

# THE SEMAPHORE

September 2021

Fox Valley Division • MIDWEST REGION



FVD member, Dan Cahill has started construction of a double decked, operations' orientated layout that has been in the planning for a couple of years. Read more about the realization of his work on page 5.

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***Throttle up and get those trains moving...***

After a year and a half (it seems like forever!), I started to clean my layout. Steve Miazga of the WISE division actually should be credited with the initiative because he pushed me and volunteered to come over and vacuum track, buildings and scenery. I cleaned track and wheels - all 1400 feet of track, plus the wheels on about 30 locomotives and over 350 cars. Of course, there were plenty of maintenance items that need to be tended to as I made my way around the railroad. I tried the track cleaning technique covered in one of the recent NMRA e-newsletters using low odor mineral spirits followed by a conductive lubricant. I've since had two operating sessions and the railroad ran great. So far - so good!

The ops session and layout cleaning got my modeling juices flowing again, so I started working on some vacant railroad property awaiting scenery - specifically a quarry I'd been thinking about for over 10 years. I was procrastinating because the quarry pit was problematic for me. I live near McHenry, home of 5 quarries - so you would think I would have plenty of prototypical scenes to model. This is not the case because they are all lined by a high berm covered with dense trees and bushes. Then it dawned on me - surround my quarry pit with a berm, trees and bushes! D'oh! I lined the quarry pit with a photo-shopped quarry picture I found on-line, made a Styrofoam berm and started making trees and bushes. I added the ubiquitous chain link fence on top of the berm, and the scene is starting to come together quite nicely. I just finished the conveyor system and will begin planting foliage. I'll have a picture or two next month.

While developing the scene, I dug out my bin of tree making materials and found an old bag of Scenic Express **SuperTree** armatures. These were the leftovers of the package which were so bent or curved that I could not straighten out using the soaking and stretching method

covered in the instruction manual. That process was messy and it took forever. The product does make great looking trees if you can ever get them straightened out.

Now for a **modeling tip**. I decided to look on-line for new ideas on how to straighten out the tree armatures. I was in luck! I found two YouTube videos describing how to use a 30 watt soldering iron to gently heat the "trunk" at the bend to soften the material to easily straighten it out. It works and it is fast! I made a dozen trees - from naked and bent trunks to finished trees with leaves and all - in less than an hour. This used to take days to do. Here are the links to add some oxygen producers to your pike:

Dave Frary shows three ways to improve SuperTrees:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3CQ\\_NEuPFE&t=45s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3CQ_NEuPFE&t=45s)  
 DG Modelworks has a video on the whole process:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM9o\\_QiNkul](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM9o_QiNkul)

In a totally different direction, I saw an advert about a book titled **Logomotive**. It looked interesting, so I did an impulse purchase and was pleasantly surprised when I read the book. The author covers the history of most railroad logos -- and the messages the owners were trying to convey with their logos -- from early RR days until present time. I was fascinated to learn the irregularly shaped disk background of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company (reporting mark SSW) logo, aka "The Cotton Belt," is actually the outline of one of the separator wheels used in Mr. Whitley's cotton gin. The "Goat" in the GN logo was inspired by a RR VP's goat that pulled a newspaper cart for him as a child. Future **Jeopardy** questions?



Finally, I would like to mention that Laurie, Walt Herrick's surviving widow, called me the other day to inform me about Walt's celebration of life memorial remembrance. The gathering is on October 9th at 1:00 pm. at **The Racket Club**, 9101 S. Illinois Route 31, Algonquin, Illinois 60102. Please join her if you can.

Model Railroading is Fun!  
 J. O.



## Disaster on the Rails...

Disaster rattled the town of Rhineburg Junction on Steve Miazga's beautifully detailed N Scale *Missabe Junction Railway* mid-morning Thursday August 26th. The Duluth Missabe & Iron Range ore extra was en-route to the Missabe ore docks when the entire train of 30 ore jennies plus two power units clothes-lined. Only the lead locomotive and a couple of jennies remained upright. Six additional freight cars on a parallel siding were also derailed as collateral damage of the wreck. Thankfully no one was injured. Engineer Jim Allen (FVD) was quoted as saying "I don't know what the hell happened - but I think I've seen this before." Conductor Michael Hirvela (FVD) stated, "I was enjoying my morning cuppa and a cookie when all of a sudden wham!" A number of by-standing hecklers were quickly on the scene to investigate the cause. A self-appointed expert announced, "It's too early to determine the root cause, but I suspect a dragging caboose coupler." Others also believed that less than NMRA recommended car weights of the jennies may have contributed to extensive wreck. They all further added, "We've seen this before!" The railroad owner and dispatcher was asked for comment about the non-standard weights of the cars but only replied, "Go away! Those cars are right on the weight spec - well sort of close anyway..." The crew and hecklers had the whole mess cleaned up in 30 minutes and operations resumed - albeit somewhat off schedule. Only a few egos were found to be bruised.

-- J. O. reporting from the field for the *Semaphore*.



An areal view of the ore extra wreck at Rhineburg Junction. Mike Hirvela photo.

## Mike's Minute...



Welcome back to all FVD members who've continued to stay on track with us during these unprecedented times, and a particularly hearty welcome to those who have joined during the summer months. I and our Board of Directors (I hope you, too), are looking forward to another interesting and informative model railroading season.

I needn't remind everyone it has been a tough several months with COVID restrictions (mask on – mask off – mask on (maybe-maybe not)) and group limits remaining invoked at indoor facilities. As I write this, there still are issues related to the COVID-19 virus and the variants of it that seemingly change almost daily. Further, the facility we had been using (and hope to again in the future), has usage restrictions in place. One reason is the room is used during the week by small children. We don't want anything adverse to happen to them, their caregivers, or to our members. To that end, the Board has decided to continue our division meetings via the ZOOM computer system. It has advantages for now, and our experience during last season showed us it can be done with success. I feel it is the best option for us. The Board is hopeful that as the season wears on, the COVID situation ease and we might be able to hold in-person meetings in late spring. We'll keep an eye on the requirements of the state health authorities and local facility managers and will make future decisions with the health of our members always a primary concern.

You should have received the "Orange Card" with the season's schedule via USPS. You may wonder why a number of clinics are listed as 'TBA.' Our Clinics and Programs Trainmaster, Gary Saxton, remains busily working on finding and scheduling topics of interest to all our members, but this summer has been particularly difficult. I know we have presentation topics scheduled by members of Central Indiana Division and Gateway Division coming up. So, where are you? If you have an idea for a topic, talk to or send an e-mail to Gary and get together with him and make a plan for a presentation. I've done a

couple. Yes, it is some work, but the reward is worth it. Even a "What I did on my Summer vacation" would be of interest to those who weren't there. In the meantime, check the website timetable page for the latest program information.

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

I attended the re-start of the Great Mid-West Train Show (aka: The DuPage Swap) at the DuPage County Fairgrounds on August 8th. A new management team is in place, and there was a very enthusiastic crowd. It is refreshing and encouraging to know that interest in model trains has not vanished. My thanks to FVD member John Drozdak who was our rep at the NMRA table during the show.

While a lot is still up in the air and unknown and may change on a moment's notice, I am focused on the future and I am looking forward to seeing all of you over the ZOOM system on September 26th.

One final note. John Drozdak would like members to know he has changed his email address to:

[cripkeeper74@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cripkeeper74@sbcglobal.net)

Regards, MH

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## Fun Stuff...

A new land speed record was set for a solar powered, non battery assisted locomotive - 30.7 mph. The current land speed record for any solar only vehicle is 56 mph. Marco Fucci di Napoli & Eric Houston created the 10 HP solar engine and ran it on a spur of the NP RR in Sonoma county, CA. Web search "solar powered train test run" for a variety of reports on the whole story. Below is a CBS-KPIX TV photo of the loco.







