

BUILDER'S PLATE

March 2023

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Newsletter of Division 12, Mid Central Region, NMRA, Inc.

Superintendent's Letter

Building a railroad of any size requires a certain amount of "stuff". There's always a spare bit of lumber, roadbed, track, wire, and other infrastructure supplies stored here and there under or near our layouts, which can often come in handy when the railroad needs to be altered or repaired.

There's another sort of "stuff" that gathers, though, that can sometimes get out of control. I'm referring to the too-numerous locomotives, unbuilt kits, detail parts, and other things that we purchase, store away "for someday", and which never (or rarely) see the light of day again. I am as guilty of this as anyone, buying some things that, in my mind might make good projects, but are instead relegated to a form of oblivion under the layout.

I was reminded of this phenomenon this past fall, when I participated in a couple of estate sales of model railroaders who had accumulated basements full of stuff, and yet who had never built a railroad to any stage of operability. It was both sad and sobering to go through a fellow model railroaders' accumulated equipment and supplies; sad, because of the unrealized potential; and sobering, because I was forced to confront my own weakness for accumulating "stuff" that might never get used or built.

Admittedly, it takes a certain amount of discipline to forgo the latest shiny "thing", but maybe some small steps can make it easier. Perhaps your modeling focus can be narrowed: instead of "the transition era" narrow your focus to one railroad, region, and/or timeframe, i.e., "a Lehigh Valley branchline in summer 1952". If something doesn't fit those criteria, don't buy it! Or, before buying yet one more kit, build one out of your stash and put it on the layout first. The ultimate first step, though, is to recognize there is a problem!

I'll finish with this note I found enclosed in a kit I purchased from Ebay some time ago: "Hope you have many hours of enjoyment with this train car, engine, or caboos. Just so you know, it is a part of my late husband's collection of over 70-plus years! Unfortunately, he was unable to build his layout as his health prevented it in his later years. So, enjoy it now and don't wait until it's too late. (signed) Grace K."

I really should build that kit...

Mike Hauk
Superintendent, Division 12, MCR



Division 12, MCR, NMRA, Inc.
The Alleghany Western Division:
Expanding your model railroading horizons

Please visit our website: www.div12mcr.org

Or  [NMRAAlleghanyWesternDivision](https://www.facebook.com/NMRAAlleghanyWesternDivision)

Meetings

As face-to-face membership meetings return, they typically include announcements and limited business; “Modeling Question” and “What’s On Your Workbench” during which members share what they have been working on; and educational model railroad related programs, presentations, or clinics.

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Next Membership Event:

Virtual Division Meeting via Zoom: Saturday, March 11th, 2023, at 10 AM. Program: Bruce DeMaeyer of T-TRAK fame and Division 10 MCR. “**Building a Mountain Fire Station**”. Zoom link will be sent out to members prior to the meeting.

Division 12 Upcoming Events

March 2023: **See above.**

April 2023: Saturday, April 8th, 2023. **Possible hybrid in-person and remote meeting** at the restored B&LE Meadville, PA depot, home of the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society. Program TBA

May 2023: **TBA**

Upcoming Meeting Programs

To ensure that the membership meetings are of value, please let the leadership know what you would like to see in upcoming meetings by communicating directly with officers or board members.

Upcoming Model Railroad Events

March 2023: **Erie Train Show**, Sunday March 5th, 2023, 10 AM-4 PM at Rainbow Gardens, Waldameer Park, 200 Peninsula Drive, Millcreek, PA.

March 2023: **29th Annual Midwest Narrow Gauge Show**, Thurs-Sat., March 16-18, 2023, 7600 W. South Range Rd. (State Route 165), Salem, OH 44160. (See attached flyer.)

March 2023: **Railfest 2023**, presented by Division 5, MCR. Saturday and Sunday, March 18-19, 2023, 10 am to 4 pm. Lakeland Community College, 7700 Clocktower Dr., Kirtland, Ohio 44094. www.railfest.org. (see attached flyer)

March 2023: **RPM East**, Friday and Saturday, March 24th and 25th, 2023. Westmoreland County Community College Student Achievement Center, 145 Pavilion Lane, Youngwood, PA 15697. [RPM-EAST: The 2023 Railroad Prototype Modeler Seminar \(hansmanns.org\)](http://hansmanns.org)

March 2023: **The Great Batavia Train Sale**, Sunday March 26, 2023. Genesee Community College Richard C. Call Arena. 9:30 AM to 3:30 PM. <http://www.gsme.org/>. (See attached flyer)

April 2023: Youngstown Model Railroad Association **Model Railroad and Toy Train Flea Market**, Sunday, April 2nd, 2023, 10 AM-3:30 PM, Salem Centerplex, 1098 N. Ellsworth Ave. Salem, Ohio 44460. (See attached flyer)

May 2023: **Rails to Pittsburgh**, 2023 Mid Central Region NMRA regional convention. May 4th-7th 2023. www.keystonedivision.org. (See attached flyer.)

October 2023: **Round the Curve to Altoona 2023**. NMRA Mid-Eastern Region Convention, October 19-22, 2023. Altoona Grand Hotel 1 Sheraton Drive Altoona, Pennsylvania 16601. [Round the Curve to Altoona 2023 \(mer2023.org\)](http://RoundtheCurve.toAltoona.2023.mer2023.org)

Division 2 Call for Volunteers

Dennis Coglianesse, Division 2 Superintendent, is asking for volunteers to help with the **Rails to Pittsburgh** 2023 MCR convention May 4th -7th. Volunteering is a great way to support fellow model railroaders in a neighboring division, while meeting new people and enjoying a great convention!

The following volunteers are needed:

Convention Volunteers:

No experience is necessary, but there are plenty of members throughout the region who have assisted in past conventions. We'll need help in the Vendor Room, White Elephant Room, Attendee Assistance, and Registration. Send an e-mail to volunteer@RailsToPittsburgh.com.

Model Contest Volunteers:

Judges: We need members that have served as a judge in at least one NMRA sponsored Model Contest.

Clerical Staff: We need members to help check in models and complete the required paperwork.

Contest Room Security: We also members to help visitors secure any packages they are carrying before viewing the models as well as ensure that the models are not damaged.

Send an e-mail to Contest@RailsToPittsburgh.com

Open Crew Call-Ohio Northern Railroad

The 3rd Saturday of every month the Ohio Northern HO scale model railroad located in Hamden, OH has an open operating session from 7PM to 10PM. This is a classic DC layout. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own locomotives to run on the layout.

The railroad has a lengthy double track mainline with 8 industrial switching areas off the mainline.

This is an easy way to get hours for your Chief Dispatcher AP certificate.

For more information and address please contact Brad White at valleyln55@gmail.com or phone 814-490-7798.



NMRA Interchange Now Open

Many Division 12 members have already joined the new online NMRA Interchange.

The NMRA Interchange is a new place online to ask questions, provide answers, post events, share ideas and make friends.

It is implemented as a Discord server and contains categories for welcoming members, a help area, the NMRA worldwide community, the NMRA Board of Directors, each of the Departments, the Achievement Program, Special Interest Groups, the basics (of modeling), the prototype (railroads), general interest groups and then each of the 17 regions. Discord also provides, free of charge, the ability to have online meetings with up to 100 people in a "room", sharing screens and up to 25 people showing their camera feeds.

The Interchange is a free benefit of NMRA membership, so click the banner below to sign up, log in, and join in today!



Announcing the NMRA Interchange.
An exclusive NMRA Discord server for talking trains. Click to begin.

 
Text - Voice - Video

The banner features a blue background with white text. On the right side, there are two speech bubble icons. The first contains a train emoji, and the second contains a red heart emoji. Below these icons are two Discord logos, one on each side, with the text "Text - Voice - Video" centered between them.

New Product Announcement from J.L. Innovative Design/Costello Manufacturing

Costello Manufacturing is pleased to announce that we have been working with a manufacturer to create molds for our Riveted Dunmore caboose in HO Scale and are now taking conditional pre-orders.

The final details of the model are being worked out still, but if we get enough orders to make it viable, we expect it within the next 12-18 months. We plan to offer 3 numbers in the following schemes: Erie EL spartan red; EL maroon/grey Conrail (Blue or patched EL Depending on road number); and Conrail MOW Grey We are also considering the 2 numbers in WAG.

The attached pictures show the 3D printed prototype. We are still working out the final details but the models will be injection molded and feature appropriate end rails, trucks and roof walks based on the road all ready to run. At this time, we do not have a solid price, but we are looking for enough orders to get it at least down to \$100 per model. Assuming this project is successful, we will offer the welded versions.





To place a pre order, please email preorder@costellomfg.com with your name, address, telephone number, and how many of each version you would be interested in. We will contact you upon arrival for payment. We look forward to the arrival of this model.

Making Trees for Your Railroad

Editors' note: This is the second in a series of articles the Builders Plate will run that feature articles by members of Division 12 on how they went about making different kinds of trees. The making of realistic trees can be somewhat intimidating and frustrating at first. But there are lots of ways to create convincing trees -- for foreground, middle ground, or background.

We began the series last month with Dave Ellis discussing making conifers out of furnace filters. This month Ed Cronin, Mike Hauk, and Dick Bradley will show how they make stand-alone puffball trees, and hillside and background puffball forests for their model railroads.

Puffball Trees - 1

Text and photo by Ed Cronin

My introduction to the puffball concept: The first NMRA National Convention I attended was in Kansas City in 1984. It blew me away! There was so much to see and so much to learn that I realized I knew very little about the hobby. Subsequently, I attended a scenery clinic which discussed using green poly fiber to represent forest trees.

In 1990 the National Convention was in Pittsburgh. My favorite layout tour was at the home of the late Don Cassler. I think he mastered poly fiber and ground foam ground cover. Check out images of his work and layout on Google.

Products needed to make my puffball forests:

- Green poly fiber (or white or black fiberfill)
- Clear spray glue or unscented hair spray
- Coarse Woodland Scenics ground foams of various shades and colors
- Any kind of inexpensive dark caulk (not white)

One technique:

- Begin with a small piece of green poly fiber, tease it apart and form into a ball about 50% larger than a golf ball.
- Hold the ball with long tweezers and spray it thoroughly with with clear spray glue. You can also use unscented hair spray.
- Immediately, drop it into a container full of coarse Woodland Scenics ground foam (1 part light green, 2 parts medium green and 3 parts light green). Shake the excess back into the container and place the puffball on newspaper to dry.
- Repeat for as many puffballs as desired. Once dry the balls can be attached to a base using inexpensive dark caulk.

A second technique:

- Take either white or black fiberfill (much less expensive than Poly Fiber).
- Form into balls as described above. Do as many as needed. You will need a lot for a forest background.
- With a dark caulk, glue the balls to a piece of plywood or panelling that you will later attach vertically at the back of the scene to provide the illusion of distant forests.
- Once dry, spray the entire section with spray glue and shake on the ground foam mix as described above.
- Additional color variation can be had by stuffing pinches of other colors of ground foam between some of the already mounted balls.

A final technique:

- Shake a VERY, VERY FINE coat of Woodland Scenics yellow grass over the finished product to suggest reflecting sunlight.
- Open the Woodland Scenics plastic container that has several holes and hold the container so that the grass falls out and over the cover and then onto your project. This is counter-intuitive to what you would expect to do but it produces a much finer application.

Explore You Tube for tutorial videos on making these trees. Search these two names for a start -- Ron's Trains n Things and Steve Brown IMRR. Plus, there are many many others.



Puffball Trees – 2

Text and Photos by Mike Hawk

My technique for puffball trees is messy but is tailored for mass production. I use the black poly fiber from Micromark. ([Black Poly Fiber, 12 oz \(micromark.com\)](http://micromark.com)) I prefer the black over the green as I feel the black provides more of a shadowy contrast with the green ground foam.

