. Plan to bring all the stuff you don't want or will never use, and buy more stuff you do not want but might never use!

Hospitality

The Hospitality area, where you can sit and relax while enjoying some refreshments, will be open starting Friday morning and stay open until 8:00 PM. Information boards will be set up to help you get in touch with others, see upcoming events and learn of last-minute changes. This area is intended as a place to gather and meet and greet friends that you haven't seen since the last

NER Convention. We hope you will take advantage of this location to meet and greet your friends.

Banquet

The Banquet festivities will start at 6:30 PM Saturday, October 15, when a cash bar will open so you can relax and visit with friends. At 7:00 PM, our Banquet room will open. Our dinner will be served Buffet style and will feature two salads, top round of beef, a chicken dish and a fish dish, with vegetables, potatoes, dessert and coffee. The cash bar will remain open during the Banquet.

The Roger Williams Express Committee is looking forward to hosting the NER in October. We expect to have a full program to keep you active all weekend. We look forward to seeing all of you in Warwick!

The NER Convention Web site is <<http://nerconvention.org>> ☒

A MOST DIFFICULT DECISION: IS IT TIME TO TEAR DOWN AND REBUILD THE MODEL RAILROAD?

Some Thoughts on the West Island Club's Recent Move



This is one aisle where scenery has progressed the furthest. A popular feature from the old West Island layout – the large concrete viaduct on the right – was refurbished and reinstalled here. At the end of the aisle is the town of Topton, where the upper level begins, and to the left is the town of Fleetwood, with a reproduction of the former Cadillac auto body plant.

(Photo by Vincent Lee)

By VINCENT LEE

One of the most difficult decisions a layout owner faces is “Is it time to consign (literally!) the old layout to the trash heap of history, and build anew?” If the model railroad under discussion is a club facility, the decision process is more complex by an order of magnitude, since there are multiple decision makers, and a plethora of conflicting ideas, agendas, and internal politics to contend with. If a robust schedule of operating sessions has already been instituted, members will go months, perhaps years, until the replacement railroad can again function at the previous level of challenge and fun.

This is exactly the situation the West Island Model Railroad Club <www.wimrrc.com> faced in 2007. We had been in the same location since 1974, and had a large layout that had reached approximately 95% completion. We had weathered the

storms of converting to DCC, and setting up a relatively smooth functioning operating scheme that fit our “proto-freelanced” West Virginia to Maryland coal mining and steel industry-focused service.

However, dark clouds were gathering. Our location in a pair of strip mall store basements in Farmingdale, NY, was precarious since we did not have a long term guarantee for the space. The space itself left much to be desired in terms of physical amenities and a lack of handicapped accessibility. The club members’ attitude reached a tipping point when we had one of our periodic scares that we could be evicted due to a rumored sale of the mall to a developer. More and more, members discussed the possibility that it was finally time to bite the bullet. Which was worse – dealing with the ongoing low morale and strife engendered by a continually uncertain future, or managing the risks and opportunities of

making a clean break and rebuilding in a new space with an assured future?

In March of 2008, the West Island’s *Allegheny and Western Railroad* was no more. We had located larger space in an unused garage in the lower level of a business center in Hicksville. The address is centrally located for our members with good parking, quick highway access, and nearby public transit. The rent, although higher, was the most reasonable we could find on high cost Long Island given the location’s other attractive characteristics, including a supportive new landlord. In the following 30 months, we made significant progress on the new *Allegheny and Western*, which is now themed as the east end of the A&W, running from New York harbor to Harrisburg, PA, with branches to the New England gateway of Maybrook and the Pennsylvania coal fields. Theoretically, the west end of the “new” A&W connects to the east end of



2

The west end (Harrisburg) staging yards. At the far end are the staging yards representing Jersey City. All the trains are neatly arrayed here in preparation for an upcoming operating session. If you look closely, you can see that each is labeled with its train symbol. (Photo by Vincent Lee)

the "old" A&W at Harrisburg. This scheme gives us the freedom to run motive power from most of the Northeast's "Fallen Flag" roads, as well as our A&W equipment.

Shared Vision of a Better A&W Developed Through Open Communication

The West Island members clearly recognized that a tear-down and move would be a substantial risk to the club's survival. Some members feared a substantial decline in membership that would make it impossible to cover the monthly rent – never mind the renovation and rebuilding costs. However, after a number of somewhat heated business meetings, the pros and cons of the alternatives were thoroughly hashed out, and a core of the membership concluded that the potential rewards were worth

taking the risk. Did we lose some members? Sure. But we gained even more new and returning former members who liked what they saw coming on the horizon. An aggressive outreach program to publicize our new location, and an invitation to "get in on the ground floor" helped attract a steady trickle of potential new members.

Active Member Participation

As in the hobby of model railroading in general, the West Island members' age distribution is heavily skewed towards the 50-to-80 age group. Some members questioned whether we could muster the requisite time, enthusiasm, skills, and simple physical energy to perform the myriad tasks we would require to renovate the space, design, and then actually construct a state-of-the-art operating

model railroad. Without hesitation, our core group of existing members, plus our valued new arrivals, stepped up to do whatever was needed when it was needed. Tasks from the less glamorous chores of painting the floor, installing and finishing interior walls, and wiring the lighting system, to the modeling tasks of building the benchwork, laying track, wiring for DCC, initial scenery, etc. were all taken on. Teams of four or five people cooperating together made easy what would otherwise be backbreaking labor for an individual home modeler. Experienced members freely shared their skills and knowledge with neophytes until they could carry on alone.

The club's internal structure is organized around a number of specialized committees focused on areas such as

(Continued on Page 11)



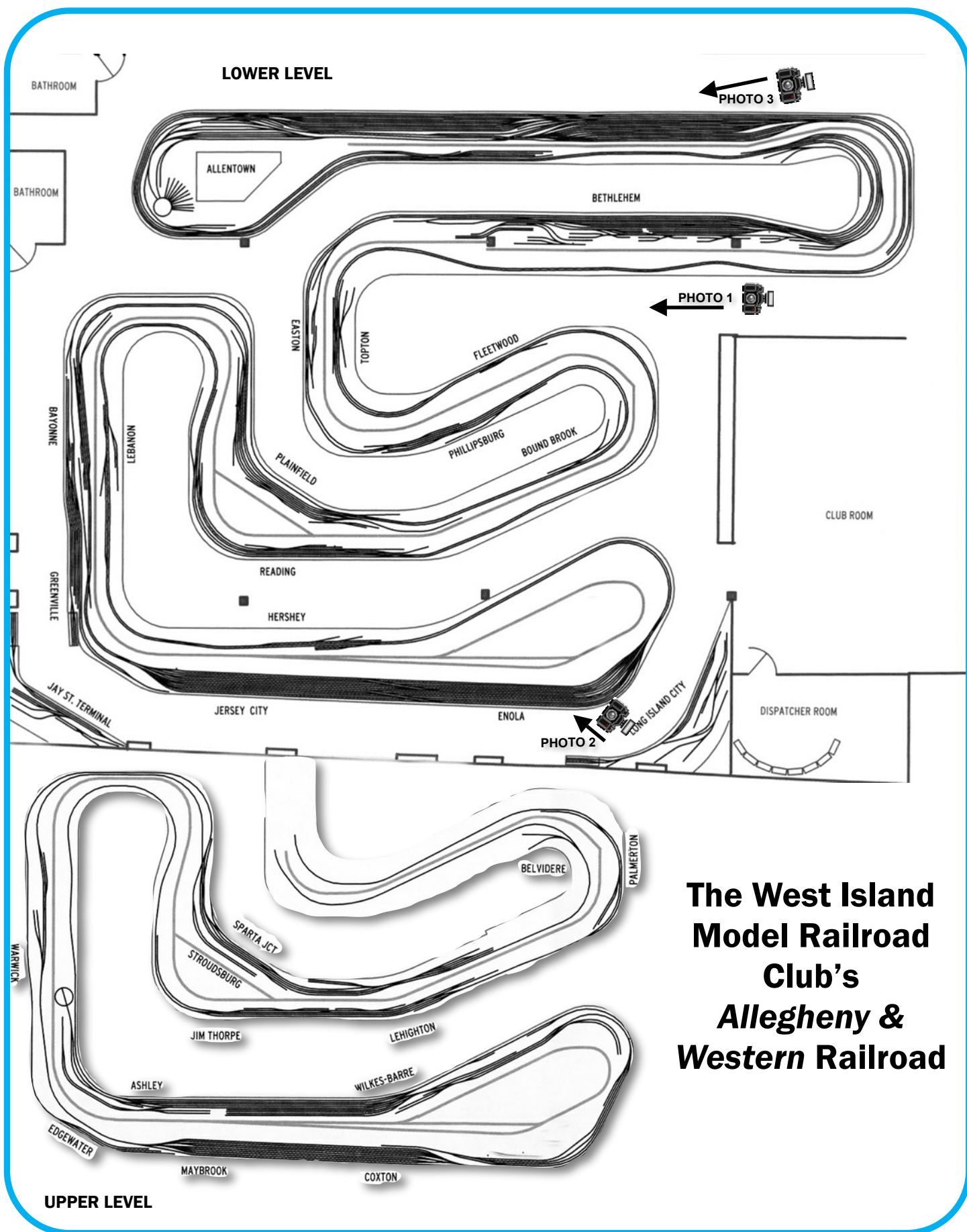
At left, the new location in Hicksville as first seen by the West Island club.

