

# THE SEMAPHORE

December 2012

FOX VALLEY DIVISION • MIDWEST REGION



**HAPPY HOLIDAYS ! from the Semaphore crew  
and all of us on the FVD Board**

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## Trains in my Christmas's

by Walt Herrick

As with many of you, trains have been a part of my holiday season for decades. Since receiving my first American Flyer train set for Christmas in 1955, seldom has a Christmas gone by without trains.

That first Flyer set consisted of a die cast Atlantic loco, green T&P gon, silver Gulf Oil tank car, and a signature red AF northeastern caboose, all with the old link couplers. Three years later my brother Skip got another Atlantic train set, this one with a 4-4-2 that smoked and made "choo choo" sounds, and a yellow AF caboose. Five or six American Flyer layouts were built in the Herrick basement in Crystal Lake, Illinois based on these two trains sets and the other trains and accessories my brother and I received at Christmas in subsequent years.



It's the Christmas season 1957. Sunday School is over and it's time to play trains on the Herrick's first American Flyer train layout. Brother Skip is on the left.

I stayed with American Flyer for eight years and then received an HO Tyco/Mantua Santa Fe GP 20 train set as a Christmas gift in 1963. The AF trains were wrapped in newspaper, boxed and put in the attic to make room for a new HO empire. The empire was short lived as sports took over almost all of my spare time in high school and continue on page two

## Fun Stuff

Although steam-powered and geared locomotives were initially imported from the United States, New Zealanders quickly developed their own versions. This Johnston 16 wheeler was built in Invercargill for the Glenham Sawmilling Company in 1910.



## Trains in my Christmas's

college. After my sophomore year in college though, a July 1970 trip to the Hesston Steam Museum rekindled my latent interest in trains, and I found myself building a small 2 x 3 foot N-scale layout in my parent's basement at the holiday break. I told dad and mom it was for my youngest brother Bob, and it was, more or less. In the next couple years of holiday breaks we graduated to building a 4 x 8 foot HO scale layout.

After graduating college in 1973, I moved to Cincinnati, Ohio to begin my first full time job. I also began serious modeling on a regular basis. I worked on a friend's large HO layout every week and, thanks to an understanding landlord, started an HO attic layout above my apartment. In 1974 something interesting happened. I was home for the holidays in Illinois shopping for a Christmas present for my girl friend in a



Several college holiday seasons were spent helping my brother Bob build a 4 x 8 HO layout.

Woodstock antique shop. There I spied an old American Flyer caboose for sale. I almost bought it for nostalgia's sake, but remembered our original Flyer trains were still in the attic of my parent's house. I made a bee line for home and headed up to the attic. There, untouched for ten years, were five boxes of our old Flyer trains and Plasticville buildings. Within a couple of hours a loop of track was set up on the floor and a train--one of the old Atlantic's and a string of cars--was running.

Since that Christmas in 1974, I've set up some kind of American Flyer layout for many Christmas's despite moving around the country a bit between 1977 and 1982. Only recently have I retired the AF trains. They were once again replaced by newer, more reliable HO trains (and slot cars) for the grand kids. The old scrap book photos in this article capture a few of the "Trains in my Christmas's." I'm sure some of you have similar photos of your old trains.



The American Flyer trains were resurrected from my parent's attic and set up on the floor just before Christmas Eve in 1974.



A 4 x 6 foot Flyer Christmas layout was built in Cincinnati in 1975. The layout became a year round fixture in my apartment's living room.



Fast forward to my family's Christmas party in 1988. Uncle Mike and Aunt Linda look on as my two sons and cousin Amy play on a "new" kids American Flyer layout in the basement. The trains, buildings and accessories on the layout were 25 to 30 years old by this time.



## Jim Allen Wins Big at Trainfest by Mike Hirvela and Walt Herrick

One guy who might not want to see the year 2012 end is the FVD's own Jim Allen. Jim added to his collection of 2012 contest winnings by winning "Best in Show—Module" at this year's Trainfest held in Milwaukee November 10 and 11. Prior to Jim's Trainfest win, in 2012 he had won two FVD division meet contests, five Midwest Regional Meet model contests in Springfield, IL (including the President's Award and a Best of Show), and took first or placed in four Midwest Regional Meet photo contests. Not bad and certainly well deserved! Of his Trainfest award Jim said, "That award was totally unexpected. It really took me by surprise."

Jim's Bluff City Modular Engineers group corner module started out three years ago as a last minute replacement module built by Mike

Hirvela when a BCME member could not attend the 2009 Trainfest due to a family emergency. Jim agreed to add some scenery to the module before the show, but ended up reconstructing the entire module to his standards in two days! In the next three years, scenery and structure additions and upgrades were added. One addition that particularly appealed to the Trainfest judges was the abandoned crossing and tower scene which fits perfectly in its corner location. This year in the weeks prior to Trainfest, Jim spent many long nights adding scenic details to the module. He was well rewarded for his efforts! Congratulations, Jim! (See "Mike's Minute" and December's "Member Layout" for photos and more on Jim's Trainfest award and module. Ed.)

