

THE POTOMAC FLYER

APRIL-MAY 2026

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE POTOMAC DIVISION, MER, NMRA



THE ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM ISSUE PLUS...

**CANDIDATES FOR THE 2026 POTOMAC DIVISION BOARD
ELECTION INFO & BYLAW AMENDMENT PROPOSALS**

MEET THE MEMBER: BOB RODRIGUEZ MMR

THE FLYER'S INDUSTRIES CHALLENGE



APRIL 12, 3PM VIRTUAL CLINIC: INTRO TO THE NMRA ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

BILL OF LADING



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COVER: INDUSTRIES CAN BE AS SMALL AS A SHED ([MAT THOMPSON PHOTO](#))

THE POTOMAC FLYER

SUBMISSION DEADLINES – ISSUE

NOV. 1 FOR DEC.-JAN. JAN. 1 FOR FEB.-MAR.
MARCH 1 FOR APRIL-MAY MAY 1 FOR JUNE-JULY
JULY 1 FOR AUG.-SEPT. SEPT. 1 FOR OCT.-NOV.



FROM THE BUSINESS CAR

by Ernie Little MMR, Potomac Division Superintendent



What do you know about the NMRA Achievement Program? Do you have questions that have been haunting you and causing you to not be able to sleep at night? The Division has a remedy for that. We will be offering a series of clinics, both live and virtual, that will provide information about what the AP program is and what the requirements are for each one of the certificates. This will provide you an opportunity to ask your questions relating to the program. Having completed the requirements to earn my Master Model Railroader (MMR) status in October of 2019, I can speak to the fact that participating in completing the MMR requirements, I acquired a significant amount of knowledge and improved my skills associated with model railroading. I also found that it was not as difficult as I thought it would be and enjoyed working on the requirements of each certificate.

The clinics will kick off with **Alex Belida MMR** providing a virtual clinic on “An introduction to the Achievement Program” on April 12th. Then on May 17th a second virtual clinic will be held with **Greg Cassidy** reviewing the “Golden Spike” and **Martin Brechbiel MMR** providing information about AP paperwork. On May 23rd, as a part of the Division’s Annual meeting at the Dranesville Community Center, **Greg Cassidy** and **Lee Stoermer** will present on the AP structures and scenery certificate requirements. Subsequently there will be clinics every month regarding AP certificate requirements, ending with an AP certificate requirement review and wrap up on November 15th.

The NMRA is ramping up a workgroup on AP program requirements and has scheduled an organizational meeting of the group in March. National is aware of our clinic series and we have been asked to participate in the workgroup.

The elections for Division Assistant Superintendent and Paymaster will take place starting April 12th and conclude April 19th. Elections will take place via Election Buddy for those members for whom the Division has a working email address. Ballots will be mailed to those without a working email address. Please take time to vote! This is your opportunity to have a say about who represents you on the Board of Directors. We have two people running for Paymaster and one for Assistant Superintendent. **The candidates’ statements are on P5 of this issue of the *Flyer*.**

With the Division now being incorporated, there is a need to make a few minor amendments to Division bylaws to align with our corporation status. **The needed amendments are available for review on P8 of this issue.** They are also on the

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

February 2026

Nick Craven - Alexandria, VA

Tom Milton - Vienna, VA

John Van Weeren - Vienna, VA

The Potomac Division, Mid-Eastern Region, National Model Railroad Association, includes the District of Columbia; Calvert, Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's and St Mary's Counties in Maryland; Arlington, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, Prince William, and Rappahannock Counties in Virginia, as well as all area independent cities.

The Division Crew:
Superintendent & Webmaster Ernie Little
MMR 571-383-7316 Super@potomac-nmra.org

Sr-Asst-Super Greg Cassidy 301-717-9118
Sr-Asst-Super@potomac-nmra.org

Assistant Superintendent Ken Wilson
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Paymaster@potomac-nmra.org

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Clerk@potomac-nmra.org

Achievement Program Manager Martin Brechbiel MMR 703-309-3082 Achievement-Program@potomac-nmra.org

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Flyer Proofreaders: Dan Ebert, Bob Sprague

Social Media Director: Bill Schultheiss
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Division website and were posted in the Potomac Division Newsbrief on March 1st. We will also take action to adopt the amendments via Election Buddy ahead of our annual meeting on May 23rd at the Dranesville Community Center in McLean, Virginia. Other items on the agenda at that meeting include announcement of the individuals elected to the Assistant Superintendent and Paymaster positions and the recipient(s) of the Marshall Abrams Award for 2026. Watch the *Potomac Flyer* and Division website for more information.

With the Division now incorporated as a recognized 503(1)c organization, the Board of Directors is working on a procedure to deal with donations, including what railroad-related items will be accepted. We do not want items that do not work or are not desirable. In other words, we do not want “junk” that will end up being trashed. Another activity that is related to taking “cash” donations is having a mechanism that would allow credit card payments for Division activities such as clinic fees and the like. More will be forthcoming on these items.

Early registration is open for the NMRA National Convention, *Scenic City Express*, being held in Chattanooga, Tennessee, from July 27 to August 2, 2026. The convention website, [https://](https://www.nmra2026.org)

www.nmra2026.org is online and has a link to make hotel reservations.

The next Mid-Eastern Region Convention, *Tracks to Tidewater*, will be held October 15-18, 2026, in Virginia Beach, Virginia at the Holiday Inn Virginia Beach-Norfolk located at 5655 Greenwich Road, Virginia Beach, Virginia. Watch for details.

Last, we are in contact with the Chesapeake Division to have a joint meet in November. We are working on finding a venue for the meet and determining the date. More to come as more information becomes available.



THE 2026 CANDIDATES FOR THE POTOMAC DIVISION BOARD OF DIRECTORS & VOTING INFORMATION

The Nominations & Elections Committee of Mark Gionet (Chair), Paul Hutchins, and Brian Sheron MMR, has submitted the following candidates for the positions of Assistant Superintendent and Paymaster on the Potomac Division Board of Directors. We thank these members for their willingness to serve on the Board.



JERRY STANLEY, CANDIDATE FOR ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

I have 45 years of managing large construction projects from 70-million dollar down to one million-dollar projects. In that position I helped write contract documents, developed scopes of work, developed schedules and plans. I built budgets, coordinated with engineers, architects and owners. I also ran day-to-day operations, solving problems, and ensuring the projects were delivered on time and within budget.

Over the time I was Potomac Division Paymaster, I also developed and held Hobby Barn clinics; assisted in the James River and Potomac division joint meets, and helped find clinicians for other clinics in addition to being the Paymaster.

I'm looking forward to continuing to work with the Board and membership to help grow the Division. I'd like to create more of an outreach program to increase awareness of the Division. I've helped organize the Division's representation at the Timonium and Greenburg Train shows. Both events did result in meeting folks who became new members. I'd like to continue this work with local churches and other family-oriented organizations to connect with potential members.

I believe my work as a Project Manager and the years of volunteering as the Potomac Division Paymaster and other roles within the Division make me more than prepared to be the Assistant Superintendent.

I would greatly appreciate your vote for the Assistant Superintendent Position.



GARY MASON, CANDIDATE FOR PAYMASTER

I moved to Arlington, Virginia, in 1999 and as an NMRA member, began attending Potomac Division MiniCons and member open houses. I retired from the National Park Service after more than four decades working in national parks as a ranger, and ultimately in the Washington, DC, headquarters as Budget & Finance Officer for the Natural Resources directorate.

Born and raised in a small town in northern California served by the Northwestern Pacific Railroad (NWP), I spent many an hour watching and photographing its operations. My love of model trains began with my father's O27 Lionel setup at Christmas, a gift of an HO train set at age 10, and completion (with assistance) of my first 4'x8' layout by age 13. Active modeling went on hiatus over the years, but I built two modest freelance layouts by 1994 when my house in Mississippi burned in a fire. I shared my lessons learned with the late Marshall Abrams for his clinic on insuring your model railroad. A few years later, working in DC, I undertook planning and acquisition of items for a new, larger prototypical layout based on a portion of the NWP. In retirement (seven years ago) I've built a detached train room and am in the process of completing 1:1 track plans to proceed with construction.

For several years, I have volunteered as the financial officer of a small HOA on Virginia's Northern Neck where I have a small cottage. Most recently, I assisted the Division's Board with input on incorporating in Virginia and securing IRS tax-exempt status. It would be a privilege to serve the members of the Potomac Division as part of a hobby that has been a life-long source of learning and pleasure.



KEN WILSON, CANDIDATE FOR PAYMASTER

I'm seeking election for the position of Paymaster. I am currently serving as the Assistant Superintendent and have been in that position since April 2023. I'm interested in moving to the role of Paymaster since the Potomac Division is currently undergoing significant changes regarding our finances. We are now incorporated and have been designated a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization.

With that new status, we can solicit donations, both in cash and items that can be resold. I'm anticipating an increase in the frequency of the need to make deposits

to our account. Fortunately, I'm in a position now where I can provide a short turnaround time for any banking needs since I am retired and live just a mile from a branch of the Division's bank. Some improvements in service to the membership have been discussed by the Board of Directors that include establishing a method for receiving cashless payments for registrations or sale of donated items. I've had prior experience managing finances when I served as the box office manager for a performing arts center. Changes have been made since that time, but the basic principles have stayed the same. I would be extremely grateful to receive your vote.

POTOMAC DIVISION BOARD ELECTION SCHEDULE

The election process will take place in April of 2026 for Assistant Superintendent and Paymaster. Ballots will be mailed to Division members for whom the Division lacks email addresses; voting by everyone else will be done electronically. This provides greater convenience for all and a significant cost savings for the Division.

Important dates concerning the 2026 election process are as follows:

April 1, 2026 - *The Potomac Flyer* and emails from the Division will provide a list of candidates for office for the membership to consider. Ballots will be mailed out to those members without email addresses on record.

April 12, 2026 - eVoting will commence.

April 19, 2026 - eVoting will conclude; deadline for receipt of mailed ballots by the Nominations Committee.

April 26, 2026 - Candidates will be notified of election results.

May 19, 2026 - The new Board of Directors will meet.



PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE POTOMAC DIVISION BYLAWS

Members will be asked to vote on the changes in **RED** via Election Buddy ahead of our Annual Meeting, scheduled for May 23, 2026. Please review. The full text of the Bylaws can be seen on our [website at this link](#).

