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2016—Indianapolis, IN • 2017—Orlando, FL • 2018—Kansas City, MO
As a youngster in the late 1940s and early 1950s, all my friends seemed to fit into one of two categories — American Flyer fans and Lionel fans. Our family fell into the latter category, perhaps because my father still owned the Lionel trains he had as a kid in the late 1920s. Our train layout came out only at Christmas and featured his vintage Lionel engine and cars, plus a post-war engine and cars bought for my older brother and me. Each Christmas, we would get at least one new car or accessory to add to our collection. Like so many others of my generation, thus began my interest in trains.

In the same timeframe, that interest in trains was also fostered by trips on the Erie Railroad with my maternal grandfather, who retired from the Erie with a very useful rail pass. He used it often to take me on the train from Paterson, New Jersey, down to the Erie Docks on the Hudson River to watch the still-active carfloat service. After we moved from Paterson to the suburbs, we used to take the New York, Susquehanna & Western train from our hometown of Oakland, New Jersey, over to the next town, Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, to shop on Main Street. By that time, the usual Susquehanna mid-day passenger train consisted of an all-silver Alco RS-1 and an ancient coach or two.

At some point in the mid-1950s, my father succumbed to Gordon Varney’s advertisements and began to purchase HO equipment. By the time he handed off that collection to me in the late 1950s, its motive power included Varney’s Little Joe engine...
In 2009, I added my Pennsylvania Logging Branch in HOn3. I call that the Slate Run Railroad. Work continues on both the Jersey Highlands and Slate Run Railroads.

In the summer of 2003, I joined an Internet modeling forum — the Railroad-Line Forum — which had two main results. First, I became a better modeler from what I learned on that forum, and second, I met Chuck Diljak, who lived nearby. It was Chuck who, in 2006, convinced me to join the NMRA, and I began attending Garden State Division meetings. The timing was perfect since, as I mentioned, I had just retired that year. That fall, the Garden State Division hosted the NER Convention nearby. The first clinic I attended was offered by Bob Hamm, MMR, on the NMRA’s Contest Program. Bob made the entire Contest experience sound so interesting that I went home that night and did the necessary paperwork to enter a small scratchbuilt structure I had just finished into the contest. That experience got me hooked on entering models into NMRA Regional Convention Contests, which led me next to the Achievement Program.

Thanks to the encouragement of Norm Frowley, MMR, who was the Garden State Division’s Achievement Program Chair at the time, I had the Division come over to evaluate my layout for the Scenery Certificate in the fall of 2007. By the time Norm and his crew left my basement, I had earned the Golden Spike, the Scenery Certificate, and several structures installed on the layout had earned Merit Awards. The actual Scenery Certificate, once it arrived, had a date of January 2008 on it. At that point, I set a personal goal to finish one layer of retirement, I went back to my old school district for the 2012–13 school year to serve as Superintendent of Schools before retiring in 2006.

My next foray into a layout occurred in the early 1970s when the Lionel equipment came back down from the attic, and I built a 4x8-foot layout for our young sons. An early 1970s engine augmented the 1920s and 1940s motive power. More cars were also added over the next few years. All that equipment headed into the attic once our kids hit their high school years.

Fast forward now to the Christmas season of 1999. Our oldest two grandchildren were visiting, and we took them to see Northlandz — a model train empire within driving distance of our North Jersey home. The kids really enjoyed seeing the trains, and so did I! It got me back into the hobby, and early in the year 2000, I began to erect benchwork in the basement. I am still working on that HO-scale layout, which features my Jersey Highlands Railroad. The railroad is loosely based on the NYS&W Railroad. Motive power appears from both the Susquehanna and any railroad that interchanged with the Susquehanna in northern New Jersey (Erie, Lackawanna, Jersey Central, L&HR, L&NE, and so forth). Oh, and that HO equipment my father gave me in the late 1950s still makes an appearance on the Jersey Highlands RR. It is great to watch that Varney Little Joe engine waddle around the layout and those loud gear noises the Gilbert engine produces sound somehow “right.” I did, however, replace the Mantua couplers my father had installed with Kadee couplers. In 2009, I added my Pennsylvania Logging