

We need to refocus ourselves.

by Ernie Poole

We must consider and take action on some new ideas. I think the last Greenberg show pointed out rather clearly what we have known for a couple of years now. This club is on auto-pilot, doing nothing new, and waiting for someone else to fix what's broken.

We have had very few new modules over the last several years, and an increasing number of members without a module. I think the danger here is that many of those newer folks seem to have no real plan to put a module together. I see no reason why a decreasing number of active module owners / displayers should be expected to provide a railroad for everyone else to use. I am sensitive to the 2 or 3 non-owners who attend regularly, help without being asked, and make themselves very useful members. I think we can work this out. These folks could be assigned to handle the bridge modules, the club boxes, etc. This club is a **MODULAR MODEL RAILROAD** club, and I feel that we need to refocus on that fact.

That said, a small group of active members met informally on December 9 to trade ideas on how best to proceed. It was a very interactive meeting and I will let our secretary comment on the results of the brainstorming session.

The following is a collection of thoughts and ideas some are my own, and some are not. All came from active Northeast N-Trak members. This list was the basis of our discussion:

1. We need to make up some module kits for members who cannot do it for themselves. This should get a few folks out of neutral and get going.
2. We should hold a series of club meetings where we invite particular modules (3 at a time?) with the

purpose of improving the overall display. We could make those repairs that just do not seem to get done, such as, end of track to end of module, frame and sky board colors, wiring and color coding, etc. Do we have an N-Trak standard or Northeast standard for frame color? (black seems to be it.) This would also be a good time to apply the "dreaded" wiring checker. All club modules would be cycled through the clinic to promote, within reason, an organized club "look".

3. We need to find a way to get our "Junk" out of sight during the show. Maybe a skirt on the back of the modules, as well as the front. The show coordinator could be charged with monitoring the "look" of the layout.
4. We should build 2 bridge modules that are "presentable". They should be easy to carry and install, meet all module standards, be as easy as possible to duck under, and not detract from the overall appearance of the layout. With our Logo on the side!
5. I need to do something with the back of the yard modules. Maybe a low sky board?
6. The club would benefit if members were required to have a module of their own after some specified time with the group. (2 years?) This should be a liberal period, but would stress the goal of putting a quality display in front of the public, without anyone being overly burdened!
7. I think members should be expected to participate with their modules in a minimum number of shows each year. (3 years?)
8. We should put together two end loop

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Springfield Show

by Frank Dignan

Our next show is the Amherst Railway Society Show, on Saturday and Sunday, February 5-6, from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM; see enclosed flier. Follow the signs to the Eastern States Exposition off the Mass Pike. Setup is Saturday morning, starting at 7:30 AM, at the Better Living Center on the Eastern States Exposition grounds on Memorial Avenue (Rt. 147) in West Springfield. For people who have a long distance to travel, the facility will also be open on Friday evening to unload. I am your coordinator and can be reached at (617-294-8606) if you wish to bring modules. We expect to join up with small groups from Valley NTrak, Long Island NTrak and Northern New Jersey NTrak to form yet another "Giant N-TRACK system."

We have worked out a deal to use a function room for Saturday evening at the local (just north on Rt. 5) Howard Johnsons Motor Lodge (413-739-7261), but we need 8-10 rooms reserved to get the function room. When you call, make sure to mention our club name, "Northeast NTrak" with your reservation. Rates, per night, which include a full breakfast are \$44 - one bed, one adult; \$49 - one bed, two adults; \$52 - two beds, two adults. We have 12 rooms blocked out, so there should not be any problems getting a room, just be sure to mention "Northeast NTrak."

The Saturday night entertainment will include slide shows, videos, and lots of shop talk. We will also have snacks, a variety of sodas and of course, the main event, Red Rose PIZZA. As in past years the cost of this feast will be divided evenly amongst the participants. You should plan to be there!

Why No Winners?

by Bob Gatland

Long Island NTRAK has more than 60 members and over 150 feet of modules in active service. How come we have come up with so few award winning modules over the years?

If my memory serves me correctly, Dale Bennett's modeling of an Ohio farm scene on his module has received the most honors. It placed third in a show in Philadelphia quite a few years ago. There had to be over 100 modules from the east coast states in this show which made the competition stiff. Dale's module has weathered the years well and is always an attention getter at our shows.

Several years ago we participated in the first of the record breaking layouts. This one was in Syracuse, New York. Once again, we didn't have any winners. Yet, we were honored in a way when *Model Railroader* used Arthur Papayanopulos's and Dale Bennett's modules as backgrounds for trains they posed there. Two of the trains belonged to our members, Dave McConnell and Bill Bantel. Arthur's and Dale's modules certainly provided attractive settings for the trains.

