



# THE SEMAPHORE

January 2018

FOX VALLEY DIVISION • MIDWEST REGION



## Mike Ristchdorff's N&W article and photos by Walt Herrick

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Pages  
1-3 Mike Ritschdorff's N&W  
Page 1 Fun Stuff  
Page 4 Mike's Minute  
Page 4 Capital 400 MWR  
Convention  
Page 5 December's Clinic &  
Contest  
Page 6 Member News  
Page 6 Meeting Schedule  
Page 7 Basic FVD info  
Page 7 FVD Board members

Semaphore Editor:  
Walt Herrick, Jr.

**Next FVD Meeting:**  
**Sunday, January 21**  
**1:30 pm at the**  
**Morava Rec Center in**  
**Prospect Heights**

**Contest: Large Structure—5000 scale feet or more**

**Clinic: "More Electronics for Model Railroading" by George K.**



We start off the new year by featuring one of Chicagoland's most well known model railroads, **Mike Ritschdorff's** basement size, HO scale, **Pocahontas Division of the Norfolk & Western Railway**. Above we see what you rarely see on a model railroad: the N&W's massive steam turbine locomotive, the **Jawn Henry** in action. Here **Big Jawn** is crossing "Railfan's Trestle" deep in the coal fields of West Virginia. *con't on p.2*

## Fun Stuff by Jim Allen

This month's photo shows the lengths to which one rail fan went to bring real railroading into his basement. He built his house over an abandoned railroad right-of-way and then preserved the track structure by building a trench filled with clear resin over it! Concrete slabs were formed on either side of the ties to make walls for the trench. Then many layers of clear resin were poured into the trench over the ballast, ties and rails. Each layer of resin had to dry thoroughly before the next layer was applied. Once the resin reached a level very slightly above the level of the concrete floor, its surfaced was polished to exactly match the same height as the surrounding floor. Pretty wild, huh?! Walt Herrick for Jim Allen.



## Layout of the Month: Mike Ritschdorff's N&W con't

Step down into Mike Ritschdorff's basement and you are transported to Appalachia in the fall of 1958 on the Pocohantas Division of the N&W Railway in HO scale. Mike's layout features big time railroading with big locomotives pulling long trains that serve big industries. Articulated steam locomotives in several classes are seen on main line trains, switching coal marshalling yards and switching coal tipples as mine "shifters". Tree covered mountain scenery reaches to the basement's ceiling and huge industries are located along the "Pokey" Division's right-of-way. Most of these industries are closely tied to the region's primary industry: coal mining. The biggest of Mike's industries is the Sieben's Brewery complex which takes up a huge chunk of the real estate on the railroad and has its own six track, 16 foot long yard. Trains are dispatched by tower operators using telephones in key locations throughout the basement. Car cards forward rolling stock to on and off layout locations.

Mike designed and built most of his railroad but had help with scenery and structures. He credits John Kaspar and Paul Hellerman with creating almost all of the scenery and many of the larger structures on the layout. The pair made extensive use of "puff ball" trees and Mountains in Minutes "Flex Rock" flexible rock castings (no longer available) to create the mountains of West Virginia in the Ritschdorff basement. Mike is a big fan of the late Don Cook MMR's work, and was happy to be able to purchase many of his layout's structures after his passing in 2016. They are seen in several locations on the layout.

One of Mike's passions in the hobby *con't on p.3*



An N&W Y3a articulated holds for an N&W color position signal at the town of Oceana (top photo). The town features several Don Cook, MMR structures. A little further east, a Y6 articulated switches hoppers at the Oceana loader (center photo). A set of Virginian ELB electrics sit next to the coal marshalling yard at Kopperstown. (bottom photo). Note the lighted caboose markers.



## Layout of the Month: Mike Ritschdorff's N&W con't

is large industries. Besides the Sieben's Brewery, there are several others on the layout including Hellerman's Tractors which stretches 12 feet along one wall, the large Ironton pig iron plant, and a large coal slurry breakdown plant. Something the Ritschdorff layout is known for is its coal mining operations using "real" (plastic particle) coal loaded into hoppers from two locations and dumped into dumpers at Norfolk, VA. Mike is also known for running 80 loaded hopper car trains during his op sessions!

Mike says his goal was to "capture the essence of the N&W's Pokey Division in West Virginia and its big coal and coal related industries." I'd say he's succeeded admirably in his quest.



Above right is the Kopperstown #1 Mine which loads actual "coal" into empty hoppers. Above Mike Ritschdorff stands next to a small part of the huge Sieben's Brewery complex. Directly above is a large coal slurry break down plant.

### Basic Layout Information

Layout Name:	N&W Ry., Pocahontas Div.
Layout Builder:	Mike Ritschdorff
Layout Location:	Mike's basement
Layout Scale:	HO
Layout Size:	25 x 41 feet
Layout Style:	Double deck, around the walls with peninsulas
Layout Theme:	West Virginia coal & heavy industry operations
Layout Era:	Late 1950s
Construction Started:	1985
Bench work:	1x4 open grid
Sub road bed/roadbed:	3/4 inch plywood (track laid directly on the plywood)
Track:	Atlas code 100 flex track with Peco turnouts
Minimum Radius:	36" radius throughout
Scenery:	Puff balls over chicken wire; flex rock outcroppings, ground foam
Structures:	Kits, kit-bashed, scratch built with many Don Cook blgs.
Locomotives:	BLI, Atlas, Life Like, etc. representing N&W locos
Rolling Stock:	Commercial, RTR and kits
Control:	Lenz DCC with CVP radio throttles
Operations:	Car cards; dispatched by tower using telephones
Hobby Heroes:	Alan McClelland, Bruce Chubb
Favorites Aspects of Hobby:	Operations; developing operating systems for model railroads; coal railroading & heavy West Virginian industrial operations

## Layout of the Month: Mike Ritschdorff's N&W con't



Above left is a part of the Ironton pig iron plant. The Baldwin S12 is the primary plant switcher with the yellow 45 tonner assisting as needed. Appalachian scenery on the Pokey Division (above right) is accomplished using tried and true "puff balls" to model the tree canopy and lots of "Flex Rock" painted shades of grey and tan for rock outcroppings.

### Mike's Minute by Mike Hirvela

#### A Very Happy New Model Railroading Year to all!

It has been my pleasure to serve as your Superintendent for the past calendar year and I look forward to 2018 and all the good things that it may bring. A new year traditionally brings with it folks making resolutions for the year. It is fitting, on the turn of the year, that we reflect on the past year and resolve to do something positive in the new one. By definition, a resolution is: a statement of intent, decision, aim, plan, commitment, pledge or promise. Making resolutions is the easy part. *Keeping them* -- that's a little more difficult. Seeing that model railroading for most of us is a leisure-time hobby, which shares time with other interests, making BIG resolutions about making BIG progress on our layouts might be too unrealistic. However, like the old Chinese proverb about a long journey beginning with a small step, we can break down BIG resolutions into manageable smaller tasks which we can achieve.

For me, this became all too apparent when I brought a box of "modern" freight cars to run at Train Fest, and some of the cars derailed or didn't stay coupled going around our modular layout. This was very frustrating as I had gone through each car before it was placed into storage some years back and had checked each wheel gauge, "squareness" of the wheels on the axles, coupler height, coupler lube, truck screw tightness, etc. In spite of these precautions, some cars were just not cooperating. So, they went back into the storage box and after returning home, back on to storage shelves. As a result, my first resolution for the new year is to take the cars out of storage and re-check each and every one of them. A second resolution is to put the cars on my layout and re-check them there by running them in trains. A third resolution is to check and fix as needed, *all* the cars on my layout. That'll probably take the remainder of the winter and then some, step-by-small step. What are your resolutions? Big or small, making them will help you improve (build?) your layout (or perhaps an un-built kit or two) especially if you write them down and check them periodically.

I hope to see *you* at a FVD meeting this year, and I hope you bring a friend. Which reminds me, at the Train Show at the Lake County Fairgrounds, we met a gentleman who said while he can do scenery well, but electricity and wiring are a challenge. He recently picked up an NCE DCC system, but has no clue how to install it on his conventionally wired, block system, DC layout. He plans to be at the January meeting to get some suggestions. "Helping" is what NMRA model railroaders do for others. See ya at the next FVD meeting?!

