



THE SEMAPHORE

December 2019

FOX VALLEY DIVISION • MIDWEST REGION



**Happy and Safe
Holidays Everyone!**

Bluff City's Model RR Revisited Layout of the Month article & photos by Walt Herrick

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The **Bluff City Modular Engineers** have been busy recently making major changes to their already excellent modular layout. Above is FVD and BCME member, **Art Jones's** new corner "River" module. This is one of six new modules built by the club in the past two years. Another five modules were substantially rebuilt. The result is an a 70% brand new layout, bigger and better than the one we featured five years ago in the December 2014 *Semaphore*. More on the "new" BCME layout on pages 2 and 3, and in the "Mike's Minute" column on page 4 of this *Semaphore*. Also see Art Jones' 6 step method for creating the realistic river water seen in the photo above. It's in this month's "Modeling Tip" on page 6. *Con't on page 2*

Next FVD Meeting:

Sunday, December 15
1:00 pm at the
Morava Rec Center in
Prospect Heights

Contest: Switching Layout Track Plan

Clinic: Electronics and MRR by George K. (Note schedule change with this clinic.)



Everybody! Special to our December 15 Meet will be a Holiday PIZZA lunch and, a new Trainmaster Jeopardy game! The fun starts at 1:00 pm!



Bluff City MRR Revisited

While the Bluff City Modular Engineers have always made annual improvements to their layout, two years ago big time changes to the layout started to be made. It was then that **Richard Plachter's** beautiful Best of Show gothic Everett Street Station modules needed to be replaced as they were being permanently installed on dad **Rolf Plachter's** layout in Racine. **Jim Allen** came up with a solution to the club's problem by discovering a one-of-a-kind kit for Denver Union Station which he promptly purchased and built for the layout. ("Promptly" is not the right word to use as the Custom Model Railroad's kit Jim built was a real "bear" to build and very time consuming.) **Mike Hirvela** talks about the other major changes the BCME guys made last year in this month's "**Mike's Minute**" column. While a couple of older BCME modules still remain on the layout (Jim's corner "Farm" module and Art Jones' corner "City" module are examples), there is a *lot* of new stuff to be seen.

Con't on page 3

Jim Allen's Denver Union Station modules (above right) replaced the BCME's previous gothic Milwaukee Road Station modules in 2018. The new modules were awarded "**Best of Show-Modules**" at TF last year. **Art Jones'** entirely new "**River**" corner module with small background street scene, appears to the right.



Jim Allen's corner "**Airport**" module, and his new six foot "**Route 66**" module are shown below left. Three of the eight unique, small Route 66 businesses are shown directly below including Mr. Fix-It with a rotating paint can sign, Dad's B-B-Q, and Double Burnt Burgers. Structures are all lighted.



Bluff City MRR Revisited

The “old” Bluff City layout measured 14 x 28 feet in its largest configuration. The “new” Bluff City layout is more than 250 square feet larger at 20 x 32 feet. Mike Hirvela expects the size will remain the same for the foreseeable future. This year the BCME crew was helped at Trainfest by **Mike’s son Brian, Tim Beuchler** who flew in all the from Arizona State where he’s a student, and another student, **Keven Beemster**, who is also a member of the Lake County Model Railroad Club. The guys helped with set up, running, and take down at Trainfest. Trainfest is the only place and time the BCME layout is shown during the year. The rest of the year, the BCME crew makes improvements on the individual modules to prepare for the next Trainfest. That’s to be expected, as the BCME guys all have “making improvements” in their DNA!



Mike Hirvela sits next to last year’s BCME staging yard (top). This year Mike and others rebuilt the yard after the frame had warped and the club decided the yard needed broader entrance curves into the ladder tracks to accommodate long passenger cars. **Jim Allen and Art Jones** stand behind Art’s new six foot freight house module above. To the right is an “Underpass” mini scene on Jim’s Route 66 module. The scene was built from Walthers and City Classics kits, and lit with Woodland Scenics street lights.