I pull random sized “globs” of poly fiber out of the bag and roll them quickly in my hands to get a rough ball shape anywhere from golf ball to plum-sized. This is a tedious process, and I’ll do it while on a long car trip (with my wife driving!) or watching TV. Toss the ball into a garbage bag and repeat *ad nauseum*. I like to half-fill a 10-gallon bag to have enough to make a decent-sized batch and justify the mess. About 1 hour of pulling poly fiber makes enough balls to cover a 2-square-foot area, roughly.

I use the fine ground foam from Scenic Express in the bulk 64 oz. jugs in Spring Green and Medium/Grass Green. ([Flock & Turf-Scenic Express \(sceneryexpress.com\)](http://sceneryexpress.com)). This adds just enough color variation without making a hillside look spotted or polka dotted.



I spread out a couple of large painters' drop cloths on the floor, and tape together baking parchment paper to cover a 3x3 or 3x4 foot area on top of the drop cloths. I lay out enough drop cloths and parchment paper to do a batch of each color at once. Then, spread out the pulled fiber balls on the parchment paper. They should be lightly touching, but not on top of each other.

Then using a spray-mister, lightly dampen the balls with isopropyl alcohol. This breaks the surface tension and will allow the dilute glue in the next step to soak the poly fiber. Next, mist the balls with a 3:1 solution of dilute white glue (one part glue to three parts water with just a drop of dish detergent mixed in). Keep misting until the balls are soaked. Then use a tea strainer to cover the balls with ground foam of one OR the other color. (Don't mix the colors.) Roll them over and repeat the process. Might have to repeat a couple of times to get the balls covered well. Let dry.

(Don't let the glue harden in the mister when you're done. Clean it with warm soapy water. I also spray a couple of ounces of white vinegar through the mister to clean it thoroughly.)



Once dry, the balls should peel off the parchment paper fairly easily. I store each color separately in a box until I need them. The “scrap” ground foam can be peeled off the parchment paper, crumbled up, and be saved to use as ground cover.





My plaster gauze hillsides are painted flat black for a shadow effect. To apply the puffball trees, I paint the hillside with undiluted white glue, and stick the trees directly to the hillside. I'll place t-pins here and there as needed to keep everything in place until the glue dries. The trees will shed a little gound foam when handling them, and if there are any obvious gaps in coverage once the hillside is complete, I'll spray some unscented hairspray at that spot and blow in a little more loose foam to cover. I'll give the entire hillside a final heavy coat of hairspray to fix everything in place.

And that's it! Messy, but simple!

Puffball Trees - 3

Text and Photo by Dick Bradley, MMR

I use several types of trees on my model railroad. For me trees are merely another part of the scenery. They should enhance the trains, not detract from them. Trees should be attention getters - neither unbelievable nor super detailed.

My background trees are puffballs. I use the black poly fiber batting from MicroMark (#84907) as the puff. There's enough in a sack for my lifetime. A handle works for handling the puff. Tiny puffs get stabbed with a round toothpick. Bigger puffs get a short wood skewer.

I paint the handle a dark gray/brown if it is to show as a tree trunk. For a permanent handle apply glue before inserting it into the puff. Elmers white or Walthers Goo will work. Adhere the ground foam as leaves with Aqua Net Super Heavy Hold Unscented hair spray.

For denser trees apply several layers of ground foam. The ground foam can be tinted with light passes of spray paint. Rattle can spraying works okay for general coverage. But an air brush can give finer shadings. The wood handle can be used for planting or it can be snipped off for direct gluing.

There are two big advantages to puffball trees. (1) Making them needs a minimum of thought and (2) they have very low cost.



“Until next time, keep ‘em polished!”

The *Builder's Plate* © 2021 is a publication of Division 12, Mid Central Region, NMRA. All opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Division 12, the MCR, or the NMRA.

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