Members Bill Ireland, Ron Weismann, and Bob Allen install switch machines in the lower staging yard. When complete, the yard will have twice as many tracks than seen here.

(Photos from wimrrc.com)



The lower level of the layout is currently under construction as seen in the photos accompanying this story.



The West Island Model Railroad Club's *Allegheny & Western Railroad*



This is the longest tangent stretch on the West Island layout. Here, the double track main line passes the still under construction Allentown arrival and departure yards. An operating hump yard will be located just at the left edge of the photo.

(Photos by Vincent Lee)



When completed, the DCC control system will have more than 25 boosters and many more individual circuit breaker protected track sections. This is the booster and breaker array. All connections to the layout pass over the aisle in a large conduit. A dehumidifier is located in the lower center of this wall section.

(Continued from Page 9)

heavy construction, high and low voltage electrical, scenery, and operations. This proved a key factor in marshalling the work force to ensure that needed tasks were accomplished. These committees are all supervised by a superintendent, who is responsible to the club president for the quality and timeliness of the layout construction and operation.

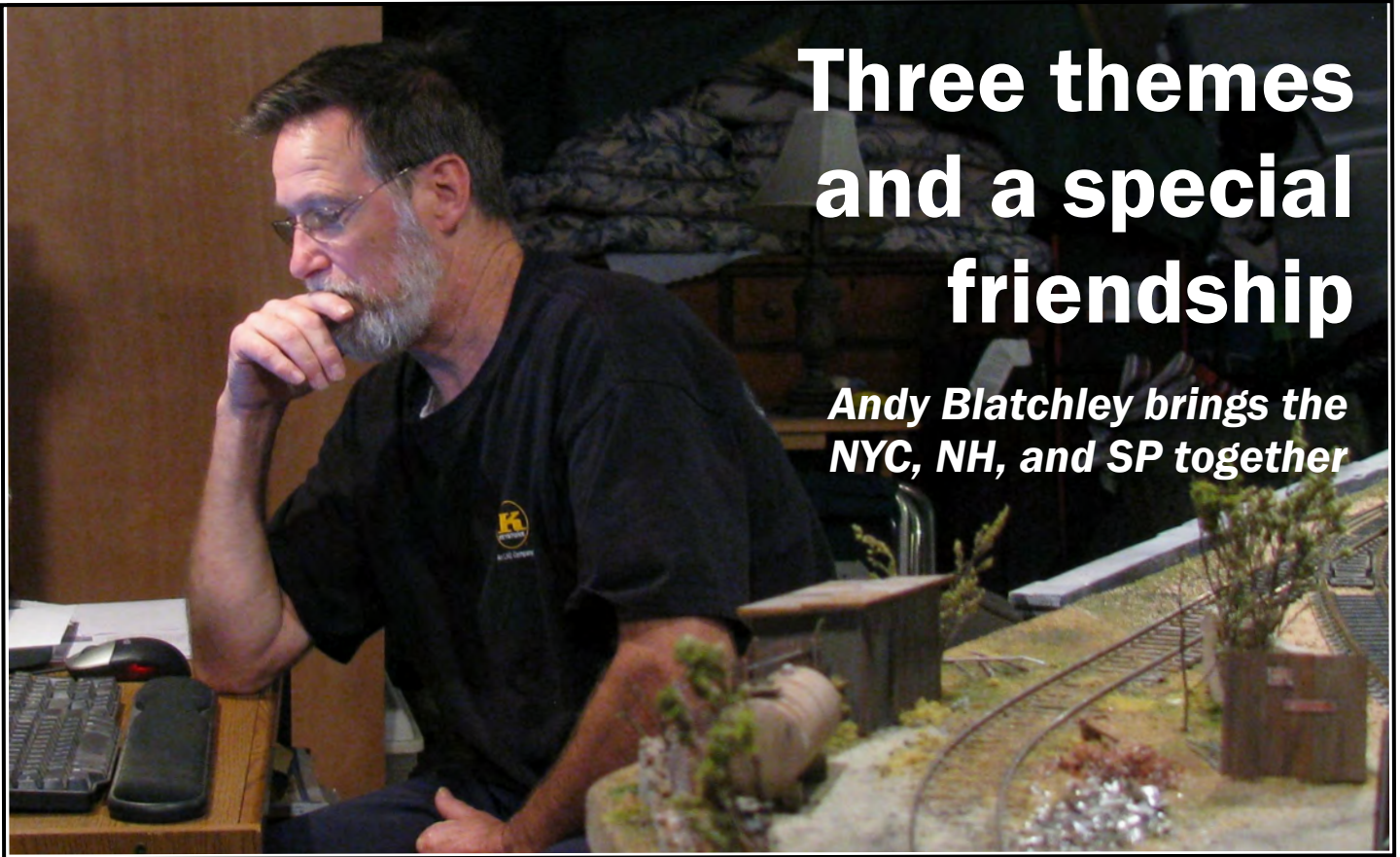
Visitors to the club – particularly those who are experienced model railroaders – are stunned by how much has been accomplished in 2 ½ years.