Basic Layout Information

Layout Name:	Bluff City Modular Engineers Display layout
Layout Builder:	Members of the Bluff City Modular Engineers Club.
Layout Location:	The layout only appears at the Trainfest Train Show
Layout Scale:	HO
Layout Size:	20 x 32 feet
Layout Style:	Large Display oval with open center and center staging yard
Layout Concept/ Locale:	Class I mid-western
Layout Era:	Can vary but usually it’s the transition era
Construction begun:	1994
Bench Work:	1x4 inch box frame in 2x6 foot and other size sections
Sub Roadbed:	Plywood
Roadbed:	Homasote or foam board
Track:	Code 100 with Peco or Atlas turnouts
Track specs:	minimum 48 inch radius with no grades; min #6 turnouts
Scenery:	Many scenery methods tried and used over the years.
Structures:	Kits, kit-bashing, scratch built
Locomotives:	Member owned steam and diesel from various manufacturers. Sound in most locos.
Rolling Stock:	Kits, RTR, scratch built
Control:	NCE DCC; tethered & wireless throttles
Operations:	Display running
Module Storage:	At member’s homes
For more information:	Contact Mike Hirvela at mikehirvela1@gmail.com



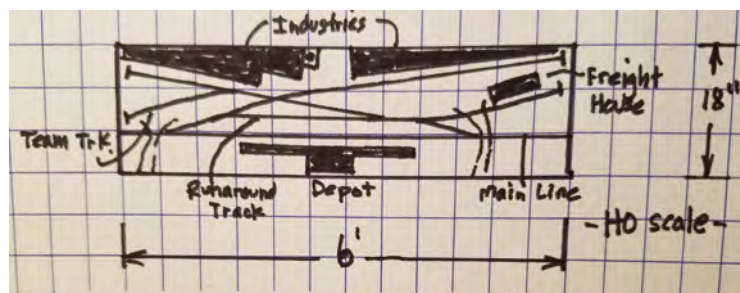
Mike's Minute by FVD Superintendent Mike Hirvela

Why We Changed a Pretty Good Thing

Our Illustrious FVD Semaphore Newsletter Editor, Walt Herrick, (*editor's note: I've been called many things in my time, but never "illustrious"!*) stopped by the Bluff City Modular Engineers layout at Train Fest 2019 and noted we had made a lot of changes to our layout since 2017. He asked about the changes we made, and why we made so many of them since our layout already looked so good. Thanks for the compliment, Walt! Here's my answer to Walt's questions: At last year's TF we won "Best in Show—Module" with the new Denver Union Station modules set built by Jim Allen. Those modules came as a result of losing the beautiful Walthers Milwaukee Road Depot kit-bash which is now permanently installed on a private layout. Also, for that show, we had made a "Y" junction on a T-shaped module 6-ft long x 4-foot deep which we placed next to Art Jones' city corner module. That yielded a 4-foot aisle between the back of the station module and the staging yard. At last year's show, this width turned out to be too narrow for people to pass each other, so we decided to add a 4-foot end module to increase the aisle width. Well, putting 4-feet on one side of the RR necessitates adding a 4-foot module to the opposite side to make the geometry work out. Jim Allen had thought about building a "Route 66" themed section and a new four foot module would provide the opportunity to do this. In the design phase however, it turned out that 4 feet just wouldn't be long enough for Jim's Route 66 plans. Interestingly, about this time, Jim and I were involved in removing a layout from a house. We found on the layout an expanded version of the Walthers' Freight House, over 30 inches long—too long for a 4-foot module, but perfect for a 6 foot module. So, Jim and Art decided to make new 6-foot modules for each side of the layout—Jim doing a "Route 66" module, and Art doing a "Freight House" module. Next, our experience with the curves on the "Y" junction module showed them to be too tight for full-length passenger cars, so Jim volunteered to rebuild the curves. This caused the tracks on the staging yard to be out of alignment and the ladder tracks had to be re-laid. Setting up the staging yard, we discovered the hollow doors we used had warped. So, two more sections had to be re-built from scratch. With all this re-building going on, we decided to replace the old "River" corner module we had used for over 10 years. It was built to an older module standard and was very heavy. Art volunteered to make a new "River" module, using light-weight materials. The last and latest change was as a result of a sad situation. We recently lost a member to cancer. Jim and I retrieved two modules in his possession before he died and I re-built one of them with buildings from Jim Allen and my son, Brian. The new modules and the re-built ones we displayed at Train Fest 2019 were completed just before the show. (And I do mean "just"—I wouldn't be surprised if glue and paint were drying on the trip to State Fair Park!) So, that's answer to our editor's original question, "What changes did we make?" The answer to "why we made them" was basically because we wanted to improve the layout. We knew we could do better the second time around. How about you? Are you holding back, resisting changes big or small you could make, and worried that what went before would be wasted? It's *not wasted!* What was before was *learning* and that's a good thing. So, let's make some improvements, Eh? I look forward to seeing you at the December 15 FVD meet. Remember we start at 1:00 pm and there's a pizza lunch and a new Trainmaster Jeopardy game to play, so come on out!

