

Region and Division Descriptions

We have overall descriptions of three regions and one division. There are aspects of all that you might want to look at. You will also find partial descriptions in various of the activities. What a region is and what it does are pretty interchangeable.

The first region in this document is the British. It is a bit atypical. The Australasian, British, and Canadian regions have a different relationship with the National headquarters than the other regions. Being outside of US borders they have to take responsibility for a number of things that headquarters does for the United States based regions.

The British Region has quite an extensive program of meets that is worth looking at. They have two regional meets per year in addition to their convention. Their handbook for putting on these meets is in the "Meets and Conventions" section of this Handbook. The Region also encourages other meets like "themed" meets both as a way to attract new members and as a fundraiser for the region. The region, with no prototypes close at hand and few legacy railroad workers, faces a greater need than most to demonstrate what we are talking about.

The report also talks about the activities of some of the subgroups of the region. They seem to fill a niche somewhere between division, club, and round robin and take much of the responsibility for these meets. Many things to think about in this.

The second is a description of the Mid-East Region. It seems more like the rest of the US based, trying to cope with the lack of dues and the aging population of Model Railroaders. Their answer is a pretty traditional and straight forward assault on the problem. Their report discusses the need to cut back to one convention a year because of the lack of host groups. They have needed to centralize and create a MER Convention Chair who negotiates with hotels, a Registrar, an Auction chair, and a Contest Chair.

As part of its outreach and attempts to recruit, the MER pays for the RailPass program for new members.

The third region is the Pacific Coast Region, also quite typical and faced with many of the same challenges that the rest of us have. The report discusses the strength of the Convention and of the interaction between region and division. Many of these like the Sierra division's train show in Roseville and the Coast Division's auction have specifics in the respective sections.

Finally there is the report of the revitalization of the Mid-Continent Region's Region seven. It originally ran in *Scale Rails*. It is a success story in how you breathe life into a dormant division, something facing many of us.

That's it so far. Hope you enjoy them.



By Nobby Clark

Description

Membership of BR at the moment is around 650 with a high water mark near 800 a few years ago. A high number of new members join each year but at the same time nearly the same number leave. This is no good to anyone. We have always had an annual turnover near 10% but this high turnover has really come about in the last few years.

New members, on joining the NMRA and taking BR services, get two old copies of the house magazine, a letter from the President, a list of all groups within BR and their contact numbers/emails. They also get the NMRA standards on a disc, plus we are thinking of giving them a NMRA gauge in whatever scale they model. There are then (not always) contacted by the group nearest them to invite them along to a group meeting. They also get free entry in to the first two region meets they attend. So a nice package. The trouble is **if** they do not rejoin for a second year we lose money on them!

Divisions: BR is split into 13 geographical Divisions covering the whole of the British Isles. Within these Div areas we have 22 groups varying in sizes from ten members up to the mid fifty with a majority of BR members not belonging to any one group. This could be down to distance to travel, or just not wishing to take part in a group.

Groups have at least a two man executive body all of whom must be NMRA members. Each group must hold an annual general meeting. The group system is one of the BR biggest success stories. But it has its

drawbacks because they have become virtually independent of the Board of Directors. Several feel quite detached with little or no input from above. Of course this all depends on the composition of the BOD of the time and does depend on the way the BOD comes across. Some BODs have had great success in fostering a “we all belong” This is a fine line between telling groups what to do (does not work) or suggesting what to do and working together (works well I know).

Web sites

We have two web sites the main one for anyone to visit and possibly join. Since we introduced PayPal we have seen a rise in members joining and now most new members come via web site. The site has general news of the region and what we do etc.

www.nmrabr.org

The chat group is for members only (any NMRA member can join as long as he can prove he is a member) I set the group up to chat about anything modelling wise and NMRA matters that come up. About a third of BR members use the

www.groups.yahoo/groups/nmrabr

Region meets

We hold Two Regional meets a year, fall and spring plus the Convention which is always held in October. (Four regional meets a year did not work because of the lack of numbers.) Additionally, we have several themed meets each year put on by different groups.

Region meet: About 18 to 24 months before the date the “meets” officer asks one of the active groups to hold a regional meet. When they agree, he sends the group a “how to put on a region meet” booklet (This is already up on the groups site) It is down to the organising group to select the hall to use along with the trade plus a selection of layouts clinic etc. The meets officer is responsible for advertising the event in all possible formats i.e. internet, club magazines etc. We do allow the general public to attend as this pushes up revenue and gets new members but they pay a 50% high price then members do. Any profits made at this meet are split 50/50 with the region. The region pays the insurance.