Changes in RED

AMENDMENTS

1. Article I, Section 3 - Boundaries of the Division were amended to add seven counties (Lancaster, Northumberland, Page, Richmond, Shenandoah, Warren, and Westmoreland) to coordinate with National and Mid-Eastern Region NMRA division boundary changes made on October 21, 2023, at the 2023 MER Convention.
2. **Article I, Section 1 - As a result of corporation status the name of the organization was changed to Potomac Division National Model Railroad Association on 09/25/2025.**
3. **Article I, Section 1 - The Division became a non-profit 501(c)(3) on 12/19/2025.**
4. **Article VI, Section 1 - Aligned the election process with changes taken place with the adoption of electronic voting in 2021. The election results compiled by the Nomination Committee and presented to the membership at the annual meeting. (date of adoption of amendment)**

Article I

Name, Purpose, and Boundaries

Section 1 - Name

This organization shall be known as the **Potomac Division National Model Railroad Association** (the “Division”) and is **established as a Virginia incorporated non-profit 501(c)(3) Division** of the Mid-Eastern Region (MER) of the National Model Railroad Association, Inc. (NMRA). **The MER is** a not-for-profit corporation in the State of Maryland. The Division is established under the provisions of the Bylaws of the MER and the Regulations of the NMRA. If a conflict should develop between these Bylaws and the Bylaws of the MER and/or the NMRA Regulations, the Bylaws of the MER or the NMRA Regulations shall govern.

Article VI

Nominations, Ballots, and Elections

Section 1 - Nominations and Elections

All members eligible to vote may vote either by an electronic voting system, if available, or if lacking e-mail on record, by a mailed ballot. Members voting by mail must have their selections of Officers clearly indicated and received no later than two (2) days prior to the Annual Meeting. Members using the mail must include their name and NMRA Membership number. No proxy votes will be accepted for the election of Board members. Mailed ballots will be reasonably designed to deter fraudulent duplication.



ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM: THE BASICS

There are 11 AP categories, broken down into four areas. At the top of the list is **Model Railroad Equipment**. The two categories here are **Motive Power** and **Cars**. Next is **Settings** with **Structures**, **Scenery** and **Prototype Models**. Then comes the **Engineering and Operations** section with **Civil**, **Electrical** and **Chief Dispatcher**. Finally there is the **Service to the Hobby** section with **Official**, **Volunteer** and **Author**.

Certificates are issued for each. To become a **Master Model Railroader**, seven certificates are needed and must include at least one from each area.

For complete details on the requirements, go to [this NMRA site](#).

On the following pages you will find:

1. Why the Achievement Program?
2. The Potomac Division's 2026 AP Clinics Schedule
3. AP Demystified by Potomac's Clinicians
4. [An NMRA AP Checklist You Can Use](#) (courtesy of Jack Dziadul MMR, Carolina Piedmont Division) **Print it out and use it!**
5. Earning a Merit Award at Long Distance

BIG benefits of a **NMRA** membership

- 100's of clinic videos + NMRA layout tours and educational videos
- Discounts from over 30 NMRA Partner companies (-15%, -25%, -45%)
- NMRA Interchange on Discord with free video hangout rooms (Text - Voice - Video)
- A positive and supportive learning community

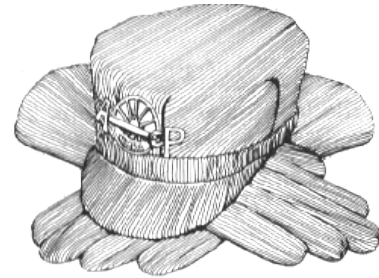
NMRA
Your portal to more fun in model railroading!

nmra.org

WHY THE ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM?

Article by Alex Belida MMR, *Flyer* Editor

How many of you play golf...or have tried...then given it up? Or any other sport or activity? Probably all of us at one time or another have tried something and then lost interest. But you wouldn't be reading this article if you weren't still interested in model railroading. And you don't want to give that up, right?



Well, let me ask you: Wouldn't you want to be better at it? That's why I got involved in the Achievement Program (AP). I wanted to be a better modeler. I wanted to learn new skills. I wanted to know about all the things I didn't know about. And there are a lot of them. What the heck is Bullfrog Snot ([photo left](#))? Ground Goop? Where do you get the materials you need? I won't guarantee that the AP program will give you all the answers. But it will help.

I suspect some of you are thinking: I don't want to chase that **Master Model Railroader** thing. Fine. You don't have to. But you still want to be a better modeler, right? And maybe if you start down the AP road, who knows, you might just change your mind.

I know...because that's how I got there.

Let me share my story.

I was honored to become Master Model Railroader #685 in 2021 ([photo right](#)). But the truth is that it wasn't something I set out to earn back when I joined the NMRA. All I wanted was to meet other modelers and have a layout in my retirement. This would be after years of putting off both desires because of family, work, and frequent travel, including 25 years living abroad.



Once I got going, I picked up my **Author**, **Scenery**, and **Structures** certificates. Then the COVID -19 pandemic struck, a good time to tackle **Cars**, **Prototype Models** and



Civil (which I found the hardest)([photo left](#)). With my hours of work on the *Potomac Flyer* and the Mid-Eastern Region newsletter, *The Local*, I picked up my **Volunteer** certificate and I was an MMR. Later I added my **Motive Power** certificate.

So what does my experience mean for others? Are you perhaps wondering about the value of working towards any of the individual AP certificates? Let me repeat that it might not be for everyone. Obviously, you can still enjoy

this great hobby. Model railroading is supposed to be fun. Why ruin it by striving for some certificate, you might ask? Hey, you don't have to!

But here's the thing I discovered: As a means of developing your skills in model railroading, especially if you are just starting out or have been modeling in isolation, I can't think of a better approach than the AP program. That's what motivated me. I wanted the best layout I could build and I wanted to learn from those with experience in the hobby. And we can all keep learning ([photo right](#)). Go to clinics!



My recommendation: Take it step by step, at whatever speed your circumstances allow, and start with the areas of modeling that most appeal to you. Your skills will benefit. I'm convinced your enjoyment of this hobby will increase because your layout and your models will be better.

In the weeks and months ahead, the Potomac Division will be holding a series of clinics—both virtual and in-person—to go over each of the AP categories. The full schedule is on the next page.

Here's a factoid that might spur your interest in striving for the MMR: More than 5,000 people have reached the summit of Mount Everest. Just over 800 have become MMRs.



POTOMAC'S AP CLINICS SCHEDULE (please check our website in case there are changes)

Sunday, April 12, 2026, 3:00 PM (EDT) - Potomac Division Virtual Clinic 71 - Intro to the NMRA Achievement Program - Clinician: Alex Belida, MMR.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/Vt2AVOjxTqa1-HoxWkCjgQ>

Sunday, May 17, 2026, 3:00 PM (EDT) - Potomac Division Virtual Clinic 72 - Golden Spike and NMRA Achievement Program certificate paperwork - Clinicians: Greg Cassidy and Martin Brechbiel, MMR.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/b9X3UF3jRWqggzZFPQymvA>

Saturday, May 23, 2026, Potomac Division Annual Meeting and Meet - 9:00 AM (EDT) - NMRA AP Structures and Scenery certificate requirements - Clinicians Greg Cassidy and Lee Stoermer - In person event, Dranesville Community Center, Mclean, Virginia.

Sunday, June 21, 2026, Potomac Division Virtual Clinic 73 - 3:00 PM (EDT) - NMRA Official and Volunteer certificate requirements - Clinician: Martin Brechbiel, MMR.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/7dX9FnTEQDemih8MYW4xw>

Saturday, June 27, 2026, Potomac Division Meet - 9:00 AM (EDT) - NMRA - AP Prototype Models and Cars certificate requirements - Clinicians: Alex Belida, MMR and Martin Brechbiel, MMR. In-person event, Leisure World in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Saturday, August 8, 2026, Potomac Division Meet - 9:00 AM (EDT) - NMRA AP Motive Power and Electrical certificate requirements - Clinicians: Alex Belida, MMR and Ernie Little, MMR. In person event, Dranesville Community Center, Mclean, Virginia.

Saturday, September 12, 2026, 9:00 AM (EDT) - NMRA AP Chief Dispatcher and Author certificate requirements - Clinicians Ernie Little, MMR and Martin Brechbiel, MMR. In person event at the B&O Station, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Saturday, November 7, 2026, - Potomac Division Meet - 9:00 AM (EDT) - NMRA AP civil requirements and other related items - Clinician Ernie Little, MMR - In person event at a location to be determined.

Sunday, November 15, 2026 - 3:00 PM (EDT) Potomac Division Virtual Clinic 78- NMRA AP review and wrap up - Various clinicians.

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/Et-Q7P2BTC-Y_r03ewpCfQ



AP DEMYSTIFIED BY POTOMAC'S CLINICIANS

AP Paperwork-Martin Brechbiel MMR

I have heard nothing but complaints about “the paperwork” for better than 20 years. What I have found is that the vast majority of the complaints are unfounded and that 90+% of the grief has originated from people having consumed sour grapes or from people that simply did not follow the instructions, and then ended up not getting whatever result was desired. Sadly, this has all taken on a mythology that’s far outgrown any reality. This condition has also led to a significant and misplaced belief that the AP all beyond most people.

**ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM
MASTER BUILDER STRUCTURES
EVALUATION FORM
FEBRUARY 2019**

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM TO A COMPLETED STATEMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS (SOQ) FORM.

Member's Name: _____ NMRA # _____ Expires: _____
 Div. Submitted: _____ Region: _____ Division: _____
 Model: _____

This model/judge certifies that the model of a structure described above, built by the above named NMRA member, has been personally constructed by him or some evaluation specified by the Region A7 Chair; that the model is either scratchbuilt or is upon detailed (as defined in the NMRA "OFFICIALS" Section), is operational and meets all applicable NMRA standards, has earned a minimum score of 87.5 points, and has been awarded a Merit Award.

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	POINTS	SCORE
CONSTRUCTION	Workmanship	0-40	
DETAIL	Quality & Amount	0-20	
CONFORMITY	Prototype Practice	0-25	
FINISH & MILLING	General Appearance	0-25	
SCRATCH/BUILT	Amount of Parts Built by the Modeler	0-15	
		Total	

NOTE
 Exempted Parts: Light bulbs, aluminum, brass wash, metal and plastic shims. The above commercial parts may be used on a model and the model is still considered to be scratchbuilt.

So, we’ll walk, stroll, trundle, and perambulate through all of the AP categories and their associated paperwork. Some categories have more than others and some have next to none! But, much of this all comes down to actually reading the requirements, not reading anything more into them, and when in doubt asking your AP coordinator. Don’t be intimidated, forget the mythology that’s going round and round, and get the real scoop!

