



Call Board

Volume 52 Issue 4

December 2012

This Month's Program ...

You can turn your computer's video display into a full-function dispatcher's panel of your own design, using PanelPro, a free open-source computer program. PanelPro works with DC and DCC model railroads, and is equally capable on Windows, Mac, and Linux computers. You create your panel by dragging icons (provided), and filling in tables. Division 3 users of PanelPro include John Smith and Ron Sturgis. John and Ron will demonstrate it, show you where to get it, and where to get more information.

Merry Christmas



Selecting A DCC System

Wil Davis

I would like to take the opportunity to amplify some of the things I didn't cover in my November presentation at the Division meeting. I lost my voice the night before and struggled to do my presentation, as those of you who attended were painfully aware. In hind sight I probably should have just thrown in the towel and put it off, but I was determined to carry on. As a result I skipped a number of points I wanted to make. This piece is an attempt to cover some of those things that I think are important to consider.

Layout Size

The size of your layout has a bearing on your choice of system. Most any system from the most basic to the most advanced will serve to operate a small 4 x 8 or similar layout. The starter systems are limited in capacity (amps) which is directly related to the number of trains you can run at a given time. If you are operating by yourself this is not a problem, but if you have a small layout and plan to have a group operating the

(Continued on page 5)

Division 3 Website: www.modelraildayton.com

2013 MCR Convention Website: www.mcr2013convention.com

Super's Notes for December 2012

Meeting Notes

The November meeting had a good turnout with a couple of new members and several old members who had not attended in a long while. Mike gave a brief presentation on the origin and development of DCC and I was supposed to do a segment on picking a DCC system. I had to apologize to everyone as I lost my voice Saturday night and to say the least it was a struggle. In hind sight I probably should have just put it off. I have decided to write up some of the things I had planned to say in a brief summary and submit it to the Call Board for publication. There were seven entries in the weathering contest and we wound up with three way ties for both second and third place. Larry Miller took first place with his "Duffy Coal" structure. Congratulations, Larry.

Train Show

The train show was a big success and we ended up with a positive balance. Nick said he has already sold most of the tables for next year. He had some last minute crises this year as one vendor died just before the show and two other regulars had to pull out due to health and other issues. Fortunately he always has a waiting list and was able to fill in the vacancies. He is still looking for an understudy for next year with the thought of that person taking over the show in 2014. Nick has done a great job over the last five or six years and it's time for someone else to take over.

2013 MCR Convention

The registration package for the convention will be in the winter King Pin, but you don't have to wait until then as the registration package is available on the web site. The early registration rate is only good through January so don't put off registering.

Model Railroad TRAINing

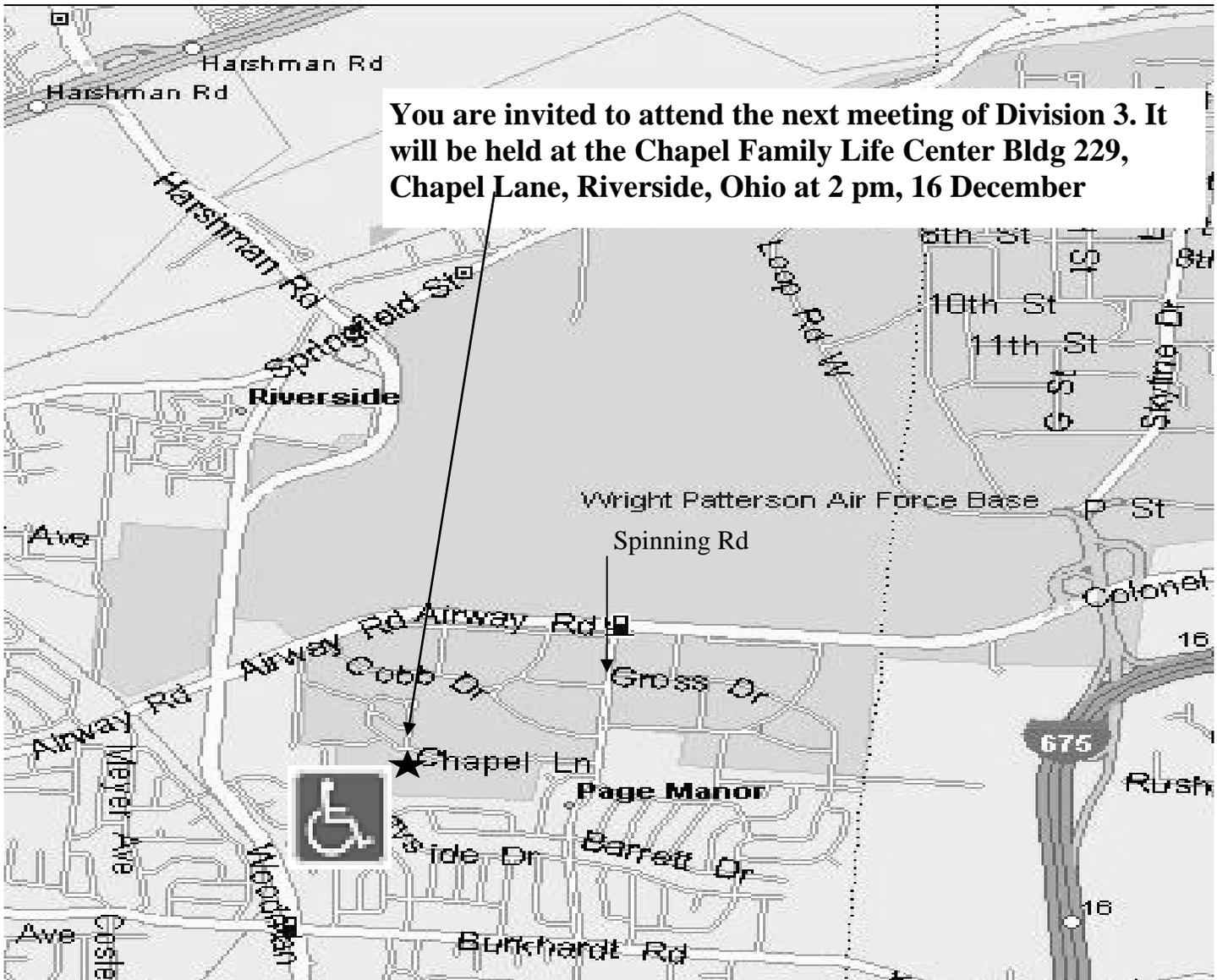
Plans are coming along for our second annual Model Railroad TRAINing and I have lined up several new presentations. Several more people signed up at the meeting to help out in some way, but it's still not too late if you would like to help out let me know at the December meeting.

December Program

You can turn your computer's video display into a full-function dispatcher's panel of your own design, using PanelPro, a free open-source computer program. PanelPro works with DC and DCC model railroads, and is equally capable on Windows, Mac, and Linux computers. You create your panel by dragging icons (provided), and filling in tables. Division 3 users of PanelPro include John Smith and Ron Sturgis. John and Ron will demonstrate it, show you where to get it, and where to get more information.

National News

- John Stevens, the NMRA Secretary, has announced the slate of candidates for the 2013 National elections. Ballots will be in NMRA members' hands early next year. Candidates are:
 - o At-Large Worldwide Director: - Stan Ames - Mike Brestel - Larry Smith, MMR - Leslie Eaton, MMR
 - o Atlantic District Director: - Alain Kap - Kathy Millatt
 - o Western District Director - Larry Alfred, MMR - Jack Hamilton, MMR



(Continued from page 2)

o In keeping with his policy of not letting anyone volunteer do more than his/her fair share of work, President Charlie Getz has named **Jim Lupfer head of the Convention and Trade Show Department**, replacing Bob Amsler, who remains as NMRA Counsel.

Speaking of President Getz, an interview with him is featured on the current episode of **“The Model Railway Show” podcast**. Jim Martin talks with Charlie about his plans for the NMRA. To listen, visit www.themodelrailwayshow.com, or download Episode 44 on iTunes (or any number of other podcast downloaders). All show episodes are archived at the TrainLife website, so even if your members miss it now, they can always listen to it at a later date. In two weeks Charlie will return to the podcast to talk about “The Magic of Scale Model Railroading” exhibit at the California State Railroad Museum.