Detailed Planning Towards a Clear Goal

Given the risks of the move, the Club felt it was imperative to develop and get general agreement on two critical mutually inter-dependent plans. One was a financial plan, and the other was a layout design/construction plan.

We estimated that we could – given our starting financial position – and with some modest expansion in membership, perform most initial facility renovations, bring the layout to a point of completion of the 700 ft. double track main line, and continue to cover monthly operational costs, such as rent and utilities. However, the capital costs of further expansion could mainly come from what has been historically our major fund raising event – three weekends of open houses during the last week in November and the first two weeks of December. The financial/construction plan we developed, if successfully executed, would get us to the point of being prepared to have our first open house in the fall of 2010. The club officers and the board of directors rigorously followed the plans, which culminated with our first open house in four years that brought almost 1500 visitors.

Going forward, it would be naive to think that the West Island club will not continue to face obstacles. We have more facility renovations to complete, a major hump yard to build, and acres of detailed scenery to create – all in the next year or two. Beyond that, we have a whole second upper deck of branch lines to install. However, we feel that due to the knowledge, and experience gained by our members so far, and their boundless enthusiasm for the great hobby of model railroading, we are well positioned to take on the next set of challenges. ☒



Three themes and a special friendship

*Andy Blatchley brings the
NYC, NH, and SP together*

By FRANKLIN LANG

The NER has many Empire Builders and Andy Blatchley of Stafford Springs, CT, is surely one of them. His HO empire, The Mountain Gorge RR, is about 95% completed after 21 years of steady expansion. The interesting thing is that the name he stuck with over the years really doesn't reflect his finished layout. It may have come from the days his father worked as a car knocker for the Western Pacific.

Andy has a basement empire that is three railroads in one. The first is a 26' x 12' New York Central operation with 18 industries and a connected, but separate,

2½' x 30' New Haven layout with 10 industries in and around the port city of New London, CT. An interchange takes his operators to the third layout, a SP based operation in California. You may be asking yourselves, how did these three railroads come to be in Andy's house?

Maybe Andy's heritage was from the mountains of the WP, but he was born and brought up in New England and always liked the NYC and NH and chose to build both. The SP layout is a different story and one that reflects the friendships that come from this great hobby. Over the years, Andy had many of his craftsman kits built by Mark Doyon, a wheelchair-bound SP model railroader without a layout. Mark

and Andy became good friends, and Andy wanted to do something special for Mark. He embarked on building him a wheelchair height 3' x 30' SP empire. The SP connects to the main room by climbing a hill into the big GI Tool & Die building which acts as a hidden interchange with the New York Central.