AP Official and Volunteer-Martin Brechbiel MMR

We’ll review these two categories as they are really similar and overlap conceptually. The organization effectively run through the support of volunteers, so being part of the solution, working on behalf of the various levels of the NMRA, be it Division, Region, or National. Just about any action can be considered as a point accruing volunteer activity. There is some focus on this being structurally through committees and serving as the chairs thereof, but as in many cases a committee of one is what gets things done! Official is a specific subset of volunteer wherein a member gets elected to serve as an Officer at the various levels of the NMRA. Service at the various levels accrues points towards this category.



AP Cars-Martin Brechbiel MMR

AP Cars is for some reason that category that all too many find challenging, saving it for their final to complete as their required seventh towards getting to MMR. This is

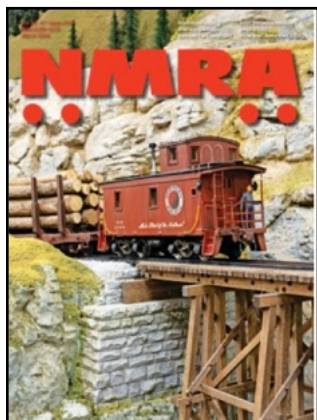


surprising because having cars on one's railroad would seem preferable. And while one can buy a wide selection of products, many are still not available and many are also flawed in some capacity. This category seeks to empower the modeler with all the skills and knowledge requisite to building good quality and accurate railroad cars. And, it's actually a far simpler and easier category to complete versus the mystique surrounding it might imply.

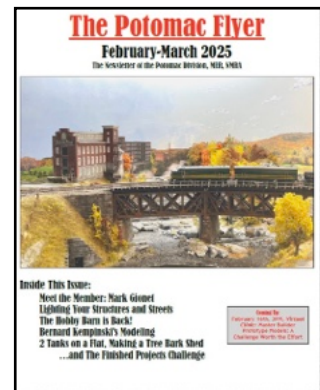
This category along with Structures and Motive Power might be one of the three that actually does have a bit more paperwork associated with it. However, that's an aspect that's far too easy to go overboard on and get mired down in unnecessarily. There are requirements to be met and those are being updated. We'll go through this category showing the requirements and then the processes of meeting those requirements. Again, it's all too easy to make this overly complicated by not reading the requirements.

AP Author-Martin Brechbiel MMR

The vast majority of articles that you have read in model railroading magazines have been written, wait for it, yes, by model railroaders. We as a community are the source for the literature that communicates and teaches us about model railroading. This category is all about your being a part of that literature. This is also one of the easier categories to succeed at completing. Your Division and Region newsletters are



always in search of content and all you have to do is supply that in the form of your articles or photos to a waiting Editor. And you can, of course, pursue publishing your articles in the national print media. Additionally, the NMRA has updated this category to reflect this century and your web site, YouTube, blogs, etc. can be counted towards this AP certificate. We'll run through the requirements and the process of accumulating points for successful completion of this category.



AP Motive Power-Alex Belida MMR

It may sound daunting, but earning the motive power certificate is doable if you want to test your skills as a modeler. You have to build three engines of any kind—steam, diesel or traction—and one must be scratchbuilt. For two, you could take an engine kit and detail it. Or you could take a locomotive you acquired cheaply or an old one you never use anymore, strip off the body and build something atop the power chassis. For your scratchbuilt engine, you could build something simple like a critter or railcar. Remember, even for a scratchbuild, you are allowed to use commercial motors, gears, drivers and wheels, light bulbs and other electronics, and trucks.



AP Prototype Models-Alex Belida MMR

Think of this as a diorama project, but it can be a section of your layout. It must be based on an actual prototypical scene and you need photographs. It has to have six models in all and must include two types of rolling stock plus an engine and at least one railroad structure, like a depot or freight house. Two of these six models have to be scratchbuilt. So find a scene you can replicate and build!



AP Chief Dispatcher-Ernie Little MMR

Chief Dispatcher requires you to show experience in being an Engineer, Yardmaster, Hostler, Traffic Manager, Road Master, and Dispatcher, for at least 50 hours, with at least ten hours in three of the five areas. One of the keys to this is maintaining a log of your activity showing what you did, where you did it, and the number of hours you were engaged in it and have the owner of the layout you were on for the activity.



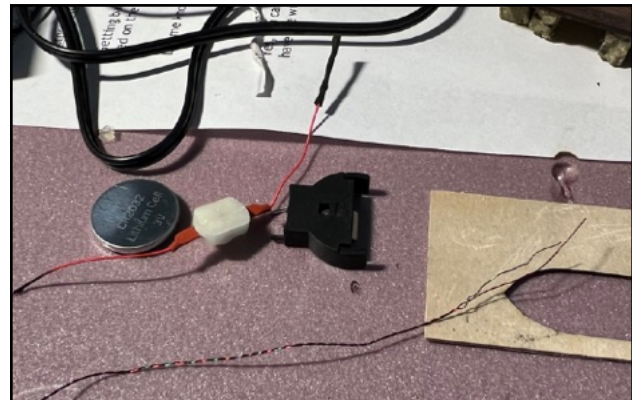
You also need to prepare documentation of a model railroad consisting of a readable drawing of the railroad layout, a timetable simulating an eight hour operating period, a string chart showing relationship of movement of other trains on the layout, and description of a meeting of two trains on the layout providing information on the action to be taken by each train involved. This also includes development of the necessary forms

and explanations of their use in controlling car movements, train make up and operation in a prototypical manner.

It sounds complicated, but it is not and can be achieved by reading the requirements and not reading into them and doing more than required.

AP Electrical-Ernie Little MMR

The Electrical category equips the modeler with the skills and knowledge requisite to wire a layout to operate two mainline trains simultaneously in both directions. Requirements include documentation that the layout includes a passing siding, a way to turn a train around, facilities for storing unused motive power units (be able to turn power off to the units) in a yard or siding, and the operation of at least three of several items listed in the requirements. You must wire,



demonstrate, and document the electrical operation of at least three of the items listed in the requirements and prepare a drawing showing the electrical system of the model railroad you are using. This will include how the layout is powered and the wiring and components of six of the listed items in the requirements.

It sounds complicated, but it is not and can be achieved by reading the requirements and not reading into them and doing more than required. Keep it simple! You do not need a CAD system to make the drawings and hand drawn sketches are acceptable.

AP Civil-Ernie Little MMR



The Civil category may look long and complicated, but it isn't as they have many options to meet the requirements. Don't read between the lines or get too deep into the weeds. Keep it simple, stay on the surface, and breathe while having some fun while working on them. Requirements include preparation of a scale drawing of a track plan and that could be a pencil sketch. Use a piece of graph paper and draw your layout. Each square on the graph paper could represent a distance. No big deal, just make a drawing of the layout and show what it consists of or will consist of.

You need to identify the overall size (you can use a tape measure and determine how long and wide it is), scale (N, HO HO3, etc.), track elevations (just show the change in elevation on the drawing), curve radii

(all you have to do is show the curve radius; maybe look at the package the track came in and viola there it is), and turnout sizes (look at the package the turnout came in and write it on the plan). Include the facilities on your railroad, adequate storage and service facilities, a passing siding, four switching locations where you pick up or drop off cars, a provision for turning motive power, and simultaneous operation of two trains in either direction. Appropriate ballast, drainage facilities, and a roadbed profile must be shown on the layout drawing.

You need to construct and demonstrate operation of a model railroad of the minimum track length shown in the listed requirements which varies by scale. You also need to scratchbuild a minimum of three of the listed items in the requirements such as a crossover, turnout, crossing, etc. and be able to run a locomotive through the constructed items.

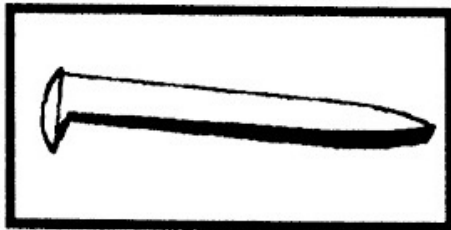
AP Structures-Greg Cassidy

Structures is one of the foundational certificates in the AP program. It encourages modelers to improve their craftsmanship by designing and building a portfolio of detailed structures that enhance the realism of a layout. Participants create twelve models—at least six scratchbuilt—that demonstrate solid construction, thoughtful detailing, prototypical design, and convincing finish work. The program isn't just about



checking boxes; it’s about learning to think like a builder, documenting your process and refining your skills as you go. The paperwork isn’t as onerous as many make it out to be. Working on the structures AP is a rewarding journey that sharpens technique, builds confidence, and brings a layout’s world to life.

Golden Spike-Greg Cassidy



The NMRA’s Golden Spike is an accessible, confidence-building entry point into the Achievement Program. It gives you a structured way to explore multiple facets of model railroading before pursuing more advanced certificates. The award’s requirements span three areas—rolling stock, scenery and structures, and basic engineering. Participants must display six pieces of

rolling stock, build at least eight square feet of layout with five structures, and demonstrate functional trackwork and wiring, including an additional electrical feature (like a light inside a building.) These requirements emphasize familiarity rather than mastery, making the Golden Spike “the easiest, and for many people, the first AP award that they earn.”

AP Scenery-Lee Stoermer

Scenery is that one part of your railroad modeling that binds everything together. Make a structure or a box car and set them next to each other, and what do you have? Just that, a couple 'objects' sitting on a tabletop. Placing into a scene of terrain, and the structure and rolling stock come alive. The amount of area needed is based on scale modeled: HO is 32 square feet as reference, smaller and larger scales are proportionate, and it can be over a series of smaller dioramas or modules... it does not need to be in a continuous scene, and includes G Scale/outdoor modeling. There are five areas that are evaluated: Terrain, Structures, Background, Lighting and Realism. Couple points to note: the structures themselves are not evaluated. They are simply evaluated based upon placement and how they are tied into the terrain. The portion that takes some effort and time is the documentation. It boils down to two things: a series of photos of decent quality showing what has been constructed, and a list of the varied materials used in constructing your scenery.



