

# THE SEMAPHORE

January 2022

FOX VALLEY DIVISION • MIDWEST REGION



Dan Sylvester's totally scratch-built Rio Grande Southern HOn3 operating layout is saved from the wrecking ball by a team of NMRA members. Read about how the team moved this 4 x 8 foot masterpiece out of a Waukegan basement and into a Wisconsin Southeastern Division member's Burlington, Wisconsin location. The move process and photos follow on page 2.



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### ***Keep Those Trains Moving - literally!*** ***by Mike Hirvela, FVD ...***

I have taken apart, removed or cut up more model railroads from owner's spare bedrooms, basements or recreation rooms that I care to count. I now can report it is much more satisfying to re-purpose a layout than to take one down.

Recently, Jim Allen, Art Jones, Dan Sylvester (the layout owner) along with Andy Breaker (new owner) did the near impossible move of an exquisitely built HOn3 layout almost totally intact. Even though the railroad was only 4 x 8 feet, it had several track levels, was about a foot thick and like many layouts, it was built to last.

There were several challenges. First was finding it a new home. Dan let us know during an op session that he intended to dispose of his existing railroad to build something new. We knew of his RR and had operated on it several times prior to COVID's putting the brakes on in-person gatherings. When he said he intended to cut up the RR, we said an emphatic, "NO!" It was just too well done to have that happen (see photo). He graciously let us have some time to find it a new home. We had some ideas and were considering options, when at the November DuPage swap, we ran into an acquaintance of ours. We noted he had some narrow gauge stuff in his possession, and we asked him if he was adding to or changing his emphasis from electric trolleys to narrow gauge. He replied that he had recently vacationed in Colorado, was bitten by the narrow gauge bug and now intended to build a RR in 3-foot gauge. We asked him if he would rather have a one already done, and he lit up like a Christmas tree. He also knew of this narrow empire, had operated on it, and almost couldn't contain himself with the thought of owning this wonderful layout. In fact, the RR has been featured in several magazines and in the January 2011 issue of the OPSIG's Dispatcher's Office journal.

We got a team together and carefully removed buildings

and details in preparation for the move. Schedules being what they were, the move was planned for Saturday, December 4 at 9 am. Art Jones brought his work van that can hold a 4x8 sheet of plywood flat on the van floor. I had my truck and the new owner had a mini-van. We met at the appointed time and planned the move details. It was a real effort.

The next challenge was a set of steep and narrow stairs, two doors and no physical way to turn the RR to go out outside and through a porch door. The existing owner solved that problem by removing a window from the porch wall and clearing the area on the patio outside it.



Jim Allen and Art Jones inspect Dan's construction. (above)

View from the van as Mike Hirvela takes a breather. (below)



We started in the basement by tipping the RR onto its blank side (covered by fascia plywood) and took apart the "Capital I" shaped floor supports. Then we shuffled the RR to the base of the stairs. One step at a time - we shoved the

RR up the stairs, past the inner door, through the storm door and onto the 3-season porch. After a breather, we hoisted the RR about 3 feet to clear the window sill then pushed it through the window. With one guy outside guiding it and one guy holding on for balance, the rest of the crew exited the porch to finish the move onto the patio and set the RR down on the concrete.



After another brief rest, we brought the RR to the back of the transport van and positioned it flat and level - carefully shoving it into the van. With the fascia trim we had about 1/4" of width to spare. But it fit. The support pieces, the power system, the PFM sound system and a control stand and miscellaneous parts and pieces were loaded into the support vehicles. After thanking Dan profusely, we hit the road for its new home in Burlington, Wisconsin.



Nothing left but some dust, pictures and echoes of the Mudhens chuffing up the grades on the RGS. (above)

Once we arrived in Burlington, we just had to reverse the loading procedure. Fortunately, the new location is at ground level – and NO stairs, whew! The guys had the support rebuilt and ready when I arrived. We got the layout in the building, through a switch-back move and into the new “Railroad Room” on its supports. As with all moves (even modules) we had a couple of minor dings, like a couple of bent trees, but no major damage.



The layout is on its base and getting wired up by Art. (above)

Some assembly required! Now to relocate all the structures, people, vehicles and rolling stock. Andy awed at the thought of running trains on his new possession. (below)



Andy treated us to lunch at a local burger place to end the day. We all reveled in knowing this wonderful layout has a good home and will continue to provide modeling enjoyment.

MH



### **Hard Shell Scenery...** by Bob McGeever

Bob McGeever entertained the division with his relatively easy and bandage free hard-shell scenery technique at our last meet. He sent the **Semaphore** some photos and the recipe for his "ground goop" to cover a plaster shell. Bob's comments follow below and his pictures are to the right.

"A couple of pictures show the before and after slurry steps on a different part of the layout. Recall that foam-core board and foam sheets support the nylon window screen base for the hard shell process. Many days passed between putting down the cloth and putting down the slurry in order to let the plaster adequately set. You can see how the dry plaster cloth under the slurry sucks up the moisture. I used to use a spray bottle to re-wet the cloth. