

KEEPING TRACK

Official Newsletter of the Abilene Society of Model Railroaders

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The word from the prez:

Is the model railroad hobby in danger of “ageing out?”

We hear and read a lot these days about model railroaders and the model railroad hobby “ageing out,” and that it’s not the hobby for those under 50. Even though we do have a number of “senior” people in model railroading, I would argue that we are far from a dying hobby, because there are many younger members in it, and joining it. NMRA President Gordy Robison announced for the first time a decade-plus, membership went up in 2023. While attending a train show in Houston recently, I would estimate that 60% of the attendees were under 50, and many were middle school age. I talked to one young boy with his mom in tow who was looking for SP engines and cars, and they were excited to find those treasures and continue building his empire.

What’s happening is a shift in what draws peoples’ interest to the hobby. Yes, building a layout to run trains is still a main goal, but like many of us when we started out, the road today is much different. Higher quality models, structures, and especially electronic controls, have changed the hobby in very positive ways. Also, many train shows offer a great range of new and used components and many bargains that provide a diverse and less expensive path into the Hobby.

The NMRA Lone Star Region is recognizing younger members and their contribution to the hobby. At their annual meeting in February, they recognized one each from Divisions 1, 3, and 5 for their participation in their clubs and divisions. There were over ten high school age and younger attendees at the LSR Convention, all active in the hobby. These and thousands more like them are the future of the model railroad hobby and offer visible proof that it is definitely not “ageing out”.

Your President, Dan Schueler

Jim Frankenfeld receives Life Membership Award



Photo by Jim Gibson

Jim Frankenfeld (left) is shown above receiving the ASMR Life Membership Award from president Dan Schueler at the Feb. 3 business meeting. He was nominated for the award by Jim Gibson in a formal letter submitted to the club. It was read to members at the Jan. 6 business meeting and unanimously approved.

In his nomination letter, Gibson touched on some of the activities and achievements that have made Jim a supremely valuable and worthy ASMR member from the time he joined shortly after the club was founded and continuing for more than three decades. Among other things, his extensive abilities and knowledge of electronics and circuitry have been invaluable in the successful construction and operation of every club layout, starting with DC and modernizing into DCC control systems. At one time, he single-handedly took on and completed the initial preparation phase of a club project by painting and installing custom decals on dozens of HO-scale boxcars that were then sold to members and others as a fund raiser. On his own initiative and using personal resources, he has rehabbed numerous donated railcars in various states of disrepair and added them to the club’s rolling stock roster over the years. He also served several terms as an elected club officer.

According to the award citation, which recognizes “more than three decades of faithful, dedicated membership,” the gold railroad key on it symbolizes Jim’s “selflessness and willingness to share his time, talents, and treasure with his fellow model railroaders.” In closing, Gibson’s nomination letter said, “Simply put, whatever needed doing, he has always been ready and able to lend a hand,” and labeled Jim Frankenfeld “a model railroader extraordinaire.”

KRBNRR Ops Session Report

We held this month's Ops Session on my home layout (the KRBNRR) on the Feb. 17, with five operators and one railfan present. The operators were: Lonny Thompson, Dusty Garison and his friend Loren Cole, Cecil Walston, and Jonathan Williamson. Our railfan was Billy Barrow, a friend who came with Cecil and Jonathan. We were able



Above: Dusty Garison (L) and Cecil Walston (R) look on while Loren Cole handles throttle duties during Ken Riediger's Feb. 17 Ops Session on his home layout. Photo by Ken Riediger.

to run a total of four trains. Dusty and Loren worked as a crew. Loren had been a railfan a year earlier, but this time he took to the throttle with Dusty conducting. Cecil and Jonathan also worked as a crew. The operations went smoothly with only a few switches that did not get thrown back to the proper position. That seems to be a continual problem. The next Ops Session will be March 23 at 1:30 pm. Hope to see you then. **KR**

ASMR Business Meeting Highlights

The Feb. 3 business meeting was opened at 10:00 a.m. by pres. Dan Schueler. Sec'y Cody Hilliard read minutes of the Jan. 6 meeting; treas. Ken Riediger reported an assets balance of \$8,472.42, and members approved both. Four members were reported late on dues for a total of \$340. The DCC wi-fi was reported in need of updating to eight slots, and Terry Andrew has donated a unit for it. Members were advised to completely release ID numbers, including all apps, when finished using them.

Ken still has HO-scale items for sale, and his next Ops Session will be Feb. 17. Dan presented Jim Frankenfeld the ASMR Life Membership Award. The Sept. 5 – 7 "Railfest" downtown was discussed, including our club putting a modular layout on display in the Elks Bldg. Ken, Cody and Wayne Smith are our committee reps to this affair. Nothing new was reported on making an outdoor club sign for special events. Ken mentioned photo

ideas for the club calendar project, and Dusty Garison suggested we get them made in time to be ready for sale at the Rail Fest.

Members were asked to keep an eye out for surplus/low cost cabinets that could be used for lockers for members to keep their train stuff at the club. Jon Prestridge said the Plano train show was great, with lots of vendors and displays. A leave of absence policy redraft for the club bylaws by Jim Gibson was approved by members. Members discussed having a Bad Order Book to record problems on the layout in and track getting them fixed. Jon said he would make one. Members were asked to use it and also put a sticky marker that includes a contact name on the spot on the layout where the problem was so it can be easily found by the repairman.

Dan talked about the upcoming Lone Star NMRA Div. 5 convention. Members approved \$80 to buy 500 club business cards. Dusty talked about going to see CP loco #2816 when it comes to Shreveport and Laredo in May. Dan mentioned talking to our landlords about a club Open House in conjunction with a spring sales event they have mentioned in the Memorial Day time frame. The meeting closed at 11:05 a.m. **JG**

Real railroading is no picnic.

Former ASMR Veep talks about being a UP trainee

My Time at UP: What I Learned and Why I Left.

For those of you who don't know, for the past few months I've been in Union Pacific's conductor training program in Fort Worth. Recently, I decided to resign from the program and come back to Abilene. In this article I want to go over some pros and cons that I experienced working for the railroad, as well as my reasons for leaving.

Cons:

Management – Just about everybody who works for UP could tell you the same thing: don't trust managers! The way the railroad hierarchy is set up, it seems like managers' main and most important job is to get you fired. They will set you up to fail and rarely help you. In fact, during my time at UP, I never even met the manager who was assigned over me. Although I did meet one or two managers I liked, almost all of them were egotistical and/or could not be trusted.

Schedule - Your schedule depends on what board and job you work, but for new employees you are most certainly going to end up on an "extra

board". This means that you could be called in anytime, and for almost any job. Unless you have a decade or more of service there is little chance you can hold a regular job.

Location - I mentioned that I was working in Ft. Worth. However, When I hired on I was supposed to have class in Sweetwater, Tx. But before I even got to start, some of my paperwork didn't process in time, and I was told I missed the Sweetwater class. Later on, while attending the Ft. Worth class, I found out that several other students had been hired out of Sweetwater as well, but were told different reasons for being moved to Ft. Worth. Eventually, I discovered that there actually *never was a class in Sweetwater* to start with! Being misled about this didn't sit too well with me.

Safety - This, of course, is a dangerous job. You are working with large machines and dangerous loads. Any mistake could lead to injury or worse, and I knew this going in. But thinking of it is one thing, and then having to traverse an active hump yard in the dark at 2 a.m. is another. UP does it best to promote safety, but rules can still be broken and the dangers are *very* real.

Co-workers - Your coworkers can make or break your job. Unfortunately, most of the people I worked with were miserable and made me feel like crap. Strangely enough, the best people that I got to work with were the ones who ran road trains in/out of Ft. Worth. Not everybody was difficult to work with, but in my experience it was a majority.

Pros:

Compensation - Something I could never complain about was the pay and benefits. We were paid very well even as trainees. We had a good daily rate and even qualified for overtime. UP also has some of the greatest benefits of any job out there. Healthcare, retirement, and insurance are among the best in the country.

Class - I was fortunate to be in an amazing class of trainees who looked out for each other and supported each other. We had two awesome teachers who ensured that most of us passed our tests and gave it their all to help us learn. Half of us came from Ft. Worth, and the other half from San Antonio.

Workload - Despite the numerous safety rules and knowledge needed for this job, the workload was actually quite easy. As one of my instructors said: "It's all about making something move forward and backward."