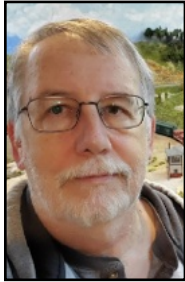
NMRA Achievement Program Checklist

Master Model Railroader - Complete 7 certificates, at least 1 from each of 4 categories
 Refer to the [full NMRA Requirements](http://nmra.org/education/achievement-program) nmra.org/education/achievement-program

	Scratch Built	Scratch Built	Scratch Built	Scratch Built	Scratch Built	Scratch Built	Super Detailed	Super Detailed	Super Detailed	Super Detailed	Super Detailed	Super Detailed	Photographs	Written Description	Materials & Methods	Prepare Drawing(s)
MOTIVE POWER: Earn 3 Merit Awards																
ROLLING STOCK: Total 8 Cars. 1 must be a passenger. Earn 4 Merit Awards																
STRUCTURES: Total 12 structures of 6 types (1 must be a bridge or trestle) Earn 6 Merit Awards																
SCENERY: N-18 sq', HO-2 sq', S-45 sq', O-60 sq' Earn 1 Merit Award for total scene																
PROTOTYPE MODELS: Proto scene with at least 6 models. 4 must be of different types Earn 1 Merit Award for total scene																
CIVIL: Build Trackwork N-25', HO-50', O-75' 6 different types of trackwork Earn 1 Merit Award																
ELECTRICAL: Construct electric control for railroad Wire 3 track types Wire 3 other electrical features																
CHIEF DISPATCHER: 50 hours of operation Schematic drawing of railroad Develop a timetable, train chart and a system of operation																
ASSOCIATION OFFICIAL: 1 yr National, 2 or 3 yrs Regional																
ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEER: 60 time units eg divisional officer, judge, volunteer																
AUTHOR: 42 total points eg articles, clinics, video																

A LONG-DISTANCE MERIT AWARD

Article and Photos by Greg Cassidy



How far would you go to help a fellow modeler? If you happened to catch the article by **Gregory Wright MMR** in the February 2026 issue of the NMRA magazine, you know that it describes his travels—along with **Bill Fassett MMR**, the Pacific Northwest Region’s AP Manager—from their home base in Washington State to Alaska...in the middle of winter! They traveled there to visit the Tanana Valley Model Railroad Club, a 100% NMRA club in Fairbanks. The intent of their visit was to perform many AP evaluations on the club layout, which is housed in the Alaska Railroad’s Fairbanks station. Much of the article focuses on the number

of AP Statement of Qualifications forms that were filled out, as well as quite a few Merit Awards that were given. Gregory mentioned that one in particular, which was for a structure on the layout, had been built by a member who had subsequently moved to Texas. They had to send the Merit Award to the NMRA National office, where it was then forwarded to the modeler in Texas.

I found that part very interesting, because I was in a similar situation a few years ago. After finishing my layout (as much as any layout is finished), I continued building structures, as I found that to be the aspect of the hobby I enjoyed the most. And after a few years of creating structures for friends, I started getting contacted by other model railroaders who wanted a particular structure built for them. This led me to develop a friendship with **Ed Rappe**, for whom I built two structures.

Fast forward a year or two, when I was working toward my Structures AP. I contacted a few friends nearby who I had built structures for and asked if it was OK to have our AP Manager evaluate them as part of my quest. This was easy, as they were all living close by. However, Ed just happened to live a couple of hundred miles, and two Divisions away. One of the structures that I built for him was scratchbuilt, and I felt sure that it might possibly garner a Merit Award ([photo right](#)). So, I took a shot at contacting the AP Manager in the Tidewater Division, where Ed lived, to see if it was possible to get the structure

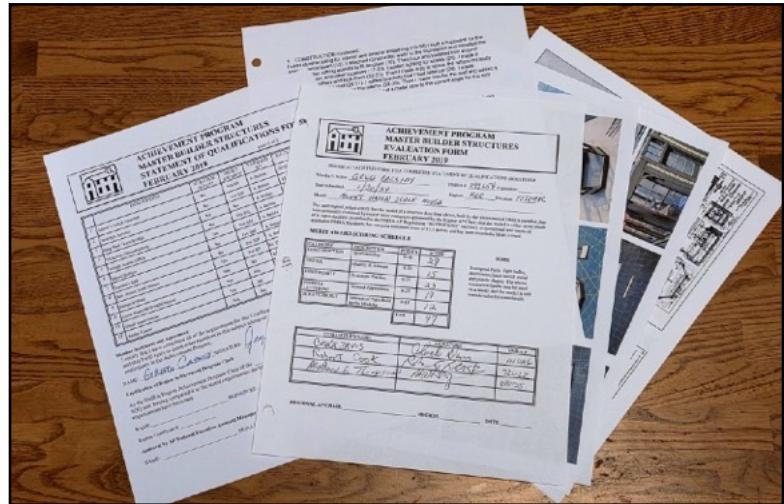




evaluated while on Ed's layout. The AP Manager for Tidewater is **Chuck Davis MMR**, and he couldn't have been nicer about it. I put together all the paperwork just as I had for the other structures being evaluated, and sent it to him in electronic format. It wasn't going to happen soon, because it turned out to be a bit of a distance for him to have to travel as well. But when he was able to travel, he took two of his friends with him and traveled to Ed's town. One of his traveling companions just happened to be **Mat Thompson MMR**, the Potomac Division's former AP Manager. Not only did they get to enjoy Ed's

layout, which is fantastic, but they also evaluated my scale house (photo above).

The following day I received an e-mail with the news I had hoped. I had received a Merit Award for my scale house. Once the paperwork arrived back to me, I was able to include it with all my other papers and send in my Statement of Qualifications for my Structures AP (photo right). While it wasn't the highest score for a Merit Award that I received, it did count towards both my scratchbuild and one of my Merit Award structures.



Because of this, I'm very much indebted to **Chuck Davis MMR**, **Robert Cook MMR**, and **Mat Thompson MMR** for going out of their way to help this modeler.

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Greg Cassidy is the Potomac Division's Senior Assistant Superintendent. His modeling can be seen on his [YouTube Channel](#).

A FINE DAY FOR FOUR FINE VIRGINIA LAYOUTS

Article and Photos By Ken Wilson

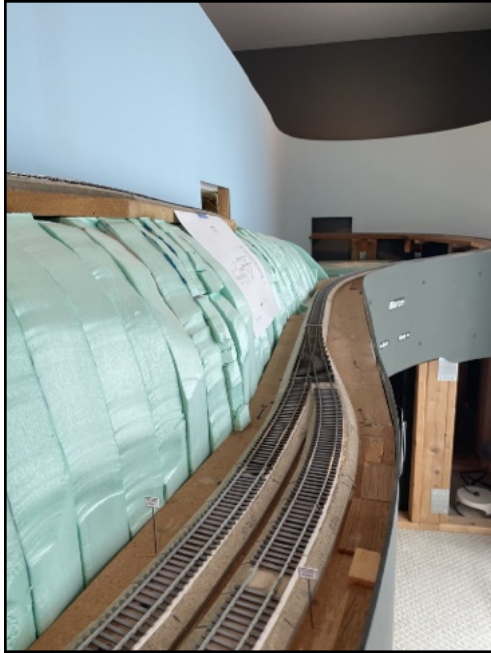
On March 7th, three of our members in the Gainesville, Virginia area and one further north in Hamilton, Virginia opened their layouts for visitors. The weather was fantastic, but I was worried that we might lose potential visitors because this was one of the first days of warm weather following weeks of cold, and outdoor home projects might take priority. I was pleasantly surprised with the attendance, which was between 16 and 26 at each layout. This was better than at previous open houses.



My first visit was to see **Bob Gifford's** HO scale Waterford Creek Lines in Hamilton ([photo above](#)). His layout is large and features two levels but no helix. He told me that two of his "must haves" when designing the layout were no helixes and no duck under. Seeing what Bob has created so far made me look up to him, both as a modeler and, frankly,

frankly, a rather tall individual. I think the "no duck under" requirement was his main priority. His trains start and end in an adjacent room where he has built two staging areas stacked upon each other with a 21-inch differential. It takes over 20 minutes to run the entire railroad, and the grade changes are very subtle. Standing in any of his aisles, you can see the slight difference in the heights on either side. However, the most





obvious elevation change is at one end of the layout where trains disappear through the backdrop and reappear on the return loop at a different level. It's the steepest grade on the layout, but his trains do not require helper engines (photo left). Bob is in the early stages of scenery, and this gave me the opportunity to look closely at his trackwork. His curves are not tight, but I noticed in an area without ballast that he has added thin



styrene strips under the outside rail to super-elevate the track (photo right). I had the chance to run a train on the entire route and didn't experience a single problem. He has a painted fascia, but no masking skirt below, and I couldn't help but notice the massive construction he employed for framing and legs. His explanation was simple: the cost of 2x4's was cheaper than thinner 1x lumber or 2x2 legs. I look forward to returning to see how his railroad evolves.



My next stops were to see the three Gainesville layouts. I started at Lee Stoermer's HO rendition of the Codorus Subdivision of the Northern Central RR. It was my first visit, but I have seen a small tease of his layout during Potomac Division Board meetings on Zoom. I took a photo of Lee (in the back wearing the green shirt photo left) standing in front of the

area visible during those Zoom meetings. Several of us in the group noted that we had a quorum of board members present to conduct a meeting. Fortunately, enjoying his railroad overruled that silly idea. It was great to see the whole thing with many small

details to be appreciated at each turn. During the Potomac Division annual meeting last May, Lee demonstrated how he uses natural materials for scenery detail. I enjoyed seeing the finished application of his technique, most notably the presence of deadfall trees and shrubs. (photos right and below left) Lee's railroad is single level, but the many bridges, streams, and occasional tunnels give visitors a sense of a real railroad overcoming the various obstacles of nature. No area of his layout



looks like it is waiting for his scenic treatment. However, like all model railroaders, he is constantly working on such details as weathering rolling stock. His work area might be called "snug", but that doesn't restrict his talent.

My next stop was a revisit of John Whittaker's HO narrow gauge layout. He didn't have a name for it back in 2024, but now it is known as the Colorado and Silver Hope Railroad. It's a bit of a whimsical name since John (photo below right) bases his fictional railroad on one

that is down on its luck hoping for the local silver miners to strike it rich and keep the railroad solvent. In the meantime, the railroad uses equipment borrowed from the D&RGW. John's railroad has multiple levels, but again, this is accomplished without a helix. His little HOn3 steamers struggle with the steep mountain grades, and thanks to long runs and curves, John has created some spectacular views of the Rockies. He has added to his scenery from what I had seen two years ago. I might have missed seeing the snow shed before, but I believe this is a nice new feature. He told me during my prior visit that a waterfall was planned for a location that was just in the earliest stages of formation. I was pleased to see now how it turned out.





The Potomac Division has recently hosted a series of virtual clinics presented by Ed Koehler that detail the history of various narrow-gauge railroads—a topic that has always captivated me. The chance to see John’s layout ([photos left and below right](#)) again was a timely opportunity to further satisfy the narrow-gauge fever. We don’t have many narrow-gauge layouts to visit, and I highly recommend checking this one out the next time John hosts a tour.