Themed meet: A subject is picked i.e. Santa-Fe, then layouts are picked that have a western road theme and clinics recruited on the themed subject. These have proved very popular and are becoming more adventurous, and attract a good numbers. Other than the theme the meet follows closely along the lines of a region meet with a 50/50 split in profits.

Convention: at the moment bids are for conventions out about two years. For example, we have a bid for the 2010 + 2011 already. In the last few years we have stayed with one specific hotel in central England every even year. On the odd years, depending where the bid comes from, the convention moves around the Country. This works well though the odd years see a down turn in attendance as big as 40%. We still do not know why this is!

Again the organising group get a 50/50 share of any profits with the region paying the insurance. The convention format is very much like a region one in the USA held over three days, with traders on site plus a large selection of layouts Z to G competitions, RPM room, Bring + buy tables (these bring in a good return as some times as much as \$ 900. As we charge members \$8.00 per 4 ft so a 2ft x 12ft table will bring in \$24.00). Clinics are held all weekend. The raffle is very popular

and brings in good amount of funds but we have had problems getting prizes from the USA manufactures lately due to the down turn in the economy.

Friday is mainly for members who have booked into the convention hotel. Sat is for day visitors including the public who get a discount on the door cost if they join at the convention. We hold the banquet on the Sat evening. Sun is a more relaxed time with people spending on last minute items plus attending clinics in the morning. As the convention normal starts to wide down just after lunch.

Convention Non-rail: We stopped running tours for non-rail as the buses ran nearly empty and costing the convention money. Member’s wives seem to prefer to self drive to shopping and local attractions. We do arrange events for them within the convention hotel if they so wish.

Annual Public show: This started three years ago when, as President, I suggested we needed a show case for the region for the public to attend. I was very pleased when a group came forward to not only run it but to organise it. This show is very popular attracting good numbers and making the region a fair profit. We use member’s layouts and ask members to put on clinics.

Traders are charged per foot for their stands space (normally \$ 10 per ft) so a trade stand of 18ft will cost \$180. These charges normally also cover the cost of any expenses of the layouts and a little towards the hall hire. We hold a raffle the same as we do at the convention and it too brings in a good return. The region again pays the insurance but gets a bigger slice of the profits for this event. So far all three shows that have been put on have been good fund-raisers for BR.

Library: the region has a large library from which all members can borrow books, DVDs, and magazines at no cost. They only pay any postage.

House magazine: Our house magazine is called “Roundhouse” is produced bi monthly and is in colour. This is the main benefit to BR membership and by far the biggest cost. We put all voting and renewal notices in this magazine. What with the web sites and Roundhouse we try to keep the BR membership well informed.

Main Fund raising: As you can see from the above our main way of raising funds for the Region is to split profits made at any of the sanctioned meets and share in profits from the convention. We have a very small working surplus from the charge we make for BR services but this is very dependent on the dollar/pound values because when the dollar was 1.32 we were losing money big time. Our break even figure is more like 1.55. The low dollar has forced the BOD to put up the cost of BR services by £2.00 per member per year. So a BR member taking NMRA membership + BR services pays £23.00 (\$37.00) but if you add Scale rails to that you have to add an extra \$53.00 on top.

Groups within BR: as I have said this is one of BR’s success stories with several new groups forming in the last four years. Each group is reasonably for its own accounting i.e. hire of meeting place, collecting funds so that hall hire can be paid. Most meet once a month and the membership of these groups’ varies from just 10 members to the larger groups who have 50 plus. Some have their own web sites, newsletters even yahoo groups to keep in touch. All NMRA are welcome. I visit three each month.

Example A: The Black Diamonds’ meet once a month and have two groups within itself, HO and N. The N gauge group is the more progressive of the two, building large number of modules which they take around public shows around the country. Due to the fact the BD group has run three conventions out of the last five years and had a 50% in the share of the profits, it has a healthy bank

balance.

I have heard moans of why them again but if no other groups come forward to run a convention what do you do. Have no convention? This also applies for meets as it’s normally the same set of groups that come forward even though I try to bully others it always comes back to the same groups. Membership of a group of course is open to any NMRA member, who can go along to any group they want.

These groups are the back bone of the region and are the ones who get called on to arrange themed meets and region meets. They also supply layouts for the convention that are near them so keeping cost down for gas etc. We are now seeing interlinking between groups who have N gauge modules with a special show being arranged by me this year. This was a modular special attracting more than the normal number of members and made a nice profit.

The problems with some groups come when non-members are allowed to attend and are not asked to join the NMRA. We have a policy that after three visits they should be turned away. Even though these non-members get charged 50% more per visits, their influence on some groups is worrying at times.

Example B: my group, the Nene Valley Railroaders, started just over a year ago and has 10 regular members. We are building a HO modular layout. None of us live to near each other so we can’t just pop around to play trains. I started a yahoo group for the NVRR so that we can keep in touch. We meet once a month, but have very little funds. We can apply for a grant from the BOD to help build our layout but the rules to hard to comply to, so we have not even tried. We are going to hold an open house to attract new members and to raise funds. We are also looking at holding a regional meet so we can boost our bank balance somewhat. As a new group we

are very aware of how important it is to build a layout as quickly as possible. Just sitting around talking about it drives people off. I know this is a catch 22 situation because with fewer members it becomes hard on the few pockets to pay out for everything that goes into making a new layout modular or not.

Communication is the key to any good region/group. They must do what they say and be seen to be doing so! The members have a part to play. Paying a membership fee does not entitle them to be given everything they want or expect it is too easy to sit back and moan. Any region is only as good as its members. Members must be willing to offer help no matter how small, write that article, give a demo, or stand in the car park for an hour directing traffic so your fellow member can safely enjoy themselves.

Mid-Eastern Region

Organization: The Mid-Eastern Region (MER) of the NMRA was founded in 1935 and covers all or part of PA, NJ, DE, MD, WV, VA, DC, and NC. It is incorporated as a Maryland corporation, and is divided into 14 Divisions, of which 10 are presently in an active status. Total membership is approximately 2100 members.

The elected Board of Directors consists of the President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and three Directors, all of whom serve two-year terms with a limit of two such terms except for the Treasurer who can serve a maximum of five terms. The first four officers are elected in even-numbered years, and the three Directors in odd-numbered years, to provide for a degree of continuity of operations and “corporate memory.”

The Board of Directors meets at least twice each year, and conducts some business between the physical meetings by the use of e-mail to approve or disapprove actions that cannot be held in abeyance until the next formal meeting. Electronic communication has proven invaluable in the operation of the MER Board.

Each Director has specified areas of oversight (e.g., publications, budget, contests, elections, etc.) but these functional areas are typically administered by committees for their day-to-day operations.

A Business Manager maintains membership and subscriber records, provides contact with NMRA headquarters, issues welcome letters to new members, follows up with lapsed members, and performs other significant program functions.

There is an Executive Handbook, the key elements of which include the **bylaws**

(changes to which must be approved by vote of the membership), **policies** (the procedural structure for operations), **position descriptions** for functional areas, the **Division Superintendent’s Handbook**, and the **Convention Handbook** (which provides procedural information relating to planning and carrying out a Regional convention).

Candidates for elected office must provide a statement and photograph which is mailed to all members as part of the ballot, which will also provide for any proposed changes to the bylaws. Direct mailing of the ballot, while imposing additional costs, has considerably increased the percentage of members voting each year over the previous practice of printing the ballot in the MER LOCAL.

Divisions are required to have at least four officers but may have more as deemed appropriate for the specific situation. Although the MER provides general guidance for Division operations, they function with a high degree of independence in planning their activities, priorities, timetables, and budgets.

Publication: The official publication of the MER is the LOCAL, which is issued 6 times each calendar year. It is available in printed form to subscribers, and is also available electronically at the MER website. Since there are no longer regional memberships and dues, a subscription fee is charged for the printed version to cover its printing and mailing costs. Presently the subscription fee is \$6, which approximately covers costs. The LOCAL consists of MER business matters, a calendar of upcoming events, club and Division news, and member articles on a wide variety of modeling and occasional prototype subjects.

Conventions: For many years, the MER held a Spring and a Fall convention each year. Unfortunately, it became more difficult to obtain host groups so we have gone to holding only a Fall convention during the past few years. Also, in a year in which the NMRA National Convention is held within MER boundaries, no convention is held in order not to compete with the larger activity.

Our convention generally begins on Thursday evening with clinics and a Board meeting, then continues on Friday and Saturday with layout tours, clinics, prototype tours, in-hotel activities (contests, white elephant sales, company store, modular displays), and generally a Saturday evening banquet followed by a live auction. The annual business meeting and perhaps clinics are held on Sunday morning, with layout tours during the afternoon “going home” time.

On average, there are 20-25 clinics and 20-30 layouts available during each convention. Some clinics are hands-on “make and take” ones in which registrants are able to build a structure during the clinic time (two or three hours) and then take it with them. These have proven to be very popular and require advance registration. One relatively recent but very popular activity has been the Operations Call Board, in which one or more layouts that feature organized operation are open to a few individuals who wish to try their hand at running under timetable/train order, car card, fast clock, scheduled trains, and so forth.

Layout tours typically are set up to provide for individuals to drive themselves, with maps and driving directions provided as part of the registration packets. This enables attendees to visit those pikes which they really want to see, and to spend as much time as they wish, rather than be on a tour bus schedule.