### **FVD Construction Zone...**

**Dan Cahill** has started turning his design plans into reality. Two photos are featured on the cover page. His layout is in HO scale and loosely models the CNW line from just outside of Proviso yard to Butler, WI. It is a point-to-point, double deck design with a helix in the center of the run and teardrop shaped staging yards at either end. Locations modeled include: Proviso area industries, Gurnee, Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee area industries. Train control is DCC using NCE products with six, circuit breaker protected, power blocks on each level. Track is code 83 throughout with a minimum mainline radius of 34 inches. A 54 inch duck under is planned which will go from the helix to the upper deck location of Kenosha; above Butler yard. The operations plan so far includes operators for Butler yard, as well as separate switching runs for Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, Gurnee and Proviso industries, and through trains. As of now, the lower deck bench-work plus track and wiring are nearly complete. Construction of the helix and upper deck will hopefully begin early next year after finalizing and testing the lower deck operations' plan. Below is a picture of one tear drop staging yard with a high speed creeper underneath it. Big thank you to Dan for taking the time to share his progress. ###



Superintendent **Mike Hirvela** tells the **Semaphore** staff, "I have built yet another **3rd pike** in my home. The layout is in a capital "E" shape in a 8 ft x 10 ft bedroom. Built it over winter after cleaning out the bedroom of miscellaneous junk. I had all the parts and pieces except for one 8" W x 48" L shelf and one curved turnout. Fourteen Walthers' kits and two DPMs were constructed, painted and installed."

Hirvela further commented, "The bottom of the E (on the left) is the 3.5 track staging yard representing the CNW's Manitowoc, WI Calumet yard. The center of the E is the station area with a concrete batch plant, station team track and a feed mill. The back of the E against the far wall has State Oil, Hamilton's Warehouse, Becker's Foundry, Kahlenberg's Marine Engines and a warehouse for an aluminum cookware manufacturer - Mirro Plant #4."

Being from Two Rivers, Hirvela pointed out, "Turning the corner, the top of the E has the swing bridge over the West Twin River and the center of town, with Mirro Aluminum Plant #1, the Twin River Co-Op and (in the far right corner) Hamilton Manufacturing. Across 17th Street is Eggers' Plywood mill." The center and top of the "E" represent areas of Two Rivers. The East Twin River is not shown on the RR. Photos follow on page 6.



The view from the doorway is shown above.



"I have tried using photos of streets in the actual city to try to extend the view through the wall. This view is looking north on Washington Street (aka WI Hwy 42), the main street of the city, just about where the scene would be in real life. The technique really works!"



## May Contest Results - recap ...

As reported in June, Jeff Jarr's Crew Shed won 1st place honors in May as a repurposed RR equipment scene. Mike Hirvela grabbed 2nd place with his HO scale Engine Service Fuel Tank and Jim Osborn's HO Scale MoW Camp took 3rd place. Pictures below. These are all great scenes. See more photos of all the model entries on our web site at:

<http://www.foxvalleydivision.org/fvd2016/contests.v2.html>



Captions:

Jeff Jarr's Crew Shed (upper left).

Michael Hirvela's Engine Service Fuel Tank (above right).

Jim Osborn's MoW Camp (left).

## Next Meet....
















**Program:** Dave Ackmann will present a tutorial on Building Billboards. He is from the Gateway Division of the NMRA in St Louis and is a frequent contributor to virtual clinics sponsored by the NMRA. In "Building Billboards for the Baden Vogt and DeSmet," he presents how to make custom billboards, as implemented on his HO scale model railroad. The clinic describes where to get billboard images and how to build the support structures in Styrene. He recommends standardizing billboard heights and describes how to make assembly fixtures using Ultra High Molecular Weight Polyethylene and a router table. Dave will also discuss how to create billboard legs and boardwalks using 3D printing.

You might want to view a "trailer" on his web site to get an idea of what is covered in the clinic. The link to the trailer video is [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFGq\\_b05wI0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFGq_b05wI0)

**Contest:** Celebrate and share your modeling work with the membership. Send in photos of your favorite and sharpest diesel locomotive to the photo contest website. You may submit up to three photos of one diesel locomotive to the web site. Solar powered locomotives not allowed this time.

