

NMRA BULLETIN

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2019 NMRA National Convention Dates and National Train Show Reservations:

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Train Show Booth Reservations—Jenny Hendricks Registrar - P.O. Box 1328, Soddy Daisy, TN 37384-1328

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• 2020—St. Louis, MO • 2021—Santa Clara, CA • 2022—Birmingham, England

ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

NMRA AP CERTIFICATE REPORT SEPTEMBER 2018

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MMR #620 Jeff Palmer, Garland, Texas

MMR #621 Andy Doll, Meridian, Idaho

AP QUESTIONS: If you have questions about the AP program or requirements, start with your local or Region AP manager. If you still have questions, contact Frank Koch, NMRA AP Manager, at fkoch@hotmail.com. If you prefer to write, contact Frank at 4769 Silverwood Drive, Batavia, OH 45103.

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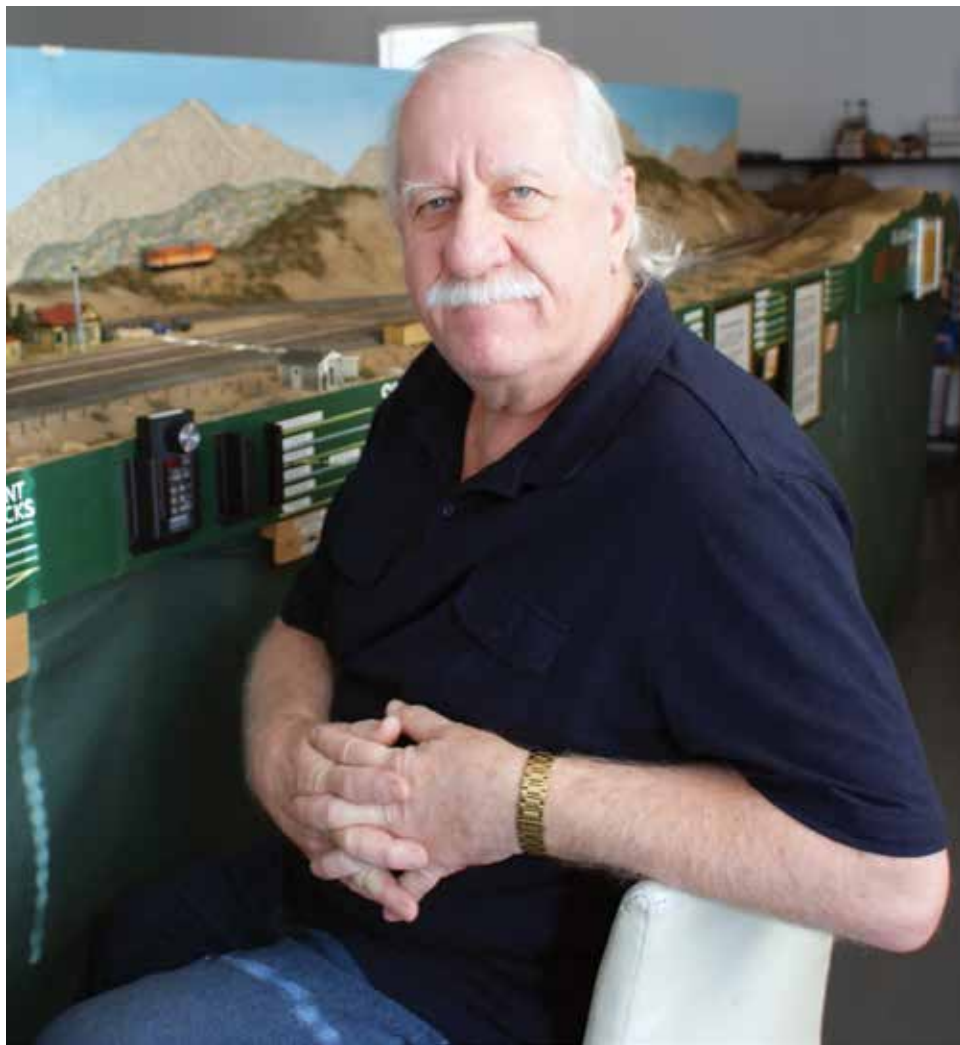
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ROB MCLEAR
EARNs MMR #616

The Journey to Master Model Railroader

I have been involved in model trains now for four-plus decades, in fact, since the mid-1970s. Unlike most modelers, I wasn't involved as a boy. My interest was in building models of ships and planes in plastic. I was in my 30s before getting into in this hobby. Service in the military, Vietnam, police work, marriage, and raising a family took up most of my time. After leaving the military, I joined the police force in Victoria and was looking for a hobby to get back into — mainly for some stress relief.

My wife, Jan, heard me talking about model trains in conversations with a friend one day, and in Christmas of '74, there were a few boxes under the tree: a Hornby tank engine, four carriages, and some flex track. Also was a Hammant and Morgan dual controller that I still have. Unfortunately for her (maybe fortunately), there was also in-

cluded a book from Kalmbach, *HO Primer*; I still have it. At the time, we were living in a rented flat with no room for a layout. The trains were put away for a while and didn't see the light of day for some time. I had been reading the *HO Primer* and the U.S. modeling bug bit hard. Inspiration came from one particular photo in that book; it was of a Santa Fe Consolidation, a brass locomotive superbly painted and weathered (top of page 74 if you have the book). I was hooked, and the Santa Fe it was. I had no steam models and was buying diesels from Athearn and Bachmann — the only real US game in town at the time.

Numerous visits to a shop in Melbourne, called The Model Dockyard, introduced me to the world of accurate models handbuilt in brass. I could spend hours in that shop because of all the brass models lined along one complete wall of the shop. That Christmas, my wife again shocked me with a model of the Santa Fe 2507 class 2-8-0 in brass from Hallmark. It wasn't until we moved into our first home in Geelong that I managed

to build a very basic layout, my first, of a figure 8 in a 10x10-foot shed out the back of the house. By then, I had quite a number of Athearn blue box freight cars and some Athearn and Bachmann diesels. There was, of course, the brass 2-8-0; by that time, it had been joined by a couple of others — all steam.

In the meantime, I began to explore other facets of the hobby and learn a lot more (do we ever stop learning?), taking on airbrushing, painting, and decaling rolling stock and gathering all the items I thought I would need to build that ultimate layout one day. Work commitments moved us to the country where I was in charge of a small, rural police station. With all the work-related moves, the house in Geelong was sold off, and the trains put away again for a while. Once more, the hobby was put on hold.

I left the force in Victoria. Joining another service meant a move to Queensland and a new home, which saw us finally settled, or so I thought. I was now a Sergeant teaching at the academy, a nine-to-five gig with weekends off. I now had some time on my hands, and there was a 30x20-foot, three-car garage attached to the house. I also joined the Union Pacific Model Railroad Club in Brisbane at that time.

Looking for something to model, I decided to model the Santa Fe from San Bernardino to Summit on Cajon Pass (in California) based on the suggestion of one of the members. The thought of a mountain railroad with lots of passenger trains and another road to boot, the Union Pacific, was manna from heaven. I love steam locomotives and early diesels such as FTs, E6s, F3s, and Alco PAs, so the year selected was 1947. I also had been to a number of model train shows in the area and wanted to be involved by having my own layout to take to shows.

The new layout was built at 29x15 feet, in 13 sections, to be able to be taken down and transported to shows. It represented Summit on one side and Devore on the other. The layout followed the track plan of both locations as faithfully as possible within the space. All the buildings of Summit were scratchbuilt. A modeler from Canada (a member of the NMRA) visited my layout and stated that the structures would have qualified me for Master Builder — Structures if I could add a couple of bridges to them. At the time, I was not interested and put the thought aside.