More recently, Charlie Dauser has received local first place awards for his well executed scenes of "Autumn in New York." He has received many compliments from his fellow members. But, at Valley Forge, Charlie was not among those chosen for honors.

There certainly isn't any lack of talent in our club. I'm almost always proud of each and every one of the modules we set up at shows. For the most part they are fully sceniced. The trains also run well. Yet, we don't have any super winners. Why not?

Here are my thoughts on what has to be done to come up with a truly outstanding module. Yes, I know that my modules never won a major prize either, but I'm preaching and not necessarily practicing. So, here I go.

Rule 1: There has to be a unified theme that brings the scene together. A collection of buildings helter skelter

won't do the trick. Dale's module is built around all the aspects of a cattle farm and the barns, fields, fences, terrain, and foliage that are appropriate.

Rule 2: There can be no weak points or area of omission. Did you paint the sky board solid blue or stick on a Walther's background complete with wrinkles? Then forget about all the other work you did. Is exposed bench work neatly painted? Did you handle problem areas such as the intersection of the skyboard with the table top well? Are there any area where the scenery isn't up to snuff? Does the highway really look like a road?

Rule 3: The module must actually be finished. (Almost doesn't count.) Have you added lighting, figures, lines on roads, chrome paint to cars, barrels, debris, enough trees, underbrush, ... I understand that a model railroad is never truly finished, but it should be state of the art.

Rule 4: The scene must look plausible. Does your four-lane highway suddenly become a dead end street?

The module must actually be finished. (Almost doesn't count!)

Does the roaring river spill into a tiny pond with no visible or suggested outlet? Are all of the structures, figures, and accessories appropriate for the scene? Are all of the elements of the scene appropriate and suggestive of a particular era?

Rule 5: Virtually everything needs weathering. Starting with the ties, rails, and ballast and continuing across the module, bright colors must be toned down. Weathering brings elements together. An occasional bright spot should be justified by its newness.

Rule 6: There should be mini-scenes that attract our attention and praise. Dale Bennett has watermelons in his garden and a tractor is in the midst of cutting a crop. Find some focal points that attract the attentions of the viewers and then go full out with the details. Bridges often serve as focal points. I can recall many exciting scenes I've seen such as a building on fire with all kinds of fire fighting equipment; the scene of a traffic accident involving a

bear (ursa major) and a car surrounded by a collection of rescue equipment.

Rule 7: Flat tables hardly ever make it. Try to recall a truly outstanding module that was built on a sheet of plywood and looked it. Close, but no cigar. Do mountains rise sharply out of the plywood plains? The winners have plenty of vertical separation. A highway ducking under or climbing over the tracks can add immensely to the effect of a scene. Over the years I've seen some great modules where trains ran well above the lowest areas of the scenery. Two of my favorite scenes were built on the same theme of a railroad following a river gorge around a sweeping turn. They were both done on inside corners with transition modules on the ends.

Rule 8: Trees must be realistic. Did you plant your forest with bumpy chenille? Or did you take the time to spray the trees a realistic color, shape them and add ground foam? Are your other trees just clumps of lichen or semi-transparent with visible branches?

Rule 9: Be innovative. Does your talent break new ground? Are you taking us where man has never gone before? If so, you may come up with a winner. For example, there is an attention getting module in the Philadelphia area that features level upon level of tracks going all the way down to the floor.

Rule 10: Show us that you have talent. Is there any scratch building, kit bashing, tree growing, rock casting or other **not** out-of-the-box modeling evident on the module? Would you deserve to win a prize if you purchased a huge, custom-built factory building and placed it on the module?

I hope you have been inspired by these pearls of wisdom and are now about to go down to the basement to start working on your super-duper, show-stopper. (let's hope that the other clubs don't get a hold of these rules too!)

New Roster Format

Enclosed is yet another copy of the Northeast NTrak membership roster. You will notice a new column added to the roster called *Modules*. This column indicates the number and types of modules that the club member owns (or in charge of for borrowed modules.)

The numbers indicate feet of modules.

Corner modules are indicated as “3c” for a three foot corner or “4c” for a four foot corner, “3cb” a three foot corner bridge, “3ic” a three foot inside corner, etc. Please send any corrections and additions to your Secretary, Ed Smith at (508) 772-4870.

Greenberg Wrap-up

by Ed Smith

The Fall Greenberg Show started off with questions about whether we were going to have enough of a layout to even run trains. Our show coordinator had contacted everyone but was unable to get enough members willing to bring modules to make a large layout for one of our biggest shows of the year. It was very lucky for us that Ernie Poole lives only a short distance away and was willing to bring not only his 16-foot setup yard, but his 12-foot Auto-Train module set and his 4-foot lumber yard and truck terminal module. We rearranged the modules and by show time had a reasonable size layout operational and looking very good.