## Layout of the Month: Jim Allen's BCME Corner Module

Yep, this month's Layout of the Month is a module--a very special module. As has been related elsewhere in this Semaphore, Jim Allen won "Best of Show—Module" at this year's Trainfest show in Milwaukee. We couldn't resist using his module for this month's "Layout of the Month". The module struck a chord with your editor just as it did with the Trainfest judges! Ed.



Continued on next page.



Top left: Notice how the road, field, and orchard all follow the curve of the tracks.

Bottom left: The Trainfest judges loved this mini scene.

Bottom right: Another great mini scene. The sign, barn and silo were scratch built.

All photos by Brian Hirvela.



## Jim Allen's Basic Layout Information

**Layout Name:** BCME layout corner module

**Layout Builder:** Jim Allen

**Layout Format:** Part of the BCME's modular layout

**Layout Size:** 4 x 4 feet with interior corner cutout

**Theme:** Mid-west country highway scene

**Layout Philosophy:** Inspire viewers to think "I can do that, too!"

**Era:** 1960's to present

**Benchwork:** 1x3 grid with ¼ inch birch plywood top

**Roadbed:** ½ inch homasote base with cork roadbed

**Track Code** 100 super elevated flex track. No turnouts.

**Minimum Radius:** 36 inches

**Control:** NCE digital command control

**Scenery:** Variety of techniques. 70% complete.

**Structures:** Scratch built; scratch built resin from molds; modified laser cut and plastic kits.

**Operations:** Display running for shows.

**Favorite Aspects of Hobby:** Kitbashing; I also really enjoy turning ordinary items into nice models.

**Hobby Influences:** John Allen. Also, I always look to the real world for modeling inspiration.



## Mike's Minute by Mike Hirvela

This month Mike reports on Trainfest 2012 held in Milwaukee. Ed.

Trainfest 2012 was another big show with slightly more in attendance (25,569 to be exact) than last year. More than a dozen from the Fox Valley Division participated in the show this year. I along with FVD members Ed Pavlovic and Jim Allen (more on him later) worked at the Bluff City Modular Engineers layout. Fox Valley Super, Jeff Jarr, and FVD members Tom Cara, Gordon Johnson, Jim Goettsche, and Mike Bychowski manned the excellent North Shore and Western HO modular layout. Other FVD members working at Trainfest were Bruce Rodbro and others as part of the Waukegan Modular Railroad Club's HO layout, Eric Bronsky and others who manned the Northwest Trainmasters HO modular layout, Bert Lattan and Harry Sorenson with the huge Midwest Rails G scale modular layout, and Mike Cieselka, Jeff Varney and others who worked the Lake County Modular Railroad Club's very nice HO layout. FVD MMR, David Leider manned the Soo Line Historical Society booth, and Mr. Hiroshi Kato represented Kato Manufacturing, Inc. at their fine booth. If I left anybody out I am truly sorry!

Sunday morning at the show was, to say the least, interesting. So there we were, Jim Allen and

I, standing at the northwest corner of the BCME modular railroad, next to Jim's Action-Reaction RR display, discussing various topics, when John Tewes, Trainfest Executive Director, walked up to us and asked who owned the corner module on the opposite corner of our railroad. "Oh no," I thought, "what's wrong?" knowing that when John Tewes speaks, people jump. I fully expected some tongue lashing (or worse!) from John, like "Your layout is sticking out too far in the aisle," or something. But when we turned around, there was a full contingent of bright yellow shirted WISE Guys (representatives of the Wisconsin Southeastern or WISE Division of the NMRA and sponsors of Trainfest) standing near and admiring Jim's corner module. All the while they were holding a plaque that read, "BEST IN SHOW – MODULE" on it. The next thing I knew, Jim was being awarded the plaque! Handshakes were the order of the day as each congratulated Jim on receiving this recognition. Wow! This is the first TF award any of us has achieved in the many years we've been there. It made for a Trainfest we'll never forget.



*"The next thing I knew, Jim was being awarded the plaque!"*

## November Monthly Meeting

We had another well attended FVD monthly meeting in November with almost 50 in our room at the Gary Morova Center in Prospect Heights. After members enjoyed some pre-meeting Eddie Shlemon home made cookies and drinks, taking a quick peek at the contest entries, and a little socializing, the meeting was off and running. Superintendent Jeff Jarr's remarks were short but he did remind us that there were still openings for High Wheeler 2013 volunteers. Contact Jeff or Dave Johnson to volunteer for a High Wheeler spot. Jeff also reminded us that the 2014 Midwest Regional Spring Convention is being sponsored by the FVD and that we are in the process of lining up volunteers for it. Contact Jeff if you'd like to help with this effort.

Highlights from other FVD Trainmasters were:

- Achievements Trainmaster Jim Landwher recognizing long time member and former Assistant Superintendent, Harry Sorenson, for his considerable work for the FVD and NMRA over many years. Harry was presented with a well deserved NMRA Service Award plaque.
- Public Relations Trainmaster, Jim Osborn, handing out our well known High Wheeler flyers for members to pass out to area hobby shops. This year's flyers are a nice bright green. Thanks to all who volunteered to do this big job!
- Clinics Trainmaster, David Leider, MMR, noting that he needs clinicians for the February and May meetings. Contact David if you have a clinic to present or know of someone who can.
- Membership Trainmasters, Mike Hirvela and Bert Lattan, noting division membership was down by three members from November of last year.



CNW's covered hopper fleet as it existed in the 1970's through the early 2000's. Presented by Dave Phillips.

After a break, the afternoon's speaker, Dave Phillips of the Chicago and Northwestern Ry. Historical Society, presented us with an interesting and thorough photographic look at the CNW's covered hopper fleet as it existed in the 1970's through the early 2000's. Being an Appalachian coal railroading fan, I thought I might be a little bored with this topic. Boy was I wrong! I found the clinic to be fascinating. Dave is a CNW historian, excellent modeler, and is employed as a professional railroader. His clinic was loaded with great prototypical and modeling information. It almost had me thinking of modeling a grainger road! Prolific area rail photographer, John Szwajkart, will be presenting December's clinic on the Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad. Note this is a change from his originally scheduled topic on railfanning the CB&Q in Brookfield, IL.

**Meeting contest winners next page.**

## November's contest

November's contest was another good one. Contest Trainmaster Jim Landwehr didn't know what to expect with the contest being "Large Structures", but we had seven strong entries. Art Jones' long, beautifully kitbashed and finished Bauer & Jones Mfg. took first place honors. Mike Motherway's expertly built and weathered Stubblefield Well & Pump Supply took second, and Jim Landwehr's "scratch bashed" UP Engine Repair facility took third. Great job winners and all entrants! Jim Osborn's photos of the winners appear in this Semaphore with all contest entry photos appearing on the FVD website. December's contest is "Open Loads" with a three car maximum. January's contest is your "Favorite Train Picture". Ed.

## Contest Winners



First place; Art Jones' HO scale Bauer & Jones Mfg.



3rd Place Jim Landwehr's HO Scale Engine Repair Facility



2nd Place Mike Motherway's HO Scale Stubblefield Well and Pump Supply



## Member News

- The NS&W modular layout guys were busy over the past six weeks displaying a nice large layout at Trainfest in November, and a smaller version of their layout at the Glenview Public Library in early December. They'll be at our High Wheeler train show March 9 and 10.
- FVD members who also worked Trainfest were the Northwest Trainmasters, Lake County Modular Railroad Club, Waukegan Modular Railroad Club, Midwest Rails, and Bluff City Modular Engineers modular layouts at Trainfest.
- New MMR, Don Cook, had one of his prototype CNW photos grace the cover of the CNW Historical Society's Fall 2012 issue.
- Right before Thanksgiving Harry Sorenson and Walt Herrick assisted in putting up the Sun City Huntley KV&EC Model Railroad Club's Holiday Display layout. The large display features N, HO, hi-rail O and G scale trains. It runs through December 28th and is open to the public 11 to 3 week days and 11 to 5 weekends at Sun City's Prairie View Lodge on Del Webb Blvd.
- The FVD's Sodor portable layout along with Thomas the Tank Engine and friends made an appearance at the Glenview Public Library December 8 and 9 thanks to Mike Hirvela.
- John Cloos's widow Debbie is looking for someone who might be interested in having one of John's O scale modules. For information call her at 630-432-0137.
- FVD members David Leider, MMR, and Jim Allen are both running for one of the several Director at Large positions in the 2013 Midwest Region elections going on now.

## Regional and National News

- Midwest Region Director at Large and FVD member, Dave Johnson, reports that in a member survey he took regarding a proposal to shorten the Midwest Region Spring Convention, respondents overwhelmingly did not want to shorten the convention. The shorter convention would have been run in one and a half days rather than the current

two and a half day format.

- The Winter Midwest Region Waybill newsletter has candidate bios and a ballot for 2013 Midwest Region elections. Your ballot must be mailed back by January 31, 2013. Please vote!
- NMRA Magazine Editor, Stephen Priest, MMR, reported in his December 2012 "Observation Car" column that there is soon going to be a new Master Model Railroader in his family. Son Joel is expected to have his MMR before his 13th birthday in January. Stephen points out in his column that 12 year old Joel has had some terrific advantages other modelers don't have, but that it still wasn't easy for Joel. There is a lot of work and excellent modeling to do. From Stephen's column, it sounds like the biggest advantage Joel has is his burning interest in modeling. Congratulations Joel, from the Fox Valley Division of the NMRA! We're sure your example will motivated many of us adults to get working on our MMRs!

## Modeling Tip

Have you ever used a pallet knife in your scenery work? A long bladed pallet knife is a particularly useful tool for many scenery tasks such as spreading plaster, Structolite, etc., carving or shaping wet plaster, ballasting, applying ground cover, and shaping roads and streets from wet plaster. Pallet knives are available where ever art supplies are sold and cost less than \$5.00. Below is the editor's trusty old pallet knife next to a typical hobby knife. WH





## High Wheeler Needs YOU!

High Wheeler 2013 is coming up March 9th and 10th and still needs volunteer workers. Contact Dave Johnson on line at [mjd@bds-soft.com](mailto:mjd@bds-soft.com) , or Jeff Jarr on line at [jjarr@comcast.net](mailto:jjarr@comcast.net) or by phone at 773-286-8755, to offer your services. Serving at High Wheeler is one of the best ways you can help the FVD and the hobby of model railroading. Thank you!

## Meeting Dates

Here's what's coming up in the next several months.

Date	Clinic	Contest	Other
December 16	John Szwajkart on the Indiana Harbor Belt R.R (Note change in topic.)	Open Loads. Three car maximum; same load in each car.	1:00 p.m. start with a pizza lunch being served!
January 20	George Woods on modular layouts.	Favorite Train Picture	Regular 1:30 pm start
February 17	TBD	Open Loads. Single load with 2-3 cars to transport.	Regular 1:30 pm start
March 9, 10	FVD's High Wheeler 2013 Train Show. No monthly meeting. Go to HW instead!		

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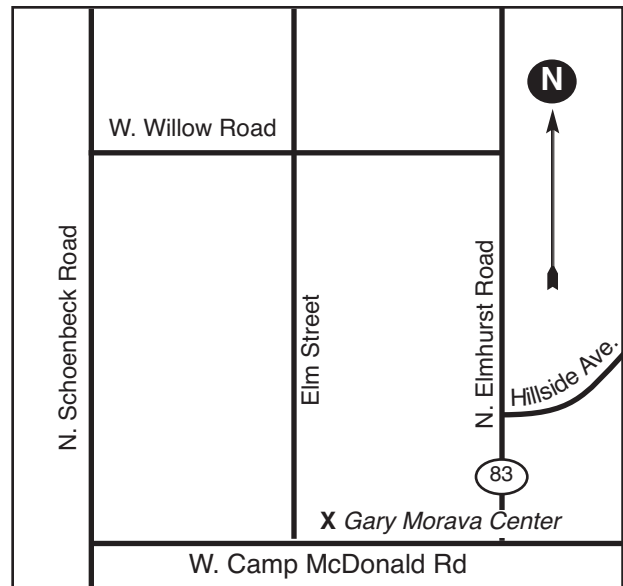
## About the Fox Valley Division

If you receive this newsletter you live in the Midwest Region and Fox Valley Division of the National Model Railroad Association or NMRA. The Fox Valley Division (FVD) includes McHenry and parts of Cook, Kane and Lake Counties in Northeast Illinois. About 240 members of varied ages and modeling ability levels belong to the FVD. Almost all modeling scales are represented in our division. Membership in the division is free as are the Semaphore newsletters.

FVD general meetings are held September through May at the Gary Morava Center in Prospect Heights from 1:30 to about 4:30 pm. Each meeting features a clinic, model contest, information of interest to the membership, and a time for socializing. Outings, layout tours, and operating sessions are also held periodically in addition to, or instead of the general meetings. To promote the hobby of model railroading, the FVD sponsors and runs a large train show called "High Wheeler" in early March each year at Harper College in Palatine, Illinois.

We encourage you to take advantage of all the FVD has to offer. We are here to help answer your questions, help improve your modeling, and help you better enjoy the great hobby of model railroading. Join us at a FVD meeting or outing. We'd love to see you. Or, visit us on the web at: [www.foxvalleydivision.org](http://www.foxvalleydivision.org).

**Questions? Contact FVD Superintendent, Jeff Jarr or any board member listed on the "FVD board section of this newsletter. We are here to help you!**



## Next Meeting

The Fox Valley Division will hold their **meeting on December 16, 2012.**

Note: 1:00 pm start time to 4:30 pm, at the Gary Morava Center, 110 W. Camp MacDonald Road, Prospect Heights, IL.



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