The layout was finished and completely scenicked. I have to admit it I am a strict

prototype modeler and a bit of a rivet counter. Things seemed to be going along well; the layout had been taken to a number of shows where it was very well received. Plans were in the wind to make the modular sections part of a much larger layout. Then illness struck, my Vietnam experience had caught up with me, and things were not good. It got to the point where my wife and I sold the house and all the train equipment and bought a yacht on which to live. The yacht wasn't the answer, however, and after some moves, we finally settled in near family in Queensland.

I had been getting back into the hobby, dabbling for a while in N scale and then back to HO. I had an association with the Railway Modelers Club of Queensland in Brisbane. I learned a lot there about DCC and electronic parts of the hobby, and I owe a people there a debt of gratitude.

After the move to the country, my wife came to the fore again. She had known, probably better than I, how much the hobby meant to me and insisted that we build a location for me to have my trains. So, a 40x26-foot outbuilding was put up as the location for the trains. I had been collecting HO-scale models and had quite a bit of rolling stock but nowhere to run it.

I then found out that my old Cajon layout, which had been sold, was not being used and was available for purchase. It had not been touched and had not even been assembled by the new owner. I purchased it, shipped it to our home, and set it up in the new shed.

To continue learning, I decided to join the NMRA. I am a bit of a lone wolf modeler, and clubs didn't seem to suit. The very fact that the NMRA in our Region didn't really have a base layout appealed to me. Visiting member's homes and seeing how other people did things really motivated me to do better. There are a lot of great modelers in our Region, particularly in Division One in my home state of Queensland. I knew members of the NMRA through various associations in the past and found them to be excellent modelers and good people.

I had discovered operation and switching on a friend's layout. Modeling Cajon would not allow me to do much switching, so a new location was selected for a layout between Emporia and Newton, Kansas (still in 1947). Plans have been done for this project, and construction will be started soon. The old layout was kept so that I would have something to run on during construction.

Wanting to learn and explore more, I decided to have a go at the Achievement Program with the guidance and assistance of Laurie MacLean MMR and Martyn Jenkins, our AP Assistant Managers. At the time, I had no intention to go all the way. Frankly, I didn't think my skills were good enough. As I completed the Master Builder – Cars Certificate, I found that I enjoyed the challenge. The points scored were enough, but the feedback I received was worth its weight in gold.

My friend from Canada was correct; Structures came next. I had in the past built resin freight cars and wrote an article about it in *Model Railroad Hobbyist*. Writing about a few other subjects in other publications garnered the Author Certificate, and the remainder just seemed to follow on.

My aim now is to continue and further my skills and to help those who want to go down the same path. The Achievement Program has taught me a lot and was not as daunting as I had first thought. You just never know what you might learn; this is a great hobby with a lot of good people in it. Those associated with the Achievement Program in our Division and Region are some of the best; I owe them my thanks for the support and the desire to keep going. My MMR is directly attributed to their guidance and patience; thanks, guys.

I also would like to thank those who have inspired me with their work and guidance; there are several, including Ted York, Otto Kroutil, and Tony Koester. Most of all, I want to express my gratitude to two men who have served their country in uniform and who advised and helped me considerably with my hobby: Richard Hendrickson, whose knowledge of freight cars and their modeling was legendary; and my good mate Andy Sperandio, whose knowledge of Santa Fe and Cajon Pass, in particular, was legendary. I miss their council and conversations. RIP guys.

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To my Friends, Teachers, and Supporters

BY JEFF PALMER,
NEWLY COINED MMR #620

I got into the Achievement Program through the diligence of a friend named Larry Swigert. I had volunteered to help with the website for the 2013 Lone Star Region Convention, and he pointed out that the time spent working on the website could count toward my Volunteer Certificate. At that time, I was not impressed with the Achievement Program — it looked like it involved too much work — and besides, I already built award-winning models, just in a different area of interest. However, it brought to the forefront the question, “What would I get out of the AP program?”