I saved my last stop to see Jim

Rogers’ massive HO layout. No helixes to be found here, since he’s modeled a condensed version of the B&O from Cincinnati to Baltimore. Jim’s layout is well known for operations, and there’s plenty of opportunity for as many as 14 operators. This is the first layout at which I tried my hand operating, and thankfully I had a seasoned conductor to keep me from losing my mind! For a layout designed and focused on operations, Jim ([photo below](#)) has created extensive scenery. This includes several



large yards, and from what I’ve witnessed during operating sessions, they provide some of the biggest operating challenges. His paper mill complex is, well, complex. As this was my first operating job, I quickly learned to be very frugal with the number of cars being moved. Those short sections of track are very unforgiving. Jim used to have a lift-up section that met visitors as soon as they entered his railroad, but he rebuilt that section to create a new island that he calls the Front Street Yard. There’s plenty of opportunity for switching with the various industries and tracks there, and it takes two operators to keep up with the schedule. The advantage of visiting during this open house was that it gave me the time to enjoy seeing other areas of his



layout that I hadn't operated on, both the scenic details (photo left) and the track arrangements (photos below).

Our next opportunity to visit layouts will be June 27 when four layouts in Maryland will be open to members. Once again, we will have the opportunity to see the HO, N, and American Flyer layouts at the Leisure World Model Railroad Club thanks to Henry Jordan. Tom Matty will show us his HO scale Western Maryland Thomas Sub, and then there will be two O-scale layouts: David Vaughn's rendition of the Kentucky Western Division of the Nickel Plate Road, and Andrew Dodge's Central Maine Railway in the 1890's. Save the date!



MEET THE MEMBER: BOB RODRIGUEZ MMR

Editor's Note: This feature is designed to promote greater knowledge about members of the Potomac Division and their model railroading interests. If you are willing to participate, please send an email to potomac-flyer@potomac-nmra.org. The following text is by Bob Rodriguez, who also provided the photos.



Bob Rodriguez MMR

How did you get started in the hobby?

My interest in model railroading started at about eight years old, when my parents bought me a Fleischmann Pennsylvania steam locomotive train set. (To this day I have that locomotive, proudly on display in front of one of the passenger stations on my layout.) With its simple oval brass HO scale track, it consumed many days of my attention. A few years later we purchased a track plan book from Atlas. G Then we purchased a 4'x8' sheet of plywood and some folding legs. My journey into the depths of the hobby was born.

That 4'x8' layout stayed with me through high school, college, and into my first townhouse, which I purchased in my early 20s. After I married, at my wife's suggestion, I attended a meeting of a group of guys who were trying to start a model

railroad club. Her friend's husband was the orchestrator of the idea. I became very involved with the newly formed club, as well as the construction of the club's first layout in the back of a local hobby shop.

After I moved to a single-family home a few years later, I staked out a medium size area in the basement for my own layout. Using some of the skills I had learned while building the club layout, I began my new layout and it started to take shape.



Amtrak 641 has just arrived in Dubois and is boarding passengers before heading west to Pittsburgh. The station is a scale replica of the Dubois Train Station Bob modeled using photographs and measurements he obtained from the internet.

What do you model now: layout, scale?

My layout is an HO scale free-lanced railroad named The Nickel City Line. The layout is triple deck, roughly 28'x46', and occupies the entire basement of our home,. The railroad is situated in the Alleghany Mountains of Pennsylvania and runs between Harrisburg and Shippensburg in the east to Ridgway in the west. The track plan is operations-oriented with a variety of freight, coal, and passenger service seen in a 24-hour period. The timeframe is set in 1999. Each operation session I host progresses through the calendar. It takes four sessions to complete a 24-hour period.

The railroad has been through several major renovations and extensions over the years, each one building on knowledge and experience I have gained in the hobby.



When COVID hit in 2020 I started a number of projects on the layout but missed the ops sessions and the social interaction they provided. I knew many of my fellow operators

Extra train 423R ascends the Canova Grade, a 5% incline modeled after the infamous Saluda Grade in western North Carolina. The Canova Grade adds operational challenges for train crews at Bob's ops sessions.

were feeling the same way. I took on the challenge of figuring out how to operate the layout over the internet and then host operating sessions remotely. With a lot of tinkering as well as helpful advice and support from a number of people I achieved both goals. In May of 2020 I began hosting ops sessions again, remotely. I had four road crews and a dispatcher, all remote. I

was the sole occupant of the layout room. In the months that followed, I hosted 64 remote ops sessions, five sessions a month, until serious COVID infections declined and we could once again be together. The remote component of the railroad remains active and is still used today by several of my crew. During COVID I actually added to my operating crew with model railroaders from Indianapolis, Indiana; Syracuse, New York; Long Island, New York; and Reading, Pennsylvania. These new folks all operated remotely. The railroad has been dispatched, using the Computer Assisted Traffic System on the dispatcher's computer, from as far away as Indianapolis. Needless to say, the layout got many of us through the worst of COVID.

When I started the layout, I didn't know much about how to do operations. I sought out as much information as I could. This was well before the internet was a regular thing and Google wasn't even an idea yet. I gathered enough information to conduct my first ops session in 2002. Over the years, I have made a lot of refinements to enable each session to go more smoothly than the last. Learning from others involved in operations has made my sessions more enjoyable and efficient. In late 2026, I hope to celebrate my 250th ops session on the railroad.

How long have you been an NMRA member? How long with Potomac Division?

While building the club layout I learned about the National Model Railroad Association (NMRA). I eventually joined the NMRA and the Potomac Division.



NCL locomotive 245 is sitting at idle on the engine service track in Clearfield as the sun rises. The crew has a full schedule of switching moves to complete during their work day.

Over the years with my NMRA membership in hand I remained involved in my local model railroad club as well as engaging with other NMRA members. This provided me ample opportunities to refine my skills and learn more different aspects of the hobby.

In 2025 I celebrated my 25th year as an NMRA member with the Potomac Division. I also am a member of the NMRA OPSIG group which provides invaluable knowledge and insight into model railroad and prototype operations.

What to you is the value of the AP program? Is shooting for MMR worthwhile?

During my journey into model railroad operations, I decided to work on the NMRA Achievement Program. My first certificate earned was for Chief Dispatcher. More certificates followed over the years, but the advent of COVID really caused me to knuckle down and finish the last remaining certificates for my Master Model Railroader certificate, which was awarded in September 2022. Looking back, my road to MMR provided me opportunities to vastly improve my modeling skills and learn new

tricks to accomplish my hobby goals. While the path to MMR looks daunting at first, think of it as a process or series of courses that help you learn and push your limits in the hobby. As you gain more knowledge and experience in the program you become a much better modeler.

What advice do you have for newcomers to the hobby?

For those just starting in the hobby my advice is to not let the great work of others discourage you. Everyone I met whose work I admire was more than willing to share how they did what they did. And everyone started at the bottom and learned through trial and error. So, yes, admire others' work, but also ask questions and learn a little from each person with whom you interact.

The Potomac Division and the NMRA offer many activities for learning, socializing, and passing knowledge onto others. Over the years I have attended a number of open houses, joint meets, virtual clinics, and MiniCons. I have attended an NMRA convention and MER conventions where there was so much to do and to learn.

Describe your model railroad philosophy?

My philosophy in the hobby is all about enjoyment. We must enjoy what we do, whether it is through building, operating, socializing, learning, or something else. If we are not enjoying the hobby, then why do it?

What's your favorite part of the hobby? How about your least favorite? What projects have you been working on recently?

Now fully retired for about two years, I am deeply involved in attending ops sessions wherever I can. Attending clinics and meets are also on my agenda, but I love model railroad operations.

My least favorite aspect, I suppose, is wiring, probably because I have to spend a lot of time on my back pulling wire and checking for proper connections.

With regards to projects, last year I added a switching layout extension called Clearfield. Most of my projects these days revolve around finishing up Clearfield (scenery, structure building, adding fine details, etc.) Another project I am working on is refurbishing older locomotives I have so they can be added to my ops roster. Those projects take up a good bit of my hobby time when I am not getting ready to host an ops session or to attend an ops session elsewhere.

For all of these reasons, I consider model railroading the world's greatest hobby.



THE INDUSTRIES CHALLENGE

This time, the *Flyer* challenged you to submit your favorite industry on your layout or module. These could be big industries like a steel mill or meat packing plant, or something smaller, perhaps a sawmill or a dairy. We received a real variety!



In a departure from our usual practice, we'll begin this challenge with a photo essay on railworthy industries by former Potomac AP Coordinator **Mat Thompson MMR** (shown here as a 19th century railroad magnate courtesy of ChatGPT).

Thanks to all who sent in photos and brief descriptions for our February-March Decal Challenge!

Our *Flyer* 1st Place Favorite Star for that challenge is awarded to **Mark Gionet** for his truck signs. If you have a favorite among these industry offerings, send us an email telling us which one.



Looking ahead, our **June-July 2026 Challenge** will be for your **Favorite Railroad (or Model Railroading) Book**. Just send a brief description explaining why you like it and a photo of the cover for our **Railroad Book Challenge** by May 5th to: potomac-flyer@potomac-nmra.org. (If you have two favorite books, send us both.)



And a heads up for the **August-September Challenge—Emergency Services**. We'll be looking for fire houses, fire trucks, police stations, jails, hospitals and the like.

I want to thank the members of the Potomac Division for sharing their work in these challenges. Readers of the *Flyer* in the Division, in the entire Mid-Eastern Region, and NMRA members elsewhere benefit from seeing what you have accomplished (and are welcome to participate in these Challenges.)

As *Flyer* Editor, I can tell you that reviewing your Challenge submissions is always a real treat.

Alex Belida, MMR
Editor and Publisher

(The following items appear in the order in which they were received. The texts and photos are by the modelers who submitted them unless otherwise noted. Some texts may have been edited for length and/or clarity. We welcome submissions from members of other NMRA Divisions in the MER and beyond.)

RAILWORTHY INDUSTRIES

Photo Essay by Mat Thompson MMR

I have been able to learn from observing real railroads that the industries on my Oregon Coast Railroad are large enough to qualify as “railworthy”—that is, their size and purpose justify rail service. I think of an industry as any activity that generates traffic. The industry can be a factory or a mill, but also a railroad coaling tower or just a spot along a siding used as a team track.

Some of my models portray a specific industry appropriate for Oregon, like Christopher Paper. Others help set the railroad location by using local names such as Santiam Foods and Victoria Windows even though from their appearance they could be many different businesses in almost any part of the country.

I model 1957, when the transition era was winding down but industries receiving only an occasional single car would still be common, so all of the industries I display don't need to be big. If I modeled more current times, the trend would be fewer rail customers with bigger facilities.