While the MER territory is not as large as some other regions, it is still a significant drive for individuals who live in the perimeter areas

when a convention is held at the opposite perimeter. Consequently, we have started to organize conventions on something of a geographic rotation, North to Central to South in order to balance the amount of travel any one part of the membership has to do in order to attend. North, South, and Central are somewhat relative terms, since there are at least three Divisions in each of these general areas, meaning that the same location is not always used nor does the same group have to do a convention each time.

Due to difficulties in sometimes getting a Division to sponsor a convention, MER has to a degree centralized some of the functions. We have a MER Convention Chair who takes care of negotiating with one or more hotels in the specified area, a Registrar who performs the receipt of forms and payment, an Auction chair who oversees the White Elephant and live auction activities, and a Contest Chair who ensures that a room, judges, certificates, and supplies are available.

While there is still considerable work and personnel required of a sponsoring Division, having this centralized staff plus the convention handbook eliminates some of the workload and provides for smooth convention operations. The convention attendance ranges from about 140 to over 200.

Financial Management: The MER is now and has been for some time in sound financial condition due to conservative and prudent financial practices. We received our 501(c)(3) status in 1985, and have been fortunate to receive various cash donations as well as donations of model railroad material from the estates of deceased MER members. These have been sold at conventions and at train shows, with the proceeds going into a donation fund for special projects. The conventions typically result in an amount of revenue that is divided equally between the region and the sponsoring division, such revenue coming from more registrants than

expected, white elephant and company store merchandise sales, live auction fees (10% of the selling price), and door prize ticket sales.

Many years ago, Region life memberships were sold on a straight dollar basis rather than an actuarial one. This resulted in many members long since having more than received a full return on their investment. Through financial success with certain projects, the MER was able to set aside in a Certificate of Deposit sufficient funds to cover future costs associated with life membership (primarily the LOCAL). We deal with a small, flexible, but financially sound local bank for all of our operations, one that pays competitive rates and charges minimal fees.

To ensure financial integrity, a review is performed at least every two years or upon change in the office of Treasurer. While not a true professional audit, this review confirms invoices for all expenditures and reconciles bank statements.

Since there are no longer regional membership dues, NMRA provides twice-yearly payments to all regions. These are shared 50/50 with the active Divisions to partially offset their costs of operation. Each Division determines its own subscription fees for any local newsletters, and carries out necessary fundraising locally for its activities. The Divisions provide each year to the Vice President a summary of their financial health, accomplishments, and future plans to enable the MER board to be aware of any problems.

Activities and Outreach: As noted above, the annual convention and the LOCAL are the primary communication tools of the MER. We have had five special car projects over the past 15 years or so. One criterion for choosing a freight car project is that the car was either owned by a railroad within the MER territory, or could be documented as having operated within this territory. The car projects have been somewhat difficult in that

so many cars already have been made by manufacturers or historical societies, prototype car bodies are not made, or good photographs are not available. The most successful projects in terms of rapid sales have been transition-era cars; the less successful ones were a mid-60s and an N scale car.

In an attempt to reach out to potential members, the NMRA developed the Railpass program a few years ago. The MER Board voted in 2007 to pay for such memberships up to a budgeted amount. The Divisions must do the recruiting, but the MER pays for the actual membership. As of the last Business Manager's report, 37% of the sponsored Railpass members have converted to full NMRA membership, which we have concluded was a sign of success and hence worth continuing our support through our Region budget.

The MER board recognizes that most outreach and contact takes place at the Division level, since this is much more of a local and accessible level of activity. Most of the Divisions hold monthly or at least quarterly meetings or home layout tours, and many hold one or more mini-conventions during the year. Some of them hold substantial-sized train shows each year, have tables at large train shows to make the public aware of their existence, and have produced car projects for members and non-members as part of their benefit and fundraising programs.

Contests and Achievement Program:

Each Division has at least one AP coordinator and the amount activity ranges from relatively inactive to very active. AP awards are announced in the LOCAL, and several articles have appeared with modeling tips and techniques. At the conventions, there are generally a significant number of AP awards achieved in the judged categories. Total contest entries average 25 or more. In addition to the AP awards, we have several other award categories sponsored by Divisions or groups of

individuals, including New Modeler Award, Pride of Dixie Award, Blue Lantern Award, Maryland and Pennsylvania Modeling Award, and a Narrow Gauge Modeling Award, in addition to the President's Choice Award. The Photo Contest varies considerably among conventions in terms of entries, and the Arts and Crafts Contest has decreased greatly in recent years. We are exploring broadening the popular vote aspect at our conventions, to mirror what the National contests have done recently.