Click on: <https://form.jotform.com/201995250508962> to submit your contest photos.

## What's Happening - or not ...

-  A number of **old Semaphore issues** have been discovered. Take a gander back in time to check some out on the **Semaphore** web page. BTW if you have copies of issues not shown, contact the webmaster so we can add them.
-  **Happy Birthday Amtrak!** The services turned 50 on May 1st. Click on: [https://youtu.be/Jbxng\\_WJ2mM](https://youtu.be/Jbxng_WJ2mM) for an excellent summary of the evolution Amtrak over its years of service. Amtrak has had several locomotives painted in commemorative schemes and has put forth enhanced route plans through 2035. Bachmann will have HO models available later this year. Micro-Mark is featuring a whole slew of 50th Anniversary Amtrak Locomotives and sets in various scales.
-  **Amtrak gets rolling again...** Various news sources reported that Amtrak will spend \$7.3 B on new rail coaches featuring contemporary interiors & a variety of locomotives. They have already inked a deal with Siemens for 83, new train sets. The new locos will be a variety of hybrid, diesel and dual diesel/overhead powered. Apparently the hybrid locos will be diesel electric pulling a battery car. Additionally, Amtrak will invest \$2.0 B on system-wide, facility upgrades. New route planning is also in the works. A nice birthday present from Congress & the tax payers!
-  The **MWR** spring convention in Rockford has been canceled because of continued scheduling uncertainties caused by the pandemic. The Rock River Valley division will host the 2023 convention.
-  The **MWR** will hold a tri-regional convention in Indianapolis on May 18 - 22, 2022. See the FVD RR events web page for more details - it should be a dandy! See: <https://www.indyjunction2022.org/> There will be an RPM meet in conjunction with the convention. Book your hotel rooms now - INDY time trials are running at the same time.
-  The **Illinois Railway Museum** has opened its 2021 season. Select trains will be in operation per the schedule posted on their web site. The Steam Shop is working on getting UP 4-6-0 #428 finished. The Diesel Shop is working on former UP Doodlebug M-35. A full list of dates and activities can be found at: [www.irm.org/calendar](http://www.irm.org/calendar).
-  The National N Scale Convention is planned for a Nashville venue on June 22-26, 2022.  
See: <http://www.nationalscaleconvention.com/> for details as they become available.
-  The SOO line Historical & Technical Society will be holding their 2021 convention in Manitowoc, WI on September 9-12, 2021. See <https://www.sooline.org/Events/conventions.shtml> for more information.
-  Friends of the 2926 are completing operational restoration of ATSF 4-8-4 #2926 in New Mexico. The boiler has been steamed up, and the crew is hopeful for excursions in late 2021.
-  The WISE division tells us that the 50th Anniversary **Trainfest** has been canceled due to covid uncertainties.  
<https://trainfest.com/>
-  **Metra** is challenging industry to create a zero-emission commuter locomotive by converting an older engine from diesel to one powered solely by batteries. They are currently seeking proposals. Earlier this year they committed to buying 500 new Alstrom "Coradia" style coaches.
-  **Great Midwest Train Show (aka: the Wheaton / DuPage Swap )** is under new management and it opened its first swap of the season on **August 8th** at the DuPage County Fairgrounds in Wheaton, IL. The dates for future shows are: September 12, October 17, November 14, December 12, January 9, February 13, March 13, April 10, May 8 and June 12. See <https://www.trainshow.com/> [ NOTE: The Manchester Road entrances to the fairgrounds are CLOSED due to complaints from the neighbors. Use the entrance into the DuPage County Government Complex one stop light north of Manchester Road on County Farm Road. There are signs. Follow the road through the complex and enter the fairgrounds at the Northwest gate.]
-  Tri-City Train Show (Roma Lodge Swap), in Racine, 7130 Spring Street (Cty Hwy C) on the following dates: 8am – 12 noon: (6 shows only): October 3, November 7, December 5, January 2, February 6 & March 6.
-  NMRA **Gateway 2022** National Convention will be in St. Louis, August 7 – 14, 2022. Please watch the website for details as they evolve: [https://www.eventsquid.com/event.cfm?preview&event\\_id=13724](https://www.eventsquid.com/event.cfm?preview&event_id=13724)
-  The Surface Transportation Board nixed the CN - KCS merger. Will this ruling have an impact of the bid from the CP for the KCS? Unknown at this time.