Now the two of them and six others operate every other week with 20 locomotives in a 1950-1960 time frame and enjoy every minute that they are together. The hobby has brought all of us good friends from all walks of life. Not many of us have extended the hand of friendship to the level that Andy has done.



Not many folks build two decks this close together and scenic the lower level. This is one of Andy's layouts under construction. (Photos by Andy Blatchley)

MADE IN THE NER: LARC Products

By BARRY ABISCH

Bill Brown is a Master Model Railroader, so you might suspect there are not too many aspects of the hobby he has not figured out. But when it came time to paint backdrops for his home layout, the *Lehigh Alliance of Rail Carriers*, he wasn't satisfied with the results.

"I had dabbled in painting backdrops and was never very good at it," Brown said. "It takes talent I don't have."



LARC Products city backdrop on an award-winning module.

Unhappy with his brushwork, Brown turned to his other hobby – photography, drawing background images from his personal archive of some 5,000 photos. The results, he said, were some "some pretty nice backdrops." Nice enough that his layout was featured on the cover of the August 2006 issue of *Model Railroader*, accompanied by a Lou Sassi story. And nice enough to plant the seeds for his growing NER-based business, LARC Products.

Using techniques that have evolved since Brown first developed them for his home layout and still tapping into his collection of personal photographs – now up to 10,000 images – LARC Products sells backdrop photos and background elements, and creates custom backdrops, for model railroaders who don't have the talent (or the time) to do it with paint, or

for those who just prefer the realism of a photography.

When Brown started out, he devised a technique for sectioning photo prints so they could be printed at home and then precisely combined behind the benchwork. After taking care of his home layout, Brown refined the technique and made backdrops for the Central New York Modelers modular layout, which is on display at the Museum of Science and Technology in Syracuse, N.Y. After viewing

the results, a friend suggested Brown take his process on the road. Brown created CDs with background images and printed seamlessly up to 54 inches high. Customers can choose between Brown's paper-backed vinyl, a product he calls "Image-Bright," or Dunham Studios self-stick "ColorTex" process.

One year later, he returned to Springfield with more CDs in hand, and met with the same success. It was then that he realized he might have a marketable product.

Six years ago, Brown launched LARC Products. His Rail Graphics CDs, each featuring "print them yourself" backdrops and background elements, are the core of the business. Brown's method of dividing an image into sections seems to be a key to the product, since most home printers are limited to legal or letter-sized copies. He still uses his own photographs taken in many parts of the country and in all seasons.

Brown retired last July from his position as athletic director for a Syracuse-area school district and that gave him more time to devote to his business. He

revamped the company's Web site <www.larcproducts.com> to include low-resolution thumbnails of the backdrops included on the Rail Graphics CDs. In September, he and a fellow model railroader went to Colorado where they spent 17 days in a rented Jeep, covering 2,000 miles and coming home with 5,000 fresh photographs. That doubled the size of Brown's image library. He produced a fourth Rail Graphics CD, with 100 new photo backdrops, 200 background buildings and a variety of other images, including signs, building interiors and surface materials like brick, stone and wood. The photographs on the first three CDs can be printed using Microsoft Word; latest volume offers Adobe's "Portable Document Format" (PDF).

Brown has added a new product line of custom-made backdrops, using his images and printed seamlessly up to 54 inches high. Customers can choose between Brown's paper-backed vinyl, a product he calls "Image-Bright," or Dunham Studios self-stick "ColorTex" process.

Brown has a few competitors in the custom-backdrop business, but he believes he has the better product. With some of his competitors, he said, "you don't know what you are getting or what it will cost." With LARC Products, after selecting images and completing a spec sheet, a customer gets a low-resolution thumbnail image and a contract detailing all of the costs. The completed backdrop usually is received in a matter of weeks, Brown said.