Future: As is true of probably all parts of the NMRA, the MER is faced with the demographic problem of an aging membership base. While the overall number of members has not declined precipitously, the number of convention attendees has decreased from an average of perhaps 250 two decades ago to somewhere around 180 today. Obviously, the region is a captive of the decline in national membership, but we continue to offer as much as possible to existing members in hope that non-members will see the benefits of joining the NMRA. Some of the Divisions have active Boy Scout programs to encourage the involvement of youth in model railroading, and the Railpass program mentioned earlier may serve as a tool to introduce both the hobby and NMRA to a younger audience.



HOW THE PCR IS ORGANIZED

By Pat Latorres

This is a brief overview of the organization of the Pacific Coast Region of the NMRA and reasons why we feel it is the best way (for us) to set things up. While we feel that these ideas work best for us, keep in mind that what works for us may not work for all regions and/or divisions.

Basic organization: We are a regional section of the NMRA. Actually we were the first region formed. Within the Region there are five Divisions: Redwood Empire, Sierra, Coast, Daylight, and Hawaiian. The geographic layout was originally all of California, Nevada and Arizona, but with the membership growth during the 1960s the region split into two units. The PCR consists of the northern halves of California and Nevada, while the rest is the Pacific Southwest Region (PSR).

The PCR is now laid out:

Redwood Empire Division (RED); North of the Golden Gate Bridge, including Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa, Solano and Sonoma counties.

Sierra Division, in North Eastern California and Northern Nevada; Amador, Alpine, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, El Dorado, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tuolumne, Yolo and Yuba counties in California and all of Nevada except Clark, Esmeralda, Lincoln and Nye Counties.

Coast Division covers the area between San Francisco Bay and Monterey Bay,

including; Alameda, Contra Costa, Monterey, San Benito, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties.

Daylight Division covers the southern central valley of California down to Tehachapi and Bakersfield, across to Santa Barbara and the central California coastal areas, including; Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Tulare, San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties.

Hawaiian Division covers the state of Hawaii.

For those of you not familiar with West Coast geography that means that the Coast Division consists of the major metropolitan area of the San Francisco Bay Area and then south to Monterey Bay and the other three mainland divisions pretty much split up the rest of Northern California and Nevada into basic geographic areas. Each of the divisions covers an area that not only is geographically a unit but also tends to be similar sociologically as well. While each of the divisions covers a rather large geographic area, population wise the RED, Sierra and Daylight Divisions are pretty close in size.

The Coast Division is primarily an urban social area. The RED covers the north coast of the state and is a bit more rural, though it does still have the two larger urban areas of Marin County and the Santa Rosa/Sonoma area. Both the Daylight and Sierra Divisions have a more rural/agricultural base, though they are quite different in their demographics. The Sierra Division is based around the Sacramento urban area (which has expanded substantially over the past ten to fifteen years) and the Reno/Sparks/Carson City areas in Nevada, all

of which are business and light industry based. The Daylight Division has many members in the Fresno and Bakersfield areas which are agriculturally based and another grouping between San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara which have a more urban base (both having major colleges). Unfortunately the Hawaiian Division is spread between the islands of the state of Hawaii, which makes travel between the various parts of the division problematic at best.

There is a lot of intermixing between the mainland divisions. Since the major urban areas of each division are only two to three hours apart, one can drive with relative ease between divisions to attend various divisional meets. Driving from the southern end of the Daylight Division up to the Reno area, or the north end of the RED can be a bit of a run, but inside a division or to a neighboring division is not too unreasonable.

Along the same lines, we make the effort to spread the load of our regional conventions between the regions, so that the regions with smaller memberships don't get too much of a load. The Coast Division, which has the largest membership (due to centralized urban nature of the division), gets the convention every other year (usually the odd numbered years) and then it rotates between the rest of the mainland divisions in the even numbered years.

On the political side of things the Region Board of Directors consists of seven elected positions – President, Vice President and an elected Director from each division, as well as a Secretary and Treasurer appointed by the President. We also have a number of volunteer administrative positions that work for the region through the BoD (see the full listing at our region website - www.pcrnmra.org). This web site also has a link to the Regional Manual of Operations, which gives a better look at the region's administrative operations practices. Unlike the regional By-laws, this document

allows the region make procedural changes without the drawn out process required by a change to the By-laws.

Each of the Divisions has a Board of Operations which consists of three elected positions – Superintendent, Paymaster (treasurer) and Chief Clerk (Secretary). Again, the Divisions have a number of volunteer admin positions to help their boards with running the divisions. As seems to be the case across the NMRA, we often see members wearing multiple hats on either the regional or divisional level to help cover the load.