Once the layout was up and running we also had trouble finding tower operators and several members took multiple shifts on the towers. The trains ran very well and there were enough to provide variety and enjoyment to the viewing public.

This show is usually one of our biggest events of the year. Normally, we have to turn modules away because everyone wants to participate with their modules. This show is where many new modules (and module sets) have made their debut and won prizes from Greenberg. In the past, we have had U-shaped and L-shaped layouts at this show with nearly 100 feet of modules, all from Northeast NTrak members.

This year with Ernie’s help we had a reasonable size layout for this important show for which we are paid by the Greenberg organization. Although Ernie’s commitment to our club was exceptional, no member should have to bring 32 feet of modules to a show which is in our own “backyard.” We as a club somehow need to provide incentive to all members to build and bring modules to our shows and to participate and enjoy this great hobby to the fullest extent possible.

The Barney Report

by Bruce Alcock (via Ed Smith)

Bruce is in Oklahoma City and has recently sent along some news.

Bruce is now an active member of the North East Oklahoma N Scalpers, also known as the NEONS. They are located in Tulsa and have about 130 feet of modules, so are somewhat larger than Northeast NTrak (now that Bruce has left us.) He participated in a show at the OKC State Fairgrounds where he won

2nd prize for his EL U-33 and 3rd prize for his module. Not too shabby for a New Yankee Transplant.

Bruce notes that the speed limit down there is 5 mph less than the top speed of a Ferrari, horn blowing is a capital offence and yes the wind does come sweeping down the plains. More later.

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modules in order to be more flexible in how we present a layout at shows. We could go along a wall, “L” shaped with an inside corner, even “U” shaped away from a wall. It would let fewer people present a layout. They should be light, and maybe 5 feet in diameter. We should be able to run *Red* to *Yellow* to *Red* for a continuous run. *Blue* could become a switching layout. Interfacing with *Green* complicates the design and construction to the point where, considering the track conditions on *Green*, it may be more effort than it’s worth. Functionality should be balanced against complexity. (The KISS principal). We should peruse a design that was used at Valley Forge. We should do this ASAP as club interest could really use a boost.

9. The dues structure could be different for module owners and those without a module. Less for owners, more for non-owners hoping to encourage more modules.
10. Module owners only, could be allowed voting privileges. This would allow the active participants to determine the direction the club will take in the future.
11. Last, and perhaps most important, we need to prepare a Mission Statement for Northeast N-Trak. It is difficult to achieve a goal that has yet to be defined. This should provide a new sense of purpose, and help us regain that feeling of accomplishment that has been missing for a while.

I hope this article will promote lively and very active discussion among us all, and result in a “New Beginning” for **Northeast NTrak**.



Newsletter & Club Activities

Once again I must ask Northeast NTrak members to submit articles of interest for your newsletter. I realize that the holiday season put additional pressure on all of us to participate in family oriented activities, but now that the holidays are over and the model train show season is back with us, I must again ask for input from all of you.

Jim Whitehead has promised a short article to help focus our energies for the coming year. A mission statement, so to speak, stating our goals and ambitions as a club.

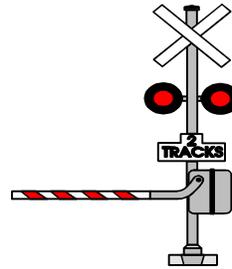
Peter Wisniewski has agreed to build a new style bridge module that is functional and looks like a bridge (and he will provide an article about the detailing which he is so good at doing.)

We (the active members and active modelers) are still hoping to get together a plan for a "Winterfest" type of activity day on one of the remaining

winter weekends. We can really use some help in pulling this effort together for a successful day of activities. You can call any of the club officers with suggestions and input.

One suggestion made back last year was to offer some kind of "carrot" to entice the membership into building more and better modules. Maybe we should award an annual trophy to the builder of the best new module of that year, voted on by members in good standing, and announced at the annual meeting.

I am interested in printing black & white pictures in the newsletter. If you call provide pictures and/or help with this please call your



Down East Model Railroad Association 19th Annual Show

Our next show, after the Amherst Show in West Springfield, is the Down East Model Railroad Association Model Train Show on Sunday March 13 from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM at the Middleborough High School. A show flier will be enclosed in our next newsletter.

The show features: Model Train Dealers, Operating Layouts (including NTrak), Railroad Historical Societies, Local Railroad History, Exhibits, Door Prizes, White Elephant Table (15% commission), Books Historic Photographs, Homemade Food, Movies and Much, Much More!!!

Their club building (only 15 minutes from the show) in North Carver will also be open to the public (donation at the door.) They have N, HO, O/On2 and G scale layouts operating.

Northeast NTrak

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