## 2021 - 2022 Fox Valley Division Meeting Schedule

Meetings are held from 1:30 to about 4:00 pm (except as noted). This season all meetings will be presented online using ZOOM virtual meeting technology. See the timetable tab on the division's web site <http://www.foxvalleydivision.org/fvd2016/timetable.v2.html> for complete instructions on how to use ZOOM and participate in the meetings. For the latest clinic and all FVD news and information, visit FVD's web site at [www.foxvalleydivision.org](http://www.foxvalleydivision.org). Save the dates for now - details will follow.

Date	Presentation	Contest	Notes
<b>Next Meet</b>			
Sept. 26, 2021	Building Billboards by Dave Ackmann	1 Diesel Locomotive	
Oct. 24, 2021	Sectional & Portable Layout Planning by Eric Peterson, CID	1 Gondola with Load	
Nov. 21, 2021	TBA	1 Illuminated Structure	
Dec. 19, 2021	TBA	An Odd Consist - 2 units max	
Jan. 16, 2022	TBA	Open Load for 1 Freight Car	
Feb. 20, 2022	TBA	1 Large Structure. 5000 sq. scale feet or more	
Mar. 20, 2022	TBA	1 Steam Locomotive	
Apr. 24, 2022	Railroads of International Harvester in Chicago by Richard Sieben	1 Refrigerated Billboard Car	1:00 Start Business & member meeting, election of Super & Chief Clerk
May 15, 2022	TBA	1 Small Structure . 500 sq. scale feet or less	
May 18-21, 2022	Midwest, North Central & Mid Central Tri-Region Convention	For more information, see: <a href="https://www.indyjunction2022.org/">https://www.indyjunction2022.org/</a>	

Note: Sept. 16-19, 2021 Midwest Region Annual 2021 Convention, IS NOW CANCELED. "As a result of continued scheduling uncertainties caused by the pandemic, the MWR Executive Committee has voted to cancel the "Rockford Railway Convention" that was to have been held September 16-19, 2021. For the second year in a row, we are not going to be able to meet and share our great hobby. Unfortunately, the efforts put forward by the 2020 and 2021 convention committees have not been able to be put to use." Stephen Studley, President, Midwest Region of the NMRA



### **Call for Articles....**

Future Semaphore issues need interesting content. Consequently we are looking for model or prototype railroad related articles. Send us your content (words and photos) or even ideas. We'll take care of the editing and insertion in the publication. Contact us at:

<http://www.foxvalleydivision.org/fvd2016/contactus.v2.html>

### **About the Fox Valley Division**

If you receive this newsletter, you live in the Midwest Region and Fox Valley Division area of the National Model Railroad Association or NMRA. The Fox Valley Division (FVD) includes all of Lake and McHenry, as well as parts of Cook and Kane Counties in northeast Illinois. About 180 members of varied ages and modeling ability levels belong to the FVD. Almost all modeling scales are represented in our division. Subscriptions to the Semaphore newsletters are free. NMRA membership in the division is available through the NMRA at:

<https://www.nmra.org/>

2020 –2021 FVD monthly meetings are held September through May on-line via the ZOOM virtual meeting technology per the schedule in this issue. Each meeting features a clinic, model contest, and information of interest to the membership. Outings, layout tours, and operating sessions may also be held when Covid-19 protocols allow gatherings.

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. Visit us on the web at: <http://www.foxvalleydivision.org/>

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Until further notice, regular meetings are held virtually via Zoom generally from 1:30 until 4:00 PM per the schedule listed in this publication and on its website at:

<http://www.foxvalleydivision.org/fvd2016/timetable.v2.html>

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<http://www.foxvalleydivision.org/fvd2016/contactus.v2.html>