There are a few things which have really helped us work as a cohesive unit on both the regional and divisional level. First off, the divisions are all set up pretty much the same to provide consistency between the various units, and they also tend to mirror the organization of the region. All of our divisions are represented on the Regional BoD. This is important in that every member has a fairly direct line of sight to their representative at the region level as well as within their division. We've managed to keep the number of divisions at a workable level, which allows all of the members to be heard while keeping the Region BoD small enough to work efficiently. While I won't pretend that everyone on our region board (much less within the region) sees eye-to-eye on every item the board has to deal with -- and the same on the divisional level, but we all feel that the health of the region is of vital importance for what we're trying to achieve for and through the NMRA. There is also a strong common feeling at both levels that the organization needs to be built from the foundation up to be effective and so the region's primary focus is to help the divisions – which when they become stronger will help the region in its growth.

Dealing with region and division activities, I'll start at what I see as the top of the food chain and work downward. The primary activity each year is the Regional Convention,

which moves around from division to division as was mentioned before and usually runs over three and two half days – that starts with clinics Wednesday afternoon/evening through an awards banquet on Saturday night and a general membership meeting on Sunday morning. Over the past few years we’ve run between 150 and 250 attendees, with the larger turnouts being in the Coast Division with its greater population density.

We try to make this event a “mini-national” convention. That is, we often have guest presenters from outside the region giving clinics and many of our local presenters have given clinics at nationals over the years. We feel that it is important to have quality clinics, which will make folks WANT to attend our event. We generally try to add special events – train rides of some sort, speeder rides, LDSIG and OPSIG activities, layout tours, a full gamut of contests (model, photo and crafts, as well as show and tell), etc. – to raise the level of return on our member’s investment in the convention and we try to keep the cost below \$100.00 – especially in today’s economy (and for the past three years the awards banquet has been included at no additional charge for full convention attendees). Two things that we’re looking at over the next few years are a mini-convention (basically a Friday evening, Saturday, Sunday morning meet) in 2011, when the NMRA National Convention will be in our region at Sacramento – and possibly a joint meet with either of our neighbors to the north or south. Right now the focus is on a joint meet with the PNR, somewhere just north of the California/Oregon border. We’ll have to wait and see if these ideas work, but we know that they won’t if we don’t try them.

Moving down from the regional level, each of the divisions has at least one meet/activity each quarter. Over the past two years we’ve initiated a program within the region to try and reduce or prevent date conflicts for these division meets, which will make it easier for

members from one division to attend meets in other divisions. This program has shown positive results in that more members are making the effort to visit and share with their neighbors. In addition to these regularly scheduled division meets, some of the divisions get involved with the various model railroad shows in their areas. In most cases this is something as simple as having a recruiting table with a display showing local NMRA activities as well as a portable layout of some sort (often a replication of John Allen’s “Timesaver”) for folks to try running.

The Sierra Division is actually a co-producer (with three other groups) of a major train show in Roseville, CA. This show is their big fund raiser, which allows them to cover the cost of other divisional events over the rest of the year. In another case, the Coast Division has an auction as a regular part of each of their quarterly meets. These auctions run anywhere from 350 to over 600 items being sold by the members (any NMRA member may participate), and the division gets 10% of all sales. Quite often division members will use the auction to help survivors liquidate estates, which may add another hundred or more items to the regular auction. In addition to the auction, there are usually at least two clinics given at each Coast Division meet.

These are just a few examples of activities by both the region and its divisions.

Blueprint for success

How Cincinnati's Division 7 came back from the dead

by Charlie Atkinson, MMR

I recently read a report that some Regions and Divisions want the NMRA National organization to provide them with funding to support their yearly activities and operation. In an ensuing discussion, members of the Cincinnati Division 7 of the Mid Central Region wondered why NMRA should do this. In these hard economic times, National has had to cut costs due to loss of membership, less advertising revenue, and increased costs to maintain the headquarters facility and (smaller) staff.

Based on our experience over the past 45 years, our members felt that each Region and Division can and should find a way to create funds for its own activities and operation. Taking responsibility for one's fate is exciting and empowering, and success breeds success. That is what happened in Division 7.

The Division disintegrates

After the NMRA National Convention held in Cincinnati in 1966, the club sponsoring the convention, which had a number of Division 7 leaders, pulled away from all leadership positions, and Division 7 disintegrated. Several of us felt a great loss due to this. I had recently moved to Cincinnati and was one of the convention volunteers giving clinics and supporting the sponsoring club in other ways. Just when I was getting really involved in the local NMRA, the whole thing blew up!

After a short while with no activity, some of us got together to see what could be done to reactivate the Division. There was no remaining leadership and no money, so we began to meet at a suburban school where I

was a band director. We met in the band room, a free space. I was able to start a newsletter using the music department's duplicating machine. We had monthly meetings and elected a superintendent and other officers.