Community

As I attended the monthly Division meetings, Larry would get up in front of the group and remind us, “It’s not about trains, it’s about people!” At first, I only heard those words, but I didn’t really understand them until later. When I look back on the APs for Volunteer, Dispatcher, and Official, it’s all about people. You cannot accomplish any of those awards on your own. You have to get more involved. For me, it began with the website, which I maintained monthly for the Lone Star Region. Then I got the phone call from Donna Orr, the LSR Treasurer, on behalf of the LSR President, Steve Barkley, asking if I would serve as the LSR Secretary. It turns out that the newly elected LSR Secretary’s work assignment changed, and he felt he could not fulfill his obligations to the office. I accepted. What this did was give me two sources for volunteer points. Throw in a couple of NMRA train shows, and you’re done with Volunteer. It wasn’t long before I had my first AP, Volunteer (LSR 666) — for some, a prelude to the future.

My seventh AP is Dispatcher, and it also followed the community path. As I got more involved, I met more people. I met people like Gil Freitag, Chuck Ellis, George Sellios, Marc LaChey, Dave Revelia, Dave Frary, Scott Mason, and many others. I soon received invitations to operate on their layouts. Talk about scared. Some of these people are model railroad icons. I have bought tools they used or kits they produced. I have DVDs that they starred in. These are people who I consider as a teach-

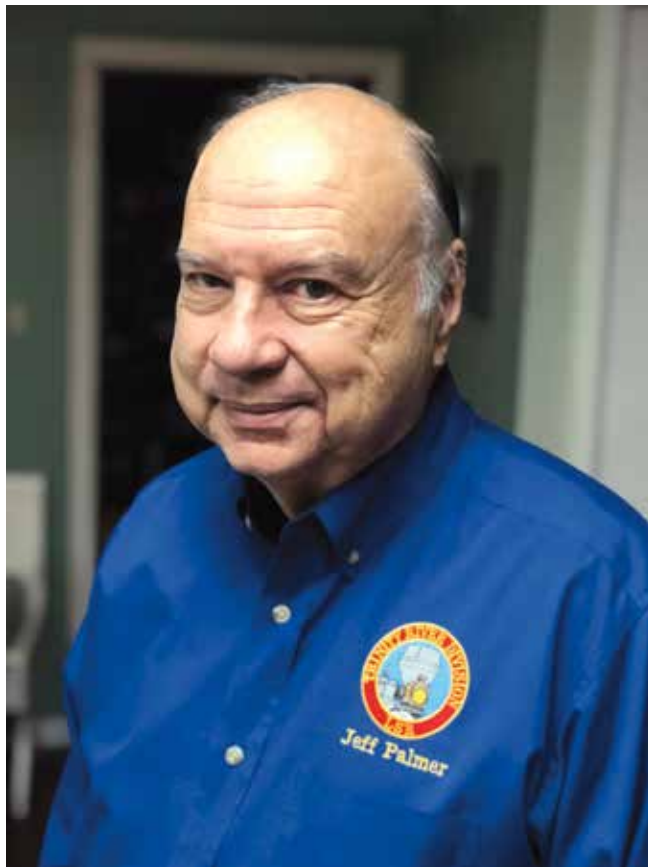
er or mentor, who have helped me to develop many of my modeling skills, and now they are conspiring against me because they know I don’t know how to operate. “They are asking me to operate on their layout; Don’t screw up now!” Needless to say, I provided many of hosts with hours of ROFLOL moments (rolling on floor, laughing out loud). As I fought through my jitters and anxiousness, I had a great time. You know what? I learned, and I got better. One of the secrets is practice, and there is no better way to improve those skills than to join a club. I got an invitation to join the North Texas Narrow Gauge group and learned to operate on their layout, the Elk Canyon & Western.

This opportunity allowed me to learn in an environment where, as I screwed up and provided humor for many, they took the time to teach me how to switch, how to control the throttle better, and how to relax and have fun.

Going from a person who would show up to a meeting on time, sit in the back, and slip out when the meeting was over, to having earned Volunteer, Official, and now Dispatcher, I’ve gotten more involved. I still have to show up on time, but now, I stay later to help others who are struggling to accomplish some of the goals I’ve worked toward. As a result, I’ve improved my social skills, operating skills, and I’ve learned to relax and have fun. I can now say, I actually understand Larry’s words, “Model Railroading is about Community (people).”

