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**Master Builder — Prototype Models**
Mid-Continental Region
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**Model Railroad Engineer — Civil**
Australasian Region
Mike Bartlett, Rainbow Flat, NSW
Chris Minahan, Hallidays Point, NSW

**Mid-Continental Region**
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**MMR Earned**

**Thomson Oxnard, MD Earns MMR #565**

My journey to becoming an MMR started very late in my hobby career. In 2000, my friend Neil Fitch showed me his basement layout and told me that he just had an article about it published in *Railroad Model Craftsman*. I thought that was very impressive. I then began thinking about writing the story of my railroad’s creation, and that led to the discovery of the Achievement Program.

Like many, I have memories of the Lionel train under the Christmas tree when I was three. However, I would say the major influence in my loving the hobby was not the train but my father. My father was a doctor, a woodworker, and a talented craftsman...
who in the 1950s built a brass rail, $ gauge shelf layout that snaked around our stone basement high above my head. I was in awe of those trains, as I was of my father. He never finished the layout before we moved to a new house, and that phase in his life ended.

That move in the late 1950s was a start for my younger brother and me — we now had a large open basement. We accumulated HO trains somehow (I had a newspaper delivery route) and built a “large” layout on two 4x8 sheets of plywood separated by 18 inches and joined by Erector Set bridges. We built plastic structures and plaster mountains and tunnels, learning all the basics. More importantly, I learned how to scratchbuild many structures from balsa wood and to paint and weather them. Many of those came with me and were used on my first layout with my children.

Fast-forward two decades after college, medical school, and the Air Force, and suddenly I had four children. In the 1980s, I started my first family layout after a local merchant at Kimball’s Store in Exeter of¬fered model railroad construction classes. With his instructions, I built a 4x8-foot layout made of Styrofoam on a frame, which was light enough to hang on the wall or be placed on the Ping-Pong table. For the wall-hanging phase, I built a framed Plexiglas cover for protection from some active kids. My pediatric practice was quite busy, but I seemed to find time to build structures and scenery. We had years of fun on that DC layout; it gradually grew to 6x9 feet.

In 1991, I started subscribing to Model Railroader and saw what home railroads could become. Finally in 1996, with three of my children safely off to college, I began planning, designing, and building the next layout. I had read enough to know that I should finish the ceiling, floors, and walls after taking out the storage closets and cold cellar and moving the freezer. I decided on a freelanced version of the New Hampshire Division of the Boston & Maine — that is where I lived and spent summers growing up. The construction steadily progressed since woodworking is my hobby, too, and the family knew if I was missing, I was in the basement.

I designed the layout for operations from the start but had never operated on anyone’s layout. I discovered DCC and never would have built a larger railroad without it. The help from my hobby store (Bob Jeffers) was invaluable with everything, including installing receivers.

I finally joined the NMRA in 1998 when my friend Neil talked about how much fun he had attending the National Conventions. I still did not participate in any conventions or groups and continued to work alone on my layout. I joined the B&M RR Historical Society and learned about the prototype.

In 2002, I had my first open house and participated in our Regional layout tour, Tour de Chooch, started by Bruce Robinson. In 2003, I attended my first operating session at Bruce’s Valley Junction RR. Those two events finally made me aware of other hobbyists and groups in the area, and I have continued to be open on the Tour and for other events and conventions. It is great fun inspiring others and having kids run trains. I thank Rich Bretton for his advice, introduc¬ing me to our Seacoast Division, and getting me involved over the past decade. I am always impressed by the wide variety of talents, interests, and knowledge the members have.

After continued refinements and improvements, I wrote my first article about the railroad’s creation, and it appeared in Model Railroader in December 2009. I enjoy photographing the progress of projects and have had three more articles published in MR and several in our Seacoast Division Switch Tower.

An important moment in my journey came when I attended the 2009 NMRA National Convention in Hartford, Connecticut, where I learned how to scratchbuild Fast Tracks turnouts in a hands-on clinic. After that challenge, I have con¬tinued to scratchbuild many more parts of my railroad with turnouts, hand laid track, and structures.

When retirement came in 2011, I launched into bigger projects and expansions that became the source of more published articles. I changed my railroad from an interesting oval to a larger point-to-loop design and closer to a prototypically operated railroad. By that time, Bruce was urging me to work on the Achievement Program as he was doing. I started with the Golden Spike that year. An important decision was to enter some of my structures to be judged. However, learning to scratchbuild and wanting to be judged were key positive milestones in my hobby career.

I owe much to Bruce Robinson, Rich Bretton, Erich Whitney, and other members of the Seacoast Division for urging me on in the process, as well as to Doug Hartwell for stimulating continued ideas for expansions. Of course, I owe a lot to my wife Sally for all those times I “went missing” in the basement. The Division has given me the opportunity to help others as New Hampshire AP Chairman and Secretary. Above all, I dedicate this achievement to my father, who got to enjoy the early years of this journey. Now, I pass it on to my grandson, who lights up the basement and is becoming my best operator.

AP Certificates - Tom Oxnard
Model Railroad Author
Master Builder- Structures
Master Builder- Scenery
Model Railroad Engineer- Civil
Model Railroad Engineer- Electrical
Master Builder- Cars
Chief Dispatcher