But we still had no money, and the Mid Central Region was a dues-free region. We did not want to charge activity fees or subscriptions, since that would automatically limit our market. At first we depended on donations and the proceeds from a small raffle to get enough money to mail our newsletter. We also passed the hat when necessary. There were times in those early days when we had less than \$5 in the treasury.

Our first show

Along with a local model railroad club that had recently been formed, we initiated some activities. Our first effort was to hold a show during Model Railroad Month (November) in a Cincinnati suburb where the model railroad club had its layout.

Our first show was in a small, one-room building. Admission was free, and we featured how-to displays, mini-clinics, and some small layouts. We continued to hold the show there for a few years, but interest in the show was growing and we were bursting at the seams. An automobile dealer who lived in the community heard about our growing pains and offered his dealership for us to use for the show. He cleared out his showroom, service area, and body shop on Friday; we set up tables on Friday evening and held the show on Saturday and Sunday.

While the show was still free, we sold snacks and drinks to visitors who were lingering at our show for increasing lengths of time. We cleared about \$1000 the first year we offered snacks, and we used the money to establish a treasury. Because of the additional space available at the car showroom, we were able to invite local model railroad dealers to attend, not to sell, but to display layouts and do some how-to clinics. In later years, the car dealer allowed us to set up in his service bay, and we were able to allow our dealers to do some selling as well, but we required each dealer to have a running layout or some kind of educational display.

Another move – or two, or three – to larger quarters

After a few years in that location, the show had grown to the point that the local police were having traffic problems around the car dealership. We negotiated with a new vocational high school to use their facilities for that same weekend, which worked well.

We continued to grow, with the show attracting hundreds, then thousands of people. We were able to use their cafeteria facilities to expand our food service, and although we began to charge a small admission fee to cover the expense of renting the school, the bulk of the money we received was from the sale of food. Our first-year net income from food was around \$3000, an astounding amount of money to us at that time. That money, as well as income from the new admission and table fees, was enough to finance our expanded Division activities through the year.

After a few years at the vocational school, a church contracted with the school to use the facility every week for their Sunday church services. So we again had to find another place if we wanted to continue having the fall model railroad show.

By that time we had enough money in our treasury to pay market rates for a place for the show. We negotiated a great rate with the Cincinnati Gardens, the former home of the Cincinnati Royals NBA team. At that time, the main arena was used by a professional hockey team and by the University of Cincinnati and Xavier University for their home basketball games. We just had to arrange the dates of our show to avoid dates the Gardens had games.

Some luck intervened at this point: The Gardens lost their hockey team and suddenly had two hockey rinks with no one to use the space. So they deactivated a practice rink and made it available for our show space. With the show in a familiar and popular venue, our attendance exploded, and as a result our treasury grew significantly. The later shows in the Gardens regularly brought in 6,000 to 8,000 people or more, and resulted in an annual surplus for the Division of up to \$10,000. We were rolling!

After a number of years, the Gardens picked up a new hockey team as a tenant, and they needed to reactivate the practice rink. Once again, we were looking for a home for our show.

We moved the show to the Northern Kentucky Convention Center, located in downtown Covington just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. This was a beautiful, modern – and very expensive – facility. Our shows during this time were very successful from the standpoint of attendance, show quality, and member and dealer participation. However, the rent was high and, since the show was in the fall, there were conflicts with parking for Cincinnati Bengals football games. The show attendees had to pay for parking in addition to the fee for the show.

These shows forced us to hone our management and expense structure as we tried to ensure that there was something left for the Division after paying our very large

convention center rental. After three years, including two that lost money due to the high rent, we knew that we had to find a new, more reasonable location so that we could recapture the formula that had made the show such a success for so long.

Proving ground for Division leadership

Fortunately, we found a new high school north of Cincinnati. The rent was agreeable, and there was plenty of free parking. We had to work around the high school football schedule, which required moving the event to a weekend in late October when there was no home football game.

For all those years, even when we were in northern Kentucky, the show had continued to grow, and so did our Division membership. We started with a small group of around 25 at those first band-room meetings in the late 1960s, and by the late 1990s we had around 350 members.

Everyone knew that the financial independence of the Division, as well as its extensive activities and programs, hinged on the continued success of the show. For this reason, a great many members were willing to participate in working – setting up tables, manning the doors and admission tables, and whatever else was needed.

When one member was forced to give up some administrative tasks necessary to the success of the show, such as taking vendor registrations, allocating space, and making the set-up diagram, others volunteered to take his place. Whenever the call for help went out, there were plenty of members who were there to help do whatever needed to be done. The show also became a fruitful proving ground for Division leadership, and most of our Division leadership for the past 40 years has come from the show management team.