Dooms Day

I hate being judged. It’s like being back in school and taking an English test. I love the rewards of getting a good grade and the praise, but getting there... Judging is so subjective, and my vision did not always match that of the judges. Fortunately, I’ve had some good teachers along the way who have helped me hone my modeling skills to match the expectations of the judges. I had the good fortune to make the acquaintance



and befriend Duane Richardson, MMR and the Region’s AP Chairman. He told me if I wanted to improve my modeling, join the AP/Contest Judging program and receive training. It’s a five-year program where you are taught by other MMRs how to judge the five categories on the Judges Score Sheet. As I was being taught, I got to observe how others constructed, detailed, and finished their models. I made notes, and I learned. As I incorporated what I learned, I became a better modeler.

Like most modelers, I started with “rose-colored glasses” when it come to my models. Objectivity is a far more difficult skill to develop than most of us would care to admit. After five years of assisting at Regional conventions and Divisional meetings, you learn to see a model and deconstruct with your eyes. The untreated glue globs, the not-so-perpendicular wall studs, the not-so-square walls, the roofline that does not meet the building frame, the inappropriate details for the era, along with thousands of other errors/issues all feed your body of knowledge, which alone will make you a better modeler. The best part of judging is, you get to see how others addressed the same modeling issues you have faced and how they approached the subject.

By the time I finished my Structures and Cars Certificates, I was well into my judging education, and I had become a better modeler. My attention to detail, techniques, and overall skill set improved. I can tell you that super-detailing the undercarriage of a flatcar, stock car, gondola, or boxcar is my least favorite thing to do, but I can tell you that I know how KC and AB brake systems work. I love to build bridges, and structures — ask Rick and Maureen Hunter.

Scenery is a fun Certificate. You get to put your hands into goop like plaster, CelluClay, or Sculptamold. You get to stretch your imagination and make hills, mountains, gullies, creeks, rivers, ponds... You get to cast rocks and quickly patch holes where the Envirotex is leaking out onto the floor. It does not get any better than this. This is the moment you find out if your wife has a lawyer on speed dial.

Are there some dirty jobs in scenery? Yes. You get to ballast the track and lock up those switch points. You get to find out that white glue is a good insulator that requires you to clean the track and switch points — several times. Hopefully, you have already painted your ties and rusted your

rails, or this could become a scene out of “First Purge.” But when you’re done setting the buildings and structures and putting down the dirt and rocks, you step back for that Kodak moment, and it’s all worth it.

You don't know what you don't know

This statement seems obvious at first glance, but working on your AP is where you get the true understanding of it. I’ve learned about operations, and I’m not an operations guy. I love operating the trains and switching, but I like working on *my* schedule — after all, I’m retired.

Have I learned new techniques and developed new skills? Absolutely! I’ve broadened my skill set to include Arduinos, voltage bucks, lighting, sound, and many other skills I had no idea I wanted to know about. In fact, I want to learn more, so I’m working on my Civil and Electrical as this article goes to press. That leaves me with Prototype and Motive Power to go, and I’m formulating plans to achieve them. To steal a paraphrased quote from MMR Gerry Leone, “Getting my MMR has made my hobby better!”

I’d like to personally thank those guys whose encouragement and support helped me reach my goal of MMR: Duane Richardson, MMR; Marc LaChey, soon to be MMR; Mike Mackey, MMR; Donna Orr; Larry Swigert; and Jerry Hoverson, MMR. Thanks goes to the Lone Star Region for giving me the opportunity to serve and to Divisions 1 and 3 for their support. I want to thank Elaine, my wife, for not pushing that speed dial button on her iPhone and continuing to offer words of encouragement like “Railroading is fun” and liking my models when you could tell by the look on her face of “What is it?” Thanks, luv, but the journey is not over. We still have scenes to build and engines to detail.

Certificates Earned Jeff Palmer

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- Master Builder-Structures
- Master Builder-Scenery
- Chief Dispatcher
- Association Volunteer
- Association Official
- Model Railroad Author

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