December's Contest: "Switching Layout Track Plan" Explained

The question was asked at our October meet, **What is a "Switching Layout Track Plan"?** The question referred to our December Contest, "Switching Layout Track Plan". **Contest Trainmaster, Jim Landwehr** provides us with the answer: "For me a 'Switching Layout Track Plan' is one where switching cars is the primary purpose of the layout. Any kind of switching is OK whether it's yard switching, industrial switching, passenger car switching—the possibilities are endless. The plan can be simple or complex, big or small, in any scale." Below is an HO scale "switching track plan" for a small 18 inch x 6 foot, 1950s or 60s town site. Note, the plan does not have to be perfectly drawn! WH



November's Clinic, Contest and Show & Tell Photos by Jim Osborn

November's Clinic:

(Note. November and December's clinic dates were switched resulting in Bob Hanmer giving the November clinic and George K's clinic going in December.) **Bob Hanmer's** clinic "**Great Northern's Mesabi Division**" was an excellent one with Bob giving us a brief overview of the Great Northern Railway's history before concentrating on its ore producing Mesabi Division. Bob mixed prototype photos and maps with photos of his and other GN layouts for a very effective presentation. Great Job and Thank You, Bob! **Our December 15 clinic is "Electronics and Model Railroading" by George K.** and promises to be a good one, too! WH



November's Contest: UP 4014 or other Steam Photo

November's "Steam Photo" contest was a popular one drawing 8 great entries. **Dick Koch** took **First Place** honors with his son's shot of UP 4014 coming under the Milwaukee Avenue overpass in Glenview. **David Crement, MMR,** took **Second** with an indoor shot of East Broad Top #18, and **Denis Zamiroski** finished **Third** with his shot of 4014 parked in West Chicago. See all the entries on the FVD's web site: www.foxvalleydivision.com. **December's contest is "Switching Layout Track Plan"**. See page 4 of this newsletter for more info on December's contest. WH



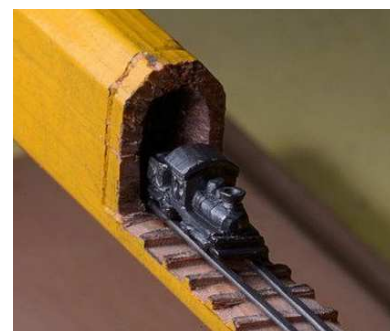
November's Show & Tell

Jim Osborn brought in two excellent S&Ts in November. The first was his scratch built, three track signal bridge. The bridge received 108 points in AP judging and was the last structure Jim needed to qualify for his "Structures" AP certificate. Congratulations, Jim! Jim also brought in a beautiful brass HO, DM&IR, steam shovel model found in a box of old Athearn kits a friend gave him! WH



Fun Stuff by Jim Allen

Does any body out there have an idea as to the origins of the wood "**Steam Engine in Tunnel**" sculpture pictured at the right? Believe it or not the sculpture was carved from a typical yellow *carpenter's pencil*! We're talking really tiny knives, and a really steady hand here!