Western Director Jack Hamilton and his committee are working on a new **Long Range Plan for the NMRA**. Jack is still looking for input from members, and writes, “The October edition of *NMRA Magazine* put out a general call (“NMRA – Where do the tracks lead?”) to members for input for NMRA strategic planning. There have been a number of excellent responses to the call but not nearly in the numbers that might be suggested by the normal level of grouching and gripes about the organization. This is your opportunity to make

(Continued on page 4)

Contests

We have three categories each month. You can enter Scratchbuilt, Kitbashed, or just plain Kit built. This allows anyone to enter anything they are proud of and at any skill level. Judging is by popular vote but if you wish to have your model judged by NMRA rules for the Achievement Program, we will make arrangements for you “on the spot”.

The coming contest schedule ...

December - Structure

January - Open Loads
 February - No Contest
 March - Freight Cars
 April - Passenger Cars
 May - Diesel Locomotives
 June - Steam Locomotives
 July - Non-Revenue Cars
 August - No Contest
 September - Make it cheap (1-3-5 Dollar)
 October - Caboose
 November - Weathering

November Results

First - Larry Miller
 Second - Wil Davis
 Jim Rollwage
 Brent Johnson
 Third - Gordon Carlson
 Richard Todd
 Jim Rollwage

(Continued from page 3)

a difference and have some direct say in the direction the NMRA takes into our future. This is your organization and your ideas and input will be treated with equal value and respect. Please read the October article and make your desires known to Western District Director Jack Hamilton at westdir@hq.nmra.org or mail them directly to Jack at 10731 Warren Road NW, Silverdale, WA 98383.”

· Allen Pollock, Museum Committee Chairman, would like to put the word out about **fundraising efforts for the California State Railroad Museum’s “Magic of Scale Model Railroading” Gallery Project.** Allen writes, “You’ve read the article by President Getz in the November *NMRA Magazine* about the Gallery project. I’m asking for your help. We’re close to making it happen, so please discuss the idea of making a donation with your Region or Division Boards. If all participate, we’ll be successful in raising the \$250,000 we need by early next year to receive the matching grant. Right now we already have \$160,000 of the needed funding. If you have any questions or need additional info about this unprecedented chance to spread the word about our hobby, contact me directly at 573-619-8532 .”

· From Vice President of Special Projects, Bill Kaufman: “Sometime in February, the NMRA national is going to try to start sending out an **electronic Bulletin**. It will be filled calendars, Divisional success stories and the like. Sent out every two months, it is not intended to replace *NMRA Magazine*, but to be a collection of teasers with links to info. We hope people will like it. One key to its success is email addresses. We currently have emails for about 75% of our members but more is better and some of what we have are not right. Please remind your Region and Division members for their correct email addresses and forward them to HQ.”

· **Brett Lambert** has left the Kalmbach Memorial Library to pursue other career interests. We wish him the best and thank him for his many years of service. In his absence, requests will be handled by the HQ staff.

· The **Standards and Conformance Committee** has been working with Bachmann and Soundtraxx to be sure both companies are in conformance to NMRA standards for DCC decoders. In the past there have been some concerns about each company’s wiring harnesses not meeting proper specs.

· The **Winter Board of Directors Meeting** will be held in Atlanta, Georgia, on February 8-10. All NMRA members are welcome to attend. Times and location will be announced later.

(Continued from page 1)

layout you have to consider the total number of engines that will be running at a given time. Something else to consider is any lighted passenger cars that you will be running. All of these will contribute to the overall draw on the system. Even though you are starting small, if you have plans to expand in the future you should give this some thought as some systems are more easily expanded than others.

Other Factors

If you have, or plan to have, a sizeable layout you need to consider breaking the layout into power districts. These can be roughly compared to blocks in a DC system, but you still have the freedom to operate seamlessly between blocks. The power districts allow you to spread the load over several boosters. A big advantage of doing this is a problem in one area will not affect operation in other power districts. You can achieve the same results on a small layout by using circuit breakers to divide it into zones so that a derailment or other problem in one will not impact others. Breakers are a good solution for a layout that does not require more than the standard 5 amps that most advanced systems provide.

