

NMRA BULLETIN

HAVE YOU CHANGED YOUR ADDRESS OR OTHER MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION?

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2026 NMRA NATIONAL CONVENTION DATES AND NATIONAL TRAIN SHOW RESERVATIONS:

Scenic City Express
July 27-August 2, 2026
Chattanooga, Tennessee
www.nmra2026.org

Train Show Booth Reservations
Jenny Hendricks Registrar
P.O. Box 1328 Soddy Daisy, TN 37384-1328
423-892-2846 ntsreg@nmra.org

Future Convention Locations
2027: Tacoma, Washington
2028: Rochester, New York

ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

NMRA AP CERTIFICATE REPORT

APRIL 2026

GOLDEN SPIKE

Mid-Eastern Region

Bob Witwer
(Benson, North Carolina)

Kenneth L. Howard
(Raleigh, North Carolina)

John Spach
(Fuquay Varina, North Carolina)

Tom Garren
(Cary, North Carolina)

Rocky Mountain Region

Terry Berg
(Grand Junction, Colorado)

Wayne Kennedy
(Whitewater, Colorado)

Tom Jones
(Grand Junction, Colorado)

MASTER BUILDER (MOTIVE POWER)

Pacific Coast Region
Richard Mossholder
(Santa Rosa, California)

Pacific Northwest Region
Bill Yancy, MMR
(Boise, Idaho)

MASTER BUILDER (CARS)

Northeastern Region
Bruce Robinson
(Sandown, New Hampshire)

MASTER BUILDER (STRUCTURES)

Midwest Region
Keith Kohlmann
(Racine, Wisconsin)

MASTER BUILDER (SCENERY)

Australasian Region
John Hunter
(Stawell, Victoria, Australia)

Midwest Region

Keith Kohlmann
(Racine, Wisconsin)

Pacific Coast Region

Richard Mossholder
(Santa Rosa, California)

MASTER BUILDER (PROTOTYPE MODELS)

Midwest Region
Keith Kohlmann
(Racine, Wisconsin)

MODEL RAILROAD ENGINEER (CIVIL)

Midwest Region
John Munson
(Indianapolis, Indiana)

MODEL RAILROAD ENGINEER (ELECTRICAL)

Australasian Region
Gary Rose
(Leonay, New South
Wales, Australia)

British Region

Jürgen Dietrichkeit
(Weilheim,
Bavaria, Germany)

CHIEF DISPATCHER

Australasian Region
Graeme Barnes, MMR
(Hill Top, New South
Wales, Australia)

British Region

Jürgen Dietrichkeit
(Weilheim, Bavaria, Germany)

Mid-Eastern Region

Alan Balma
(Williamsburg, Virginia)

Kevin O'Connor
(Cary, North Carolina)

ASSOCIATION OFFICIAL

North Central Region

Mark Mincek
(Clinton Township, Michigan)

Rocky Mountain Region

Wayne Kennedy
(Whitewater, Colorado)

ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEER

Mid-Eastern Region
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(Hanover, Maryland)

North Central Region

Stephen Harsh
(Okemos, Michigan)

Rocky Mountain Region

Larry Carter
(West Jordan, Utah)

MODEL RAILROAD AUTHOR

Mid-Eastern Region

John A. Sokash
(Cary, North Carolina)

Midwest Region

Keith Kohlmann
(Racine, Wisconsin)

Pacific Northwest Region

Marc Simpson
(Coquitlam, British
Columbia, Canada)

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER

Mid-Eastern Region

Alan Balma, MMR #820
(Williamsburg, Virginia)

North Eastern Region

Bruce Robinson, MMR #821
(Sandown, New Hampshire)

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 Ray Persing at achiev@nmra.org.

MMR EARNED

ALAN BALMA, MMR



I was the typical Lionel kid growing up in the 1950s and pretty much an armchair modeler for the next 45 years. I started back in the hobby in 2015. As a youth, I built papier-mâché mountains, planted green-dyed sawdust grass, and sprinkled dried coffee-ground dirt. I built structures from the cardboard that came with laundered shirts. But what I remember most was my dad helping, teaching me to solder wire feeds, and enjoying the trains as much as my brothers and I did. I still have those trains in a display case in my layout room. I think of my dad every time I look at them.