While Brown has been building his business, he's also been building a new home layout. The original *Lehigh Alliance of Rail Carriers* was lost when his house was destroyed by fire. In a new house, he is now at work on a 2,000 sf layout, assisted by a dozen helpers. His is not recreating the *Lehigh Alliance of Rail Carriers*, but his new *Leadville and Red Cliff* will still be a LARC – so there will be no need to change the name of his business. ☒

MADE IN THE NER

LARC Products, PO Box 342
Jamesville, NY 13078
<www.larcproducts.com>

Merit Judging and the Achievement Program

By NORM FROWLEY MMR
NER AP Manager

In order to earn the Achievement Certificates in Cars, Structures, Scenery, Prototype Models, Civil Engineering and Motive Power your modeling work is required to undergo merit judging. That is to say, you must have your work personally examined by judges approved by the region's AP manager or judges chosen by a regional or national contest chair. Then you must have that work receive at least 87.5 points in that judging and be awarded a merit award.

Each certificate of achievement entails different requirements as to the number of models that must receive a Merit Award. With regard to scenery and prototype modeling, the entire area of scenery or the entire prototype scene is judged. To secure the Civil Engineering Certificate you must scratch-build three items of track work, each worthy of that minimum score of 87.5 points. For the Structures Certificate the applicant must earn a score of at least 87.5 points on six of the 12 models he has constructed and submitted for judging. The Motive Power Certificate requires three merit awards and the Car Certificate requires that you build four cars which have received at least 87.5 points in judging.

Questions have arisen as to how AP

(rather than contest) judging is done. An AP judge may have a background in cars and structures, but not in scenery. His approval as a judge is limited to cars and structures. Approval is automatic in categories in which the judge holds an achievement certificate himself. Approval in other categories is based upon an assessment of the judge's overall modeling experience and knowledge. If

work. Any duly approved AP judge can perform judging anywhere in the Northeastern Region.

The Achievement Program guidelines provide that if anyone from another region living within the boundaries of the NER for less than six months of the year enters any regional contests here, or has any AP judging performed on his models in the

NER, then the member may submit his paperwork to the NER to receive a certificate with the home region's name on it.

The opposite is also true. If you live in Florida, for example, for less than six months out of the year and enter contests or have AP judging done in Florida, you can still have your Certificate of Achievement issued in the NER. Merit judging of

an NER modeler's work performed by AP judges from another region and then submitted for issuance of a merit award in the NER will be deemed to have been approved by the NER AP manager.

If merit judging is to be conducted at a location visited by judges and you have more than one type of model there which may be eligible for a merit award, have the judges look at all of those models. You don't have to complete one certificate before starting on another. Plan ahead before having any merit award judging done at any location to which judges are required to travel. ☒



Your AP Chair, *second from left*, and three other judges examine a bridge model at the Hartford NMRA National Convention. (Photo by Chuck Diljak)

the judge has not been approved by the regional AP manager to do the type of judging you are calling upon him to do, you run the risk of not earning the merit award you seek.

At least two duly approved AP judges must personally judge the model and award 87.5 points for you to receive the merit award. AP judging by any judge based solely upon photos or videos or other electronic means is not permitted.

If your modeling work is not transportable, then the merit judging has to be done at the location of your modeling



NEW MEMBERS

COMPILED BY MARK HARLOW
NER Office Manager

As of 2/1/11

CONNECTICUT

Bruce Anderson
Gary Hath
Erika Harger
Doug Von Holtz

MASSACHUSETTS

George Averill
Michael DeBoise
Bob Le Blanc
Scott Sandstrom

Alex Sharon
Edward Sisk
Al Steward
Paul Varney
Edward Walsh

MAINE

Travis Bragg
Paul Brown
Keith Bubblo
James Calnan
Carl Dentremont
Jeff Loustaunau

Galelen Sauchier
Paul Smith
Larry Stahlberg

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Richard Fralick
Albert Howes
John Newick
Scott Perry
Brenna Whitney
Holly Whitney

NEW JERSEY

Chris Cinque
Benjamin Dressler
Ed Grogan
Walter Patrusевич
Kristof Roth
Greg Sekac
Harold Smith
Robert Van Iugen
Warren Witzal

NEW YORK

Paul Allen

Richard Davis
Henry Densing
James Duffy
Cindy Earle
Albert Heiserer
Lawrence Heiserer
Peter Jones
Dave Krumlauf
William MacIntyre
David Miller
Liam Odohererty
John Pilkington
Scott Pregont

Frank Saladino
Eric Soencksen
Paul Tobler
Thomas Walker

VERMONT

George Lerrigo
Spence Pickard

QUEBEC

Sylvain Bissonneyye
Jean Gratton



STOP, LOOK & LISTEN

By HENRY PIERCE
NER Vice President

"A chain is only as strong as its weakest link". All organizations have one thing in



common and the NMRA is no exception. The NMRA was formed by the membership and the members are the strength of the organization – the 'links' in our NMRA chain.