Modeling Tip: Mod Podge Water

In this tip, **Art Jones** gives us his 6 step process for creating great looking river water: 1) Start with a flat, smooth surface, 2) Seal the surface with a coat of flat latex paint and let dry, 3) Pour a thin, 1/8" thick, soupy layer of plaster over the river bottom. Let dry completely. 4) Lightly sand the plaster with a sanding block and fine 400 grit sandpaper; vacuum up plaster dust, 5) Paint the plaster with flat brown latex paint. To show deeper water, use black paint in the middle and blend it into the brown paint toward the sides while both are wet. Let dry. 5) Seal the paint with a coat of semi-gloss polyurethane. Let dry. 6) "Slup" a thick coat of gloss Mod Podge (available at craft stores) onto the river with a brush held at a 45 degree angle. Slowly "slup" in the direction the water is flowing adding more Mod Podge as needed. Let dry. Questions? I'm at artljones3@gmail.com.



Member News

The **Fox Valley Division** was well represented at this year's **Trainfest** train show in Milwaukee. **Mike Hirvela, Art Jones and Jim Allen** had their **BCME** layout at the show (see pages 1-3), **Mike Wood** was there with his **SDRT** layout and crew, **Chuck Rita and Don Zyblut** were with the **AHSME** layout, and **David Leider** was at the **SOO Line Historical Society** booth. **Mike Wood** is seen at the right helping a young engineer on the **SDRT** layout....**Erich Abens**, our **FVD Membership Services Trainmaster**, reports our latest membership to be at 188....**Remember, pizza and Trainmaster Jeopardy will be at December's meet!**



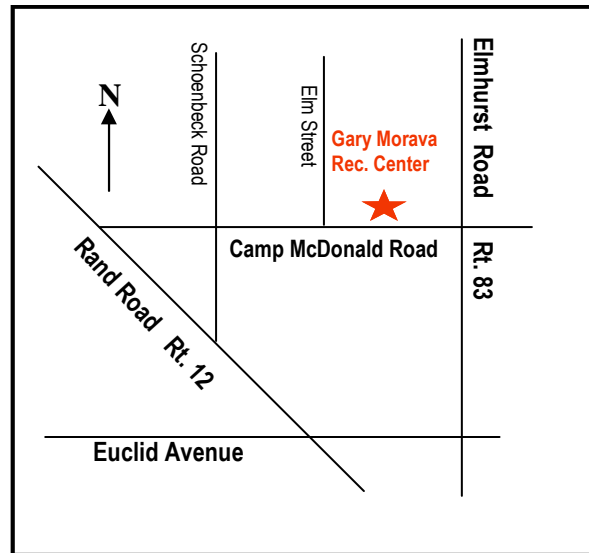
2019 - 2020 Fox Valley Division Meeting Schedule

All meetings are held from **1:30 to about 4:00 pm** (except as noted under "Other" below) 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.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Clinic</u>	<u>Contest</u>	<u>Other</u>
December 15	Electronics and Model Railroading* by George K. (*originally scheduled for November 2019)	Switching Layout Track Plan—any scale	1 pm start with a pizza lunch & Trainmaster Jeopardy!
January 19	\$220 Laser Cutter by Gary Saxton	Open Loads—limit 4 cars	
February 16	Take Full Advantage of Your Layout Design Software by Steve Miazga	12 x 12 inch Diorama—any scale	
March 15	LCC by Paul Wussow	TBD	
April 19	Changing Scales by Jeremy Dummler	Weathered Model—limit 1 model	Annual elections 1 pm start with sub lunch
May 14—17	Midwest Region Spring Convention "The Peoria Rocket" in Peoria, IL Check the MWR web site www.mwr-nmra.org for more information.		
June 7	Crystal Lake, IL Diorama by Walt Herrick	Unfinished Project	Last meet for 2019-2020
July 12—18	NMRA National Convention "Gateway 2020" in St. Louis, MO For information, go to the convention's web site: www.gateway2020.org.		



PROSPECT HEIGHTS, IL



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 190 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.

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 4:00 p.m.
- 2019 – 2020 meeting dates, contest and clinic info are on page 6 of this newsletter.

FVD web site: www.foxvalleydivision.org

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