Wiring

Many things you read say that you only need two wires to the layout to operate with DCC. This is technically true, but is only practical for the smallest layouts. I have a small (4' x7') layout that I built 30+ years ago for my son which I use for testing and programming. I only have two wires powering it and it has the standard blocks that were a requirement for DC. I have no problems operating a single engine or two, but if I were to operate multiple trains with multi unit lashups it would be a different story. I do use the existing block wiring to isolate parked engines that I did not wish to program. (I am using the NCE Power Cab which does not have a separate output for the programming track). The block wiring also added some redundancy of wiring.

DCC decoders, especially sound decoders, are very sensitive to momentary shorts and poor track conductivity. The decoders are designed to shutdown rapidly when a short is sensed as it tries to protect the electronics in the decoder. Problems that have existed in DC for years unnoticed will be very apparent in DCC. In sound decoders this is particularly apparent as the sound shuts down and has to restart. Changing to DCC may require changes to your track and wiring to prevent shorts and provide reliable power to the track. There are no hard and fast rules, but if you have problems they will surface quickly when you make the switch. This is not a reason to not switch, but it is something you will need to be prepared to address.

Budget

Budget is always a factor and needs to be considered. However, it is almost impossible to compare systems using cost as a factor. You need to take a long hard look at the capabilities of the system before you consider the cost. As with many things the initial cost is only part of the equation.

Expansion

All of the systems I discussed at last month's meeting are capable of meeting most anyone's needs and all have the ability to be expanded. Some may do it more seamlessly than others, so if you have plans to expand it will pay to look closely at what the end cost will be for the system you are considering if expansion is in your future.

Other Considerations

Some people have suggested in the past that you should consider going with a system that your club uses or that has a number of users in your area so that you can get support. I feel that this is well intentioned,

(Continued on page 6)

but misguided advice. If I had taken that advice the system we chose would have been different, but I think that the decision we made was the best one for us. There is a lot of support on the web as every system has a user's group on Yahoo and a lot can be learned from the very knowledgeable people on those groups. I spent a couple of months following the users of the systems we were considering.

A better recommendation is to seek out groups or individuals in your area who are using various systems and ask if you can give them a test drive before you make a decision. Personal preference is an important factor in your satisfaction with a given system as they all take different approaches to achieve the same end.

The Digitrax and Easy DCC systems starter level systems come with a fixed cab similar to a DC Power Pack. They are not suited for walk around operation. MRC, NCE and Lenz come with tethered cabs that are useful for walk around operation. As it comes, the NCE is unique in that the command station has been added to a standard Pro Cab. However, if you unplug to walk around, the train will stop as the power to the track goes through the cab so there is nothing to power the trains. You can still have additional plug-ins, but everything stops every time you unplug to move to the next one. One advantage is in the future, when you upgrade to a conventional fixed command station, you can use the Power Cab as a standard Pro Cab (which it is), but if you install the original PCP at your work bench you can also grab the Power Cab, plug it in at the workbench and do programming. Also due to its construction the Power Cab does not require a booster when programming sound decoders. That is a \$60 - \$100 savings over other systems which require the booster. Even the NCE Pro Cab system requires a booster.

All of the systems except MRC are compatible with the free suite of JMRI software should you decide to go with a computer connection to aid in programming or operating your layout. MRC does have their own proprietary software for programming, but as far as I know there is no component for operating your layout.

Easy DCC is only available from CV Products. It is pretty much a one man operation so future availability may not be as good as others, but they are not guaranteed either.

I have not seen hard statistics, but it is generally accepted that Digitrax has the largest user base and has a great feature in it's Loco Net which can be used for signaling etc. In the past their system (as one of the oldest) has suffered from somewhat outdated implementation, but their new duplex wireless has overcome most of those short comings.

Lenz is a robust system, but lacks an included wireless and has limited cab options.

NCE is one of the most easily upgradeable systems, as almost everything they make is compatible with previous releases, or the previous release is upgradeable with a chip swap. Some of their 90's equipment can no longer be updated, but it is still operable with the current versions, it just doesn't have some of the added functions.

If you want more details on systems comparisons visit Tony's Train Exchange at <http://>