Mathematics makes it seem so simple. Just think, if each member were to invite one guest to a meeting, wouldn't that make you feel better? If you agree with that, then please read on!

The NER Division superintendents are forming a grassroots forum. The group does not have an official name yet, but temporarily it is called the "Supers Forum.". The initial meeting took place on Jan 16th at Bruce Robinson's house as

you read in Scooter Youst's column. Present at the meeting were division "supers" Dana Brown (Green Mountain), Tom Compton (Nutmeg), Richard Johannes (Hub), Bruce Robinson (Seacoast), and me (representing Little Rhody). Also present were Rich Breton (northern New England director), Justin Maguire (CT/RI director), Keith Shoneman (NER secretary), and Paul Lessard, a member from the Seacoast Division. The purpose of this group is to discuss problems that are unique to local divisions and swap ideas that each could use to improve their respective divisions.

I could not have hoped for a more interesting and successful meeting. We covered as many topics as we could in the time available. Some "supers" were unable to attend and others we were unable to contact. Several of those who could not be present did respond with their opinions before the meeting took place. Of the several topics, one that stood out was that of communication

among divisions, Region and National.

Other areas of discussion included member recruiting and retention,



finances, division programs, and developing a regional event calendar. We were only able to scratch the surface of these problems, but we soon realized that these are areas of concern that need a lot of attention from us all.

You each have an opportunity and a challenge to stimulate your local Division. You might be surprised at what you can do, and your Division officers certainly would appreciate hearing from you. See you at the next meeting, where all are welcome. Look to our Web site for date, time and location. ☒



DIRECTORS' EXTRA

A few words from NER Directors
about their Divisions

Northern New England Director Report: Seacoast and Green Mountain Divisions Rich Breton

Seacoast Division membership drive efforts are in full gear. Strong support at the Springfield Amherst Railroad Hobby Show on January 29 and 30 generated several leads for new members (see article in this issue. Ed). Having brochures from the various divisions was a nice lead to inquire where visitors were from, which then provided them with specific activities and contact information for their NMRA membership consideration.



Seacoast officers have concentrated on generating ideas for more membership fun activities. They have started a *Free-Mo* modular group, and already have about 12 people seriously interested with active

discussion on standards. The goal is to have enough modules in process for a learning type display in about a year, but to be complete for set-up at the 2013 NER Seacoast-sponsored convention. ☒

NER Massachusetts Director Report: HUB Division William (Bill) Barry

The HUB Division has been busy as usual. December started off with a bang with the HUB's annual Model Train Expo in Marlborough MA. This year, the attendance was up considerably to 4,741. We have maxed out the space in the Royal Plaza Trade Center so that we had to turn some dealers away. We just couldn't fit them in. The Expo is now the second largest show in New England and the biggest one of the holiday season. The 2011 show will be held Dec. 3 and 4.

The week following the show saw the HUB Division Modular Group conduct their annual two-day display at the National Heritage Museum in Lexington MA.

January started off with the HUB Holiday Party with everyone enjoying the annual Yankee Swap. Unfortunately, the following Friday's Railfun meeting was canceled by one of the many weekly snowstorms we have had this year.

For the three-day MLK weekend, the HUB Division Modular Group displayed for the first time at the at the Wenham Museum in Wenham, MA.

As I write this, the HUB Division Modular Group just finished at the Amherst Railway Society's big Railroad Hobby Show in West Springfield. This is the group's largest display of the year and also included steel mill modules from Ohio's Division 4, where past HUB president Larry Madson moved a few years back. ☒



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The fish shack is doing great walk up business on Andy Blatchley's New Haven layout. The detail, especially in HO scale, is impressive. The New Haven is just one of three railroads on three layouts Andy models. He is this month's "Empire Builder," on Page 12. (Photo by Andy Blatchley)