Photo above: I built Stroube Hughes Corp. for George and Laura Hughes' Norfolk and Western (N&W) layout using George's stash of Walthers, Faller, Kibri, and other kits. Combining parts and modeling most buildings as flats filled a two-by-five-foot space.

Tracks disappearing down brick alleys, tall smoke stacks, loading docks, and multiple car types combine to represent a factory typical along the mid-century N&W right of way. Switching it kept the operator busy for two hours.



Photo above: Not every industry has to be big to be believable. This small scratchbuilt shed could be a storage place for track maintenance tools or a less-than-carload (LCL) station. A model railroad populated with only small buildings can look toy-like but a few carefully chosen small buildings can help tell the story of the railroad.



Photo left: This fuel dock can only hold one tank car's load. It's a good example of a believable, realistic

small facility. The dock is a Campbell kit, but plans for a similar kitbashed model have appeared several times in the model railroad press.



Photo above: An AMB model was used for Santiam Foods, a cannery made larger by combining the front and back pieces into a longer front and substituting unfinished wood for the rear wall. The slightly modified smaller addition on the right is from a Bar Mills kit. Each kit would be easily recognized if it was modeled, painted, and lettered as sold. With different signage and joined together, however, the modified structure is an industry unique to the Oregon Coast Railroad. Notice that some freight doors are blue, and others are green, rather than the more common numbering of doors.

Photo right: Victoria Windows is made from several buildings, typical of businesses that grew over time. The white office building was an AMB Santa Fe passenger station with the bay window replaced by the entryway. The metal sheathed building is scratchbuilt. Beyond it is an open-air supply shed from Timberline. The lumber rack is a Campbell kit.





Photo above: Christopher Paper is a combination of scratchbuilding and kitbashing. The complex consists of flats built along a wall, so most of the industry's two-foot-by-six-foot space is filled with track, providing lots of switching action in a small area. Typical of bigger industries, there are a variety of car types with inbound raw materials and supplies; outbound products; and both inbound and outbound empties. Typical of bigger industries, there are many tanks of different sizes, colors, and styles.



Photo left: Some industries don't need to be modeled at all. The three outbound cars in this picture have been spotted at an interchange, waiting to be picked up by a passing train which will also drop inbound cars. The fiction is that the lumber mill they came from is down the tracks to the right, but on the layout the track ends after curving behind some trees.



Photo left: Team tracks are spots railroads designate for loading and unloading activity for customers that don't have their own rail facilities. A team track can be no more than space for a truck to park beside a railroad car. While a layout is under construction, adding a bit of ground cover can give an area a completed look until a finished model is placed there.

Photo right: This is a more elaborate version of a team track. The large, paved lot allows around-the-clock multiple car loading and unloading by one or more customers. The ramp is for unloading vehicles from cars with side doors or end doors.



Photo left: Sometimes small industries of similar type such as these two oil jobbers are co-located. Towns and cities used to designate areas for these facilities for safety reasons. Several jobbers close together is prototypical and creates a busy look on a model railroad. In farm country, grain elevators lined up side-by-side along a siding were also common.



Photo above: At first look, it isn't obvious how many cars are at Swift, the mark of a large industry. The Swift Packing Plant occupied a two-by-eleven-foot area on my previous Oregon Coast Railroad. This version takes up a three-by-eight-foot space, allowing for a bigger ice plant and a separate maintenance facility, the white building on the far right. A plant of this size often had its own industrial switcher—a good excuse to add one to your engine roster.



Photo left: With ship, rail, and truck carriers, this transfer point is a busy and interesting hub of inbound and outbound rail traffic. The ship is an Artitec kit and the crane came from Walthers. The terminal building is two Walthers transfer stations built end-to-end.

HERE ARE THE CHALLENGE SUBMISSIONS

1. DALE LATHAM'S BAKING COMPANY



This my *Anita Latham Baking Co.* It's of course named after the greatest cook I know, my wife Anita. It's composed of kitbashed walls from several Walther's structures, as well as parts and details from other manufacturers. It's the largest single structure in the town of Piedmont on my HO scale, freelanced Piedmont Southern R.R.

Dale Latham

2. MARTIN BRECHBIEL'S PERFECT PICKLES

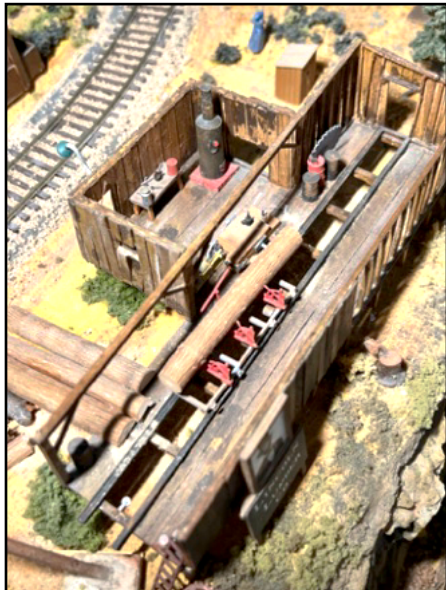


This is my scratchbuilt *Lauther's Perfect Pickles* which has a full interior on both floors. It was featured on the cover of O Scale Trains magazine many years ago.

And one extra of *Doyle's Ice* which is another scratchbuilt structure that also was featured in O Scale Trains magazine many years ago.
Martin Brechbiel MMR



3. ALEX BELIDA'S LINCOLN LUMBER



This sawmill is from Keystone Models. Details include installation of a log carriage frame with headblocks, saw blades, cables and drums, an engine and fly wheel, governor and control lever. A sawdust removal chain was added to the bottom and staked to a stump just outside the building. There is also a boiler and cistern plus a work bench with oil cans and tools for the loggers, including axes, pikes, peaveys, a crosscut saw and shovel. A small operating LED gooseneck light was attached to the entrance. Figures have been placed around the area. My scratchbuilt steam derrick is positioned next to the sawmill so it can swing logs into the log dump or directly onto the ramp leading into the sawmill.

Alex Belida MMR

4. BRIAN SHERON'S MARINA



While this is not an “industry” served by the Long Island Rail Road, it is a model of a small marina my father owned in the 1950’s on Huntington Harbor on the north shore of Long Island. It is an accurate model of the marina, with the exception of the gangway to the dock being shortened and the actual dock was made smaller due to space limitations.



This (photo left) is my model of the West Chemical Company, which operated on Long Island until it declared bankruptcy in 1992. The West Chemical decals on the tank cars were Microscale and also custom-made by me on the computer. *Brian Sheron MMR*

5. GREG CASSIDY'S CHECK PRINTERS



The American Check Printers company is a kitbash made from modular walls by DPM and the Railway Design Associates Fresh Farm Warehouse. It and the surrounding environment that's enclosed by a chain link fence are a lift-out so I can reach the trackage behind it if needed. *Greg Cassidy*

DID YOU KNOW?

The Potomac Division has its own Groups.IO site where members can discuss all aspects of model railroading and exchange information on techniques, products, prototypes, ask questions, or even ask for help, and much more. If you haven't joined, please do so. Go to [this site](#) and follow the link to sign up.

6. ERNIE LITTLE'S NORFOLK SOUTHERN CONNECTOR INDUSTRIES



There are several industries on my HO scale Norfolk Southern Connector railroad. Austin Fuel, Elizabeth's Pellet Company, and LaGuardia Energy are three of them. They are located in the town of Joyceville and are major contributors to the economic stability of the community. The first two were named for two of my grandchildren and were scratchbuilt using parts from styrene plastic kits that I had used in the past. The last was constructed from number of Walther's buildings that were sold as an "ethanol facility" and is named for a fellow model railroader. *Ernie Little MMR*



7. JAMES HELLWEGE'S PAPER INDUSTRY



My Maine-based N-scale layout required a paper-based industry, so I combined two different kits to provide a paper factory two building complex—the Walthers Cornerstone Geo. Roberts Printing Co. and Red Wing Milling Co. kits. The factory is



served by two tracks, one providing paper-making chemicals via tank cars, and the other providing access via box car service. Connections between the two buildings are provided via conduits constructed of drinking straws, as are the various smokestacks. Fine-sized ballast is used to accent the roof tops.

James Hellwege

8. BOB RODRIGUEZ'S COAL PROCESSING PLANT



The Dubois Coal Processing Plant on my HO Scale Nickel City Line Railroad occupies a 40' section of the upper deck on the triple deck layout. One person serves as the Plant Operator during ops sessions. The conveyors are for clean coal and coal storage silos. The coal flood loader ([photo below](#)) is behind and to the right of the silos. Once loaded with clean coal, the hoppers are relocated to the scale track for weighing. The



main plant is in the rear with primary and secondary thickener tanks in front. Waste rock silo and chemical waste tracks are also located in this area as well as the coal dump house. The silos and flood loader were a combination of scratchbuilt and kitbashed components. Most of the large structures were kitbashed. Some components were 3D printed.

Bob Rodriguez MMR

9. JOHN PAGANONI'S WATERFRONT INDUSTRY



My model of the Gair Mill is greatly reduced in size as this prototype mill was the largest in the Montville, Connecticut area on the Central Vermont Railway. A unique feature of the Gair Mill through the 1950's was the wood structure of the crane that was used to unload the coal barges. The barge dock construction is modeled as close as possible to the prototype as possible. While coal barges in those days were quite long and were powered, a tug boat was needed to guide them on the Thames River. The heavy truck railroad crossing is another interesting part of the Gair Mill. Trucks came down a steep hill that did not provide clear view up and down the tracks which, was a real safety hazard. The prototype in those days did not have crossing gates, so someone had to guide the trucks across safely. *John Paganoni MMR*



10. GLENN PAULSON'S BREWERY



A pair of SW7's work the Schmidt Brewery on Glenn Paulson's railroad, the Allegheny Division of Conrail in Johnstown PA. At the Brewery the covered hoppers loaded with wheat are being set out to be unloaded. The lead loco 9805 is still hard at work in the 1990's but soon find a home in retirement at the B & O Museum in Baltimore. The main brewery structure is a kit bash of a couple of Walthers kits. The silos are made from replacement tambourine head tubes.

The locos in the second photo (right) are moving a couple tank cars carrying corn syrup and two box cars carrying packaging supplies.