I am an S-scale modeler with a large 18x28 layout that I started at 70 years old. I am eight years into this project. The first question other modelers inevitably ask is, "How did you get into S-scale?" I joined our community model railroad club a few years after I retired. The first weekend in December, as part of major holiday festivities in the Williamsburg, Virginia, area, we set up modular display layouts of most scales at our local library. We had a Lionel layout where the children could press the buttons of the accessories with as much enthusiasm as we had growing up. Unfortunately, we did not have a modular American Flyer

S Layout. I thought it would be fun, and so I built one for the club in 2015.

We have been setting up this American Flyer layout annually for the past 11 years. It is a joy to see the children's amazement as something mechanical occurs when they push a button. From the startled look caused by the loud sound of the log-loader grabbing a log to the look of wonder at how a red mail bag got replaced so fast with a green one — very different from the video screens they are familiar with. We also discovered that the operating accessories are very popular with grandmothers my age. I think it is

MID-EASTERN REGION: TIDEWATER DIVISION

MMR: #820

CERTIFICATES EARNED

Alan Balma, MMR® #820

- Model Railroad Engineer – Civil
- Master Builder – Scenery
- Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical
- Master Builder – Structures
- Master Builder – Cars
- Model Railroad Author
- Chief Dispatcher

because their brothers did not let them play with their trains. For us who operate the layout, these smiles are a wonderful reward for our efforts.

Subsequently, I decided to build a small “trial” S-scale model layout for my home. (Fine scale modeling with Code 100 track, Code 110 wheels, and Kadee 148 couplers.) This project was to see if I liked the hobby, to learn some basic skills, and to test my slightly shaky hands. It then just seemed natural to continue in S-scale. Well, I love the hobby, and I really like the size of S.

At age 70, we designed and built a new house with an 18x28 dedicated train room. Now to plan and design a layout. I had space for a good-sized switching layout or branch line operation. Studying Lance Mindheim’s books on designing switching layouts, I would find that my space best accommodates an around-the-room layout with a peninsula. It would also probably accommodate three to four major design elements. In addition, his advice to build a single-level layout, avoid hard-to-reach hidden staging, keep track elevation changes to a minimum, maintain spaces between places, and execute the layout simply really resonated with me. The benchwork, track, and electrical are 100 percent done. The scenery and structures are about

60 percent complete. Car cards and waybill operations are up and running.

I model the Pennsylvania Railroad’s Elmira Branch in September 1956, the last year of steam and passenger service on the line. It is a switching layout that models the Canandaigua Division end point yard and interchange with the New York Central; the siding that went down to Canandaigua Lake; and Penn Yan, New York — a switching-rich town 25 miles PRR east of Canandaigua. I model the flavor of these locales as well as some scale replicas of structures that were there. I have really enjoyed researching and discovering these prototype locations. I railfanned the railroad locations, cycled the rail trail on part of the right-of-way, and visited the Penn Yan Historical Society.

While planning and building this layout, I kept in mind how to apply it to the Achievement Program certificates. I started working on the AP awards in earnest about two years ago. I only needed to do a few things along with the paperwork to get ready for the Civil, Electrical, and Scenery certificates. Two years ago, I had about six structures that could be applied to the Structures Certificate. I then built six more, mostly scratchbuilt, structures for the layout that could be considered for Merit Awards. Structures and scenery are my favorite hobby activities.

Even though writing well is a challenge for me, I enjoy it. Over the past two years, I have published enough articles and pictures to earn the Author Certificate. Most of these articles dealt with the construction of my layout and my approach to scratchbuilding for Merit Awards. I knew I had to do the Cars AP, but I needed to choose one more AP. Coaches along the way suggested that I pursue the Chief Dispatcher Certificate. Doing so

helped me start operations on my layout using car cards and waybills.

I will be honest: I almost did not pursue the Master Model Railroader because of the Cars AP. I was not sure I could scratchbuild four cars that would earn Merit Awards. Eight months and several hundred hours later, I scratchbuilt six cars that all earned Merit Awards. They say you learn many things from the MMR journey. With Cars, I learned patience.

First and foremost, I would like to thank MMR Mat Thompson for all his advice and encouragement through the journey. I would also like to thank MMRs Chuck Davis and Bob Cook for evaluating my work and always providing useful feedback. My return to the hobby would not have been possible without the help and coaching of my good friends Ed Rappe and Jim Taverna.

My father gave me a great gift. The first train set was fun, but, more importantly, Dad gave me a love for railroads and model trains. Had he not imparted this passion to me, I likely would not have re-entered model railroading as an adult. I think it has never been more critical for us to pass along our passion for this hobby to the next generation. Let’s get to work! ●