With the stable income from the show, as well as an annual flea market that was added in the early 1980s and is held in March, we were able to support a number of other activities. They include paying travel costs for well-known hobbyists to give clinics at some of our monthly meetings. As a result of this, we have 80 to 100 members and some visitors at each of the monthly meetings, which are generally held on the second Sunday afternoon of each month in a rotation of locations around the Division.

We have set up programs where some of our Division surplus proceeds go to finance various model railroad promotional activities, including the local Boy Scout Railroading Merit Badge programs. We also buy a number of introductory model railroading books each year and place them in the 70-plus public libraries located in our division.

In addition, we have helped the National NMRA and the Kalmbach Memorial Library with various projects, and we have sponsored the local public TV stations' acquisition of various railroad- and model railroad-related shows. We have also donated sale items and other assets to new divisions in the MCR to help them establish themselves. It is our goal each year to spend as much on hobby support as we spend on our own activities.

We also initiated a custom-decorated car program in the early 1970s, and we have developed and sold a number of cars painted for model railroads, including the Virginian & Ohio and the Allegheny Midland, and for a number of prototype roads, including the C&O, L&N, Southern, Clinchfield, NYC, and others. Like all our other activities, the car program has been run by a cadre of knowledgeable, dedicated, and enthusiastic members over the years.

A tale of two conventions

Along with all of the activities and shows, Cincinnati Division 7 has hosted a number of Mid Central Region conventions over the years. In 2003, I had just come off 15 years as a national officer, including president, of a large international RV association. When the Division superintendent found out that I was no longer traveling around the country six months of the year, he asked me if I would chair our Regional convention. I had chaired both the 1972 and 1977 Regional conventions, but that was almost 30 years ago! A competent and enthusiastic convention committee was already in place, so I took on the job.

Knowing that Regional conventions can be iffy for funds, attendance, and activities, I decided to work on the idea of creating a budget that would break even or had a little surplus left over. I had about twenty members on the committee, and all but one had email, so we did most of the organization by email with very few face-to-face meetings. Each person on the committee had specific things to do, and everyone did his or her job on time and without any prodding. As a result, we had a successful Regional convention and had a much larger surplus than any of us expected.

Then I was informed that the original chair for the 2005 National Convention had been forced to resign due to business commitments, and that the vice-chair had just accepted a National NMRA office, and I was asked to chair the National. I knew that would be a much larger job than the Regional, and I asked the committee if they would stay on with me. They all accepted. By then, the committee had 24 members, and all but one had email. We also had a lot of help from National's capable and experienced convention team, especially Henry Jordan.

Again, I was very frugal in setting a budget, but we had much more to consider when planning than we had for the Regional. In the end, we had what we felt was a good and successful National convention. Because

of being very watchful of our income and expenses, we ended up with a very sizable surplus. With all of our previous shows and with the Regional and National conventions, the Division 7 treasury was in a great position. As a result, our Division was able to give the National Office a \$25,000 donation earmarked for the new online database system that is now being rolled out.

The moral of the story

The bottom-line reason for all of the Division 7 successes between the post-National Convention meltdown in 1967 and the successful 2005 National Convention is the consistent leadership of the Division, clear goals, and the willingness of our members to jump in and help wherever help is needed.

One area where our fortune has not been entirely of our making is in Division leadership. Although it is not all that large a town – Cincinnati currently ranks somewhere in the 30s in terms of metropolitan market size – the Cincinnati area is blessed with a disproportionate number of very successful national corporations, including the headquarters for Procter & Gamble, Macy's (Federated) Department Stores, Toyota U.S.A., and Kroger Foods, as well as the General Electric Jet Engine Division, Great American Insurance, and many other large and well-managed companies. Our leadership has come from a cadre of managers from these businesses, as well as from a group of talented members from other walks of life, whose abilities have been recognized and nurtured over the years. Part of our success has been due to our "farm system" method of recognizing and developing talented members so that they are ready for the "big leagues" when their time comes.

While every area is different, I am convinced that the possibility for growth, success, and enthusiastic member support is

present in almost every Division's situation, around the country and around the world. Wishing that someone would do something for you is boring, debilitating, and depressing. But working together to figure out ways to contribute to your Division's prosperity is fun, both for the Division's members and the people it serves.

Running an interesting and successful Division benefits not only the membership of the Division but also the entire model railroad hobby in your area. All you have to do is to remember where you came from, why you're doing what you're doing, to whom you owe your success, and what you need to do to spread the success around.

What Division 7 has done over the past 43 years can be done by any other group if everyone is willing to pitch in and not let egos get in the way. Volunteerism has been, is, and will continue to be the key to the success of the NMRA.