In the third photo (below) of the Schmidt Distribution building the beer cars being loaded with the finished product. Beer and a new venture into specialty drinks.
Glenn Paulson

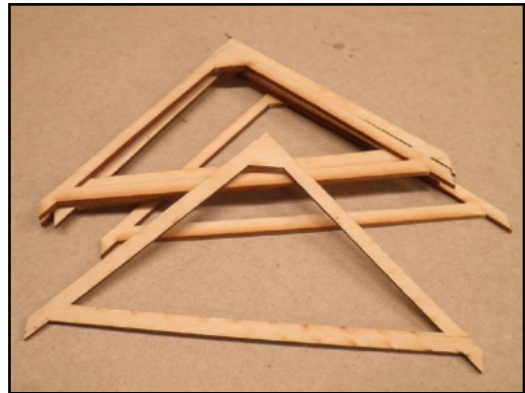


BUILDING CUTTER'S STORE

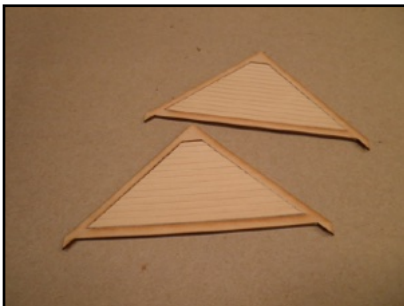
Article and Photos by Martin Brechbiel MMR



I had a bag of 16' rafters from Deerfield River Laser that needed a home, some stray windows (Grandt Line Nos. 3706, 3702), and a door (HHM). That was the starting point for this project. The dimensions of the rafters defined both the width as well as the depth of the building. Width was obvious, and depth was directly related to the number of rafters and the spacing interval between them ([photo right](#)). So, I got started on this build.



The front and back rafters were going to be exposed and would make up an integral part of the ends. To make that happen, I filled in the opening of two rafters with milled clapboard (MidWest) and added a little support behind the clapboard ([photo below](#)).



Based on the rafter span width, I laid out two clapboard blanks for the front and back walls with 3/32" square stock on the ends for corners. I secured this all with Goo and CA. I decided that the back wall would include a bump out shed space. I cut one of the blanks apart to make the five wall sections and added some more clapboard into the mix. The five sections are shown with openings cut for two windows and more 3/32" square stock on the ends to be consistent in the width dimension ([photo right](#)).

I assembled the five sections for the back wall and bump out were assembled with 3/16" square balsa for bracing to stabilize this sub-unit. I added the bracing to keep the wall "flat" and to also provide gluing surfaces at the top and bottom.

With this sub-unit good and solid, I attached the rest of the walls while making openings for the other windows and door. I added more 3/16" square balsa around the top and bottom for gluing surfaces. At the top, I laid





out the locations for the rafters ([photo left](#)).

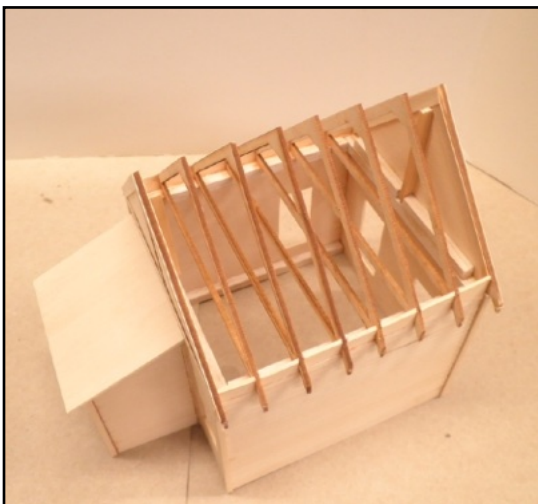
I applied a little more trim to the two exposed end rafters to add interest and depth using O scale 1" stock around the perimeter and up the middle. I used another bit of scrap wood to add some additional vertical bracing to the middle of these ends .

Now that the entire

footprint for this building was defined, I built up a base for it using some basswood, some scrap sheet stock, and some HO 8" x 22" for the visible decking ([photo right](#)).



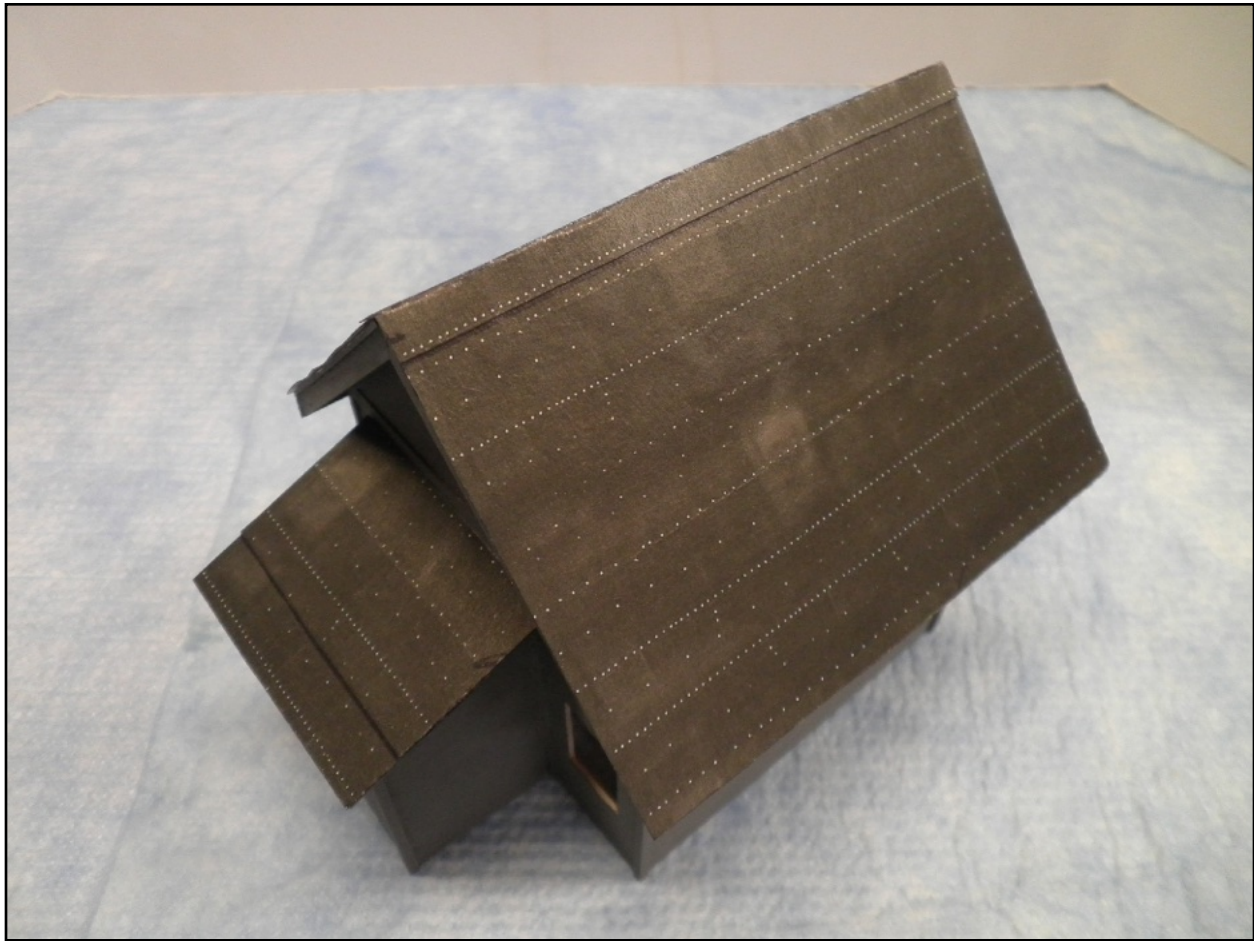
Going back to the roof now, I installed the two exposed end rafters. I placed the rest of the rafters on their marks and secured them with Goo and CA, all ready to get covered up with sheathing. Yes, all those lovely rafters won't be seen again. Between the rafters at their base, I cut and placed O scale 2" x 16" to fill the eaves under the roof.



I applied roof sheathing cut from 1/32" basswood sheet over the main building and over the bump out section around back. I applied roof trim (HO 2" x 16") under the roof edges ([photos left and right](#)).



Roofing material was printed tar paper from Clever Brothers. Having the pdf file handy, along with a laser printer, made it easy to print off all that I needed for this



small building. However, I saved the scraps for out buildings that might need a new roof some future day ([photo above](#)).

I painted the door and windows (Tuscan) and glazed them with overhead projector film ([photo right](#)). I painted the entire building with Harbor Mist Gray (Floquil) while I just stained the base platform with mystery MinWax. After drying, I mounted the building to the base and inserted the door and windows into their respective locations.



To finish this build, I created signage using PowerPoint. I mounted the store sign onto 1/32" basswood and placed it above the door using Goo and CA. I added a small sign saying



“Closed Come Back Thursday” to the door. I painted (Polly Scale) and stained drums and pallets (Tichy) for the front and around back (photo left). I added a smokejack to the one side (photo below). I assembled this from brass tube, rod, and sheet with a washer for a mounting flange all soldered together. These are easier to make yourself than to find and order. Around back, I added various small cans/drums after painting them (Polly Scale). These were some of my castings, made in a material similar to a dental stone, that takes paint very nicely versus resin.

I left the one wall blank rather than using it to display an array

of advertising signage. Every model structure doesn't need to be slathered with signage (or weathering)!

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Martin Brechbiel MMR is the Potomac Division's AP Manager and an O scale modeler.



BUILDING PREMIER PLASTICS

Article and Photos by Jim Allen

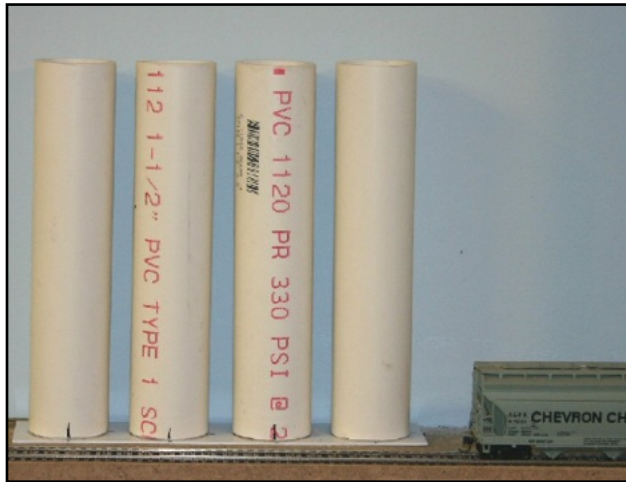


My Premier Plastics build was inspired by a brand-new plant that I watched go up a half a mile from my home. At the time I had no idea what was being built, and I wasn't particularly interested until the I saw the Norfolk Southern crews laying out all kinds of neat things. The turn and switch came in one piece. As I watched, I asked myself how are the switchers going to make the turn down and into the distribution side? To my eyes, I would guess a four percent grade with a fairly small turning radius. When the plant was finished, sure enough, the local GP38 came calling, bringing in about eight or so cars for the plant. They had positioned the eight cars last on the daily local train. The engineer backed down the hill and made the turn. They unhooked and brought what was left up and out. The plant ([photo below](#)) became a regular stop and I thoroughly enjoyed watching them work.