## December's Clinic and Contest Photos by Walt Herrick

### December's Clinic

December's clinic, "**Ramblings of an Old Railroader**" was presented by **Fred Henize** from the DuPage Division. Now retired, Fred spent several years working as a conductor for CSX. His clinic focused on the time he spent on the CSX's "New Rock Sub" from Barr Yard in Chicago to Ottawa, Illinois. When Fred worked on the New Rock line there were about a dozen different industries in and around Ottawa including those shipping silica sand, plastics, chemicals, cardboard boxes and lumber. His clinic was packed with interesting stories and lots of ideas to apply to model railroading from obvious ones like adding garbage around industrial and yard tracks, to more obscure ones like adding a mail box for way bills on chain link gates that guard spurs to industries. Our thanks to Fred for an informative and very interesting clinic! In January the Fox Valley Division's **George K.** is the clinician and his topic will be "**More Electronics for Model Railroading**". See you then! WH



### December's Contest

"**Hopper Train—4 cars max**" was December's contest and it was a popular one drawing eleven interesting and varied entries. Among the entries were George K.'s European hoppers in TT scale, Kurt Vragle's HO 100 ton Burlington hoppers with beet loads, and Tim Kleimeyer's HO cement hoppers weathered with real cement. See these on the FVD web site:

[www.foxvalleydivision.org](http://www.foxvalleydivision.org).

**Jeff Jarr took First Place** in the contest with his beautifully weathered CNW yellow grain hoppers (top right photo). Jeff followed instructions in an article he read to do a great job weathering his Athearn "blue box" cars with oil paints and chalks.

**Walt Herrick took Second Place** with four Western Maryland 55 ton coal hoppers (middle right photo). Walt used "a little bit of every kind of weathering technique" and blended them all with Pan Pastels to model his Stewart (now Bowser) cars. **Mike Wood** also used Athearn "blue box" cars in his **Third Place** entry (bottom right photo). Mike used chalks to add some very nice subtle and realistic weathering to his mixed road/owner grain cars. **January's contest is "Large Structure—5000 scale square feet or more"**. WH



## Member News

The Fox Valley Division's Superintendent, Mike Hirvela and Public Relations Trainmaster Chuck Rita have been doing a great job manning the division's NMRA Promotions Booth at both the "Wheaton" and Grays Lake Train Shows the past few months. Thanks to both of these dedicated workers for getting the word out to train show attendees about model railroading and the NMRA....Members are encouraged to vote in the Midwest Region's elections for four Director-At-Large positions. A ballot appeared in the Winter 2017 Midwest Region *Waybill* newsletter, and was also mailed to members in December. Ballots need to be returned to Election Committee member, Jim Osborn, at the address specified on the ballot by January 31, 2018. WH

## 2017 - 2018 Fox Valley Division Meeting Schedule

All meetings are held from 1:30 to about 3:30 pm at the Gary Morava Recreation Center, 110 W. Camp McDonald Road, Prospect Heights, IL 60070. Visitors are always welcome per the NMRA's visitor policy. Note that clinics are subject to change without notice. For the latest clinic and all FVD news and information, visit our web site at [www.foxvalleydivision.org](http://www.foxvalleydivision.org).

<u>Date</u>	<u>Clinic</u>	<u>Contest</u>	<u>Other</u>
Jan. 21, 2018	"More Electronics for Model Railroading" George K.	Large Structure—5000 scale square feet or larger	
Feb.18, 2018	"Mid 20th Century Box Cars by George Trandel	Gondola with load—4 cars max	
March 18, 2018	"Using Ground Goop for Scenery" by Art Jones	Diorama with On Line Structure	
<b>April 13–15, 2018</b>	<b>2018 Midwest Region Convention "Capital 400" hosted by the South Central Wisconsin Division at the Radisson Hotel in Madison, WI. More information at the division's web site: <a href="http://nmra.scwd.org">nmra.scwd.org</a></b>		
April 22, 2018	"Two Rivers Wisconsin 20 Years Later" by Mike Hirvela	Maintenance of Way Train	
May 20, 2018	"Building My Great Midwestern Layout" by Pete Walton	Illuminated Structure—any size	<b>Last monthly meeting for 2017 – 2018</b>
<b>August 5–12, 2018</b>	<b>2018 NMRA National Convention in Kansas City, Missouri. See the convention's web site for more information: <a href="http://www.kc2018.org">www.kc2018.org</a></b>		

### "Capital 400" to host special O. Winston Link Clinic

The "Capital 400" MWR Convention in Madison will offer an opportunity not available to any model railroad group previously. Tom Garver, an assistant to renowned photographer O. Winston Link, will present a program on Link's famous night photos of the N&W railroad. Tom will share stories of how those and other Link photos were created. Full information on all of the convention's many activities including 20 layout tours, four op sessions and numerous clinics is available on the South Central Wisconsin Division website at [nmra-scwd.org](http://nmra-scwd.org). Please join us for "Capital 400" in Madison April 13—15. You'll be glad you did!