Experience - Overall, I enjoyed my time working at UP. After all, I got paid to ride around on trains! It was awesome being able to experience work on

a real railroad, and I'm glad that I tried it out. Traveling to different places, moving trains, and working on mainlines and rail yards were all good experiences.

Why I left:

All in all, I don't think I can put a single reason behind why I decided to leave. There was obviously some stuff with the job I didn't like. I also had some issues going on in my personal life that were easier to deal with back home, and during my on the job training at UP there was a certain anxiety about failure that I couldn't quite get over. Whatever the case, I'm glad to be back home in Abilene, and I look forward to spending more time at the club. For the time being, I'll be back at my old job working as a butcher. Hopefully, I've been able to provide some insights into my experiences working on the railroad. Feel free to contact me with any questions you might have. I'll be happy to answer! **JB**

The Editor Speaks:

Partisan politics has no place in model railroading

Except for a couple of rare, brief occasions, I have found ASMR to be a politics free haven. The subject of real and scale model trains and all the issues related to them has always seemed be enough to occupy the attention of, and dominate the interactions between, our model railroading group. Political issues which have grown increasingly rancorous in recent years, and have tended to dominate the news and many areas of life in general, just never seemed relevant enough, with all the things going on in our hobby and our club, to take up our time or attention whenever we're together. As I said, a member's political persuasion, or their position on this or that "hot button" issue doesn't seem to come up for "discussion" in our club, and that has suited me just fine. I hope it continues to be that way.

At this point you may be wondering why I even brought this subject up. Here's the deal. I recently learned about a situation where partisan politics was injected into model railroading in an unusual way by an individual in another location. The person who made me aware of it is a model railroader with a side-business doing custom painting and decal work on locomotives and rolling stock in a town near San Antonio. During a guest visit to our club on a Tuesday night, he was showing me photos of his excellent work, and a

freight car with graffiti that said “Stop the Steal” caught my eye. The visitor explained that a customer had asked him to do several cars with similar Trump themed political slogans, including the one above, “Go Brandon,” and others, some of which I hadn’t even heard of.

Being a journalist by education and practice, I

am aware of one’s First Amendment right to “free speech”, but I also believe in discretion (avoiding inappropriate times and places for exercising that right), and not engaging in needless provocation in general. I feel strongly that introducing partisan politics into our hobby in *any form* can lead to negative situations and is best avoided. **JG**

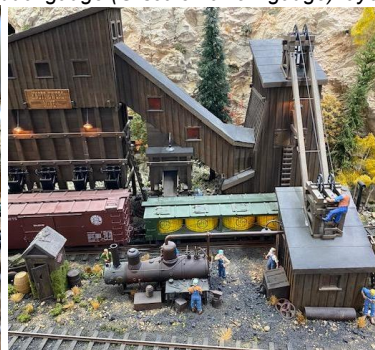
Photo highlights from pres. Dan Schueler’s trip to the NMRA Lone Star Div. conference



Above (L and R): The annual conference in Pasadena, TX was well attended, as this large crowd at the Saturday night banquet shows. Dr. Robert Holzweiss from the George Bush Presidential Library in College Station, TX, gave us the lowdown on UP locomotive 4141 and how it will be a featured display there. These three young NMRA members received special recognition at the conference for their model railroading accomplishments, giving me and everyone there good feelings about the future of our hobby.



Above (L to R): This G-scale model of UP #844 on display at the convention was completely scratch-built by Master Model Railroader Barry Boggs, who also built the G-scale “Big Boy” shown on his home layout in the next photo. The entire upper story of Mr. Boggs’ home in Spring, TX is filled with his dual gauge (G-scale/narrow gauge) layout, and these high trestles are what you see as you enter.



Above (L to R): More of the Boggs layout, with a machine shop interior, and the mining scene exterior in the next photo showing the typical level of incredible detail he has achieved in G-scale, both inside and outside, on his structures. He told me his upstairs layout covers about 1,000 square feet! We got to visit the Boggs layout and Craig Brantley’s dual gauge (O/On3) layout, also in Spring, TX, on the way back to Abilene. The photo at the right shows a representative sample of the beautiful scenery on Brantley’s pike, which is situated in a large space above a three car garage. Unfortunately, this fine layout will be dismantled in the near future, he told me, because he and his family will be moving to a new home they are having built. All photos by Dan Schueler