I made the decision to build a model of the plant, and set up the distribution point on my HO scale layout. I did not have the room to build this plant to scale. After some planning, I decided to build it against a wall at the end of my layout, as a flat building giving most of the space needed to the intricate side where the cars were loaded with plastic pellets. For this I would need lots of photos, and the plant owners did not want

the public wandering around. I waited for the weekend to drive in—nope, it was busy. In fact, they worked multiple shifts. As luck would have it, I drove in on a holiday to take pictures. There were cameras everywhere, and I assumed that I would be stopped. I had my story laid out and I would tell the truth. “Sir, I am a railfan nut and very much want to build this plant in my basement on my layout.” Well, I didn’t have to make a fool of myself, as I was able to take photos and get out without being stopped; nor did anyone show up at my house later that day!



Making the Silos

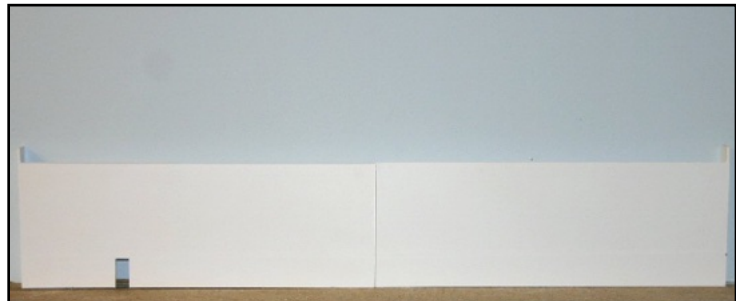
I originally planned to build two rows of silos, and then use a photo of the second row to provide depth. In place of that, I went with one set of larger silos ([photo left](#)) and opted to actually build the end of the building.

I cut the silos out of white PVC pipe. Each silo is nine inches tall. I glued the four silos to a piece of white styrene, which would end up being the cement foundation. I also used sheet styrene for the tops of each silo. I simply traced

the tubes onto the styrene, then cut them out with scissors. Once these were glued into place, I used regular household spackle to fill any cracks or gaps. After sanding the filled-in caps, I gave them a primer coat of blossom white paint.

Building the walls

I used plain sheet styrene was again used here. I cut two pieces 4 1/4" by 12". Next, I made a cutout for a small steel door to be added later ([photo right](#)). Using thicker styrene, I cut out the taller side walls and glued them to the rear sections. I cut additional 3/4-inch pieces to support the rear building walls and to keep the building evenly spaced off of the basement wall.



Again, using styrene, I cut out the roof top and then glued it into place. The building was given a couple of coats of semi-gloss blossom white paint. I chose blossom white because it was not a very bright white; as it turned out, I just happened to have a can of it.

Dry Cooling Towers

To build this unit, I cut three large rooftop swamp coolers into various sizes. The swamp coolers were made by Walthers originally. I cut out all of the vent fronts and



glued them together as the front of this unit. I cut sheet styrene for the rest of the unit. I cut the center beams from half I-beams made by Plastruct. I trimmed the remaining parts and used them along with sheet styrene to create the smaller units. I used three large locomotive fans for the top of the vacuum unit. I used trimmed sprues for the piping. I heated the sprues before any bending was done ([photo left](#)).

Adding the details

Now that the basics were in place, it was time to add the details. Using left over sprues that I heated, and then bent, I built the six main water lines. These were by far the biggest of the many pipes needed. Wrapping the pipes with automotive pin stripe tape, I was able to simulate the joint for the front shutoff valves. For all of the other pipes and fittings, I used a Walther's piping kit. Walther's makes two of these kits, which come with a lot of different pieces. The plastic in these kits is more flexible than the sprue sections left over from your kits, thus you can custom bend them without heating them.

I built the three filtering units from scratch using PVC piping and whatever I could find lying around. The pump motor behind filter number three is a leftover motor from a grain bin kit. I made the other compressors or motors were made from spare rooftop air conditioning parts, again from Walther's. I scratchbuilt the electrical cabinet from sheet styrene.

The handrails were made by Plastruct. The ladders came from Rix Products as a ladder kit. The three blower fans on top are 52" fans from Detail Associates.

Building Details and Painting

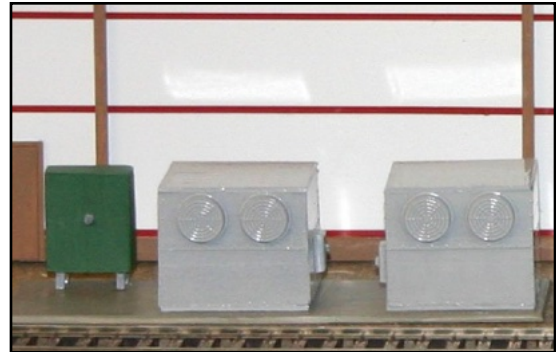
I made the building itself with sheet styrene. Using Evergreen's styrene tubing, I installed the top gutters along with the downspouts. I also used small strips of styrene for the roof top trim. For the building joints, I used 1/16th red automotive pin striping. This also breaks up the bland white walls ([photo right](#)).



For the large wall vents, I used Paintshop Pro to design my vents, and then printed them on heavy sticky back paper.

Building the blower / vacuum motor area

Like the large air coolers, there are not any specific kits that have the parts needed to build this area; so you will have to get creative. Scratch building the electrical boxes was simple. I used leftover conveyor parts along with some small Plastruct pieces to build the scaffolding. For the blower motors and containers, I used an assortment of spare parts, sliced PVC tubing, dowels, and a few pieces of small Plastruct rods. The spare parts included but were not limited to rooftop AC pieces, a hacked-up compressor, part of a small motor, and part of a grain dust collector. The vents in the walls were created and printed using sticky paper. Here you can also see the red tape wall joints ([photo above right](#)).



The Silos top details

Using leftover heated and bent sprues along with pipe from the Walthers pipe kit, I added a pipe to each silo. The four pipes run to the end and then down the rear side of the 4th silo ([photo below](#)). These turn in various directions once they are at ground level. I made the handrails from cut brass rod and thin strips of styrene.

The distribution piping

An additional set of pipes run from the blower motors down along the loading and unloading area. These pipes get hooked to the individual hopper bays. To simulate the long pieces of tubing, I used 14-gauge wire painted silver



Tying it all together

I added a little weathering, but not too much as this is a new manufacturing plant. Using photos from previous railfan trips, I created a background to give this small area some depth. Next, I poured the ballast and planted some grass. Finally, Premier Plastics was ready to receive and ship during operating sessions.

Jim Allen focuses on 1990s-era Norfolk Southern, Norfolk and Western, and Southern in HO scale, but says if he sees something interesting, he will make it or recreate it.

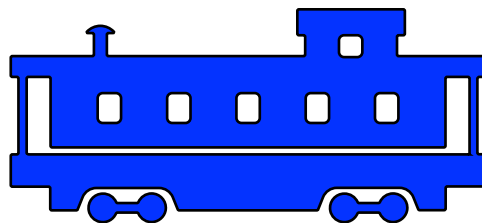
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If you are willing to provide material, please go to this [link](#) for more information on what we need. You can earn points to your Author certificate.

And if you're interested in someday taking over responsibility for the *Flyer*, contact Editor & Publisher Alex Belida at the *Flyer* email address below!

Send your submissions and/or inquiries to: Potomac-Flyer@potomac-nmra.org



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CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS

Sunday, April 12, 2026, 3:00 PM - Potomac Division Virtual Clinic 71 - Intro to the NMRA Achievement Program - Clinician: Alex Belida, MMR.

Saturday, April 25, 2026, 10 AM - Hobby Barn Clinic - Setting up a Signaling System - Clinician: Bryan Kidd

Sunday, May 17, 2026, 3:00 PM - Potomac Division Virtual Clinic 72 - Golden Spike and NMRA Achievement Program certificate paperwork - Clinicians: Greg Cassidy and Martin Brechbiel, MMR.

Saturday, May 23, 2026, Potomac Division Annual Meeting and Meet - 9:00 AM - NMRA AP Structures and Scenery certificate requirements - Clinicians Greg Cassidy and Lee Stoermer - In person event at Dranesville Community Center, Mclean, Virginia (Site is tentative awaiting confirmation)

Sunday, June 21, 2026, Potomac Division Virtual Clinic 73 - 3:00 PM - NMRA Official and Volunteer certificate requirements - Clinician: Martin Brechbiel, MMR.

Saturday, June 27, 2026, Potomac Division Meet - 9:00 AM - NMRA - AP Prototype Models and Cars certificate requirements - Clinicians: Alex Belida, MMR and Martin Brechbiel, MMR. In-person event with layout tours, Leisure World, Silver Spring, MD

NMRA CONVENTION:

July 27-August 2, 2026: *Scenic City Express*, Chattanooga, Tennessee



MID-EASTERN REGION FUTURE CONVENTIONS:

October 15-18, 2026: *Tracks to Tidewater*, Holiday Inn, 5655 Greenwich Rd, Virginia Beach, Virginia

PAYMASTER'S REPORT

by Jerry Stanley, Potomac Division Paymaster

1. Checking account (beginning balance)	\$ 7023.14
2. Cash on Hand	\$0.00
<u>3. Total assets as of 01/30/2026 (end balance)</u>	<u>\$ 6558.54</u>
4. Deposits by date	
a) \$ 0.00	
<u>5. Total Deposits</u>	<u>\$0.00</u>
6. Individual Deposits	
a) \$ 0.00	
<u>7. Total Deposits</u>	<u>\$0.00</u>
<u>8. Total individual payouts</u>	
a) \$5.00 01/21/25 Service charge	
b) \$134.60 check 710 1/26/26	
c) \$50.00 Check 711 1/28/26	
d) \$275.00 Check 712 1/23/26	
<u>9. Total Payouts</u>	<u>\$464.60</u>
<u>10. Checking account balance as of 01/30/2026 (Lines [1+5]-9) =</u>	<u>\$6558.54</u>
11. Total Cash on hand 01/30/2026	\$00.00
12. Total Assets (lines 10+11)	\$6558.54



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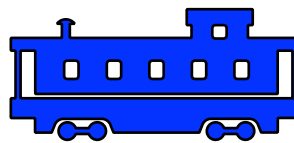



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