### About the Fox Valley Division

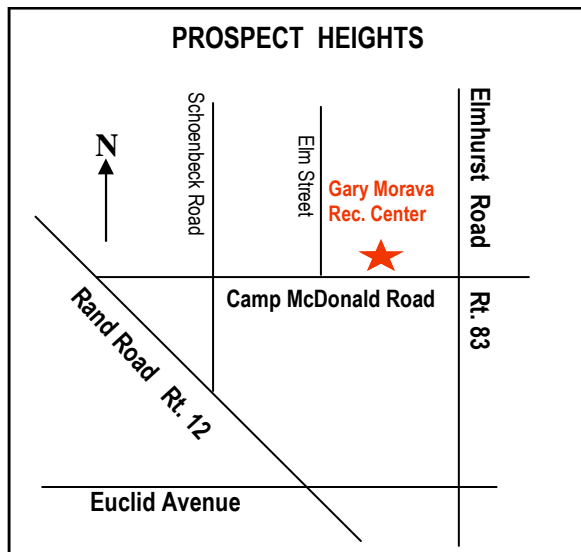
If you receive this newsletter you live in the Midwest Region and Fox Valley Division of the National Model Railroad Association or NMRA. The Fox Valley Division (FVD) includes all of Lake and McHenry, and parts of Cook and Kane Counties in northeast Illinois. About 210 members of varied ages and modeling 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 monthly meetings are held September through May at the Gary Morava Recreation Center in Prospect Heights from 1:30 to about 4:00 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 monthly meetings. To promote the hobby of model railroading, the FVD sponsors and runs the 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 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 and bring a friend. We'd love to see you. Also visit us on the web at:

[www.foxvalleydivision.org](http://www.foxvalleydivision.org).

Questions? Contact FVD Superintendent, Mike Hirvela, or any FVD Board member listed below. We are here to help!



- The FVD's monthly meeting is at the :  
**Gary Morava Recreation Center**  
110 Camp McDonald Road  
Prospect Heights, IL. 60070
- Our regular meeting time is:  
1:30 to about 3:30 p.m.
- 2015 – 2016 meeting dates, contest and clinic info are on page 6 of this newsletter.

FVD web site: [www.foxvalleydivision.org](http://www.foxvalleydivision.org)

FVD mailing address: Fox Valley Division  
Midwest Region-NMRA  
P.O. Box 1535  
Arlington Heights, IL  
60005-1535

## Fox Valley Division Board Contact Information

Superintendent, **Mike Hirvela**  
[mhirvela1@gmail.com](mailto:mhirvela1@gmail.com) 847-360-9579

Ass't Superintendent, **Bob Shlemon, Jr.**  
[shlemonjr@gmail.com](mailto:shlemonjr@gmail.com) 773-334-4208

Chief Clerk, **George Trandel**  
[georgetrandel@rcn.com](mailto:georgetrandel@rcn.com) 773-975-7366

Paymaster, **Tim Kleimeyer**  
[kleimeyert@comcast.net](mailto:kleimeyert@comcast.net) 847-426-4732

Achievements & Contests TM, **Jim Landwehr**  
[Jlandwehr901@yahoo.com](mailto:Jlandwehr901@yahoo.com) 847-577-7984

Clinics & Programs TM, **David Leider, MMR**  
[sooauthor@netzero.net](mailto:sooauthor@netzero.net) 847-253-7484

Membership Promotions TM, **Mike Hirvela**  
[mhirvela1@gmail.com](mailto:mhirvela1@gmail.com) 847-360-9579

Membership Services TM, **Bert Lattan**  
[nswnmra@comcast.net](mailto:nswnmra@comcast.net) 847-295-7959

Public Relations TM, **Chuck Rita**  
[carita@ameritech.net](mailto:carita@ameritech.net) 630-222-9933

Web Technologies TM, **Jim Osborn**  
[FVDWebsite@comcast.net](mailto:FVDWebsite@comcast.net) 815-578-8315

Publications TM/Semaphore Editor, **Walt Herrick**  
[waltherrickjr@gmail.com](mailto:waltherrickjr@gmail.com) 815-355-2003

Ways & Means TM—open

Note: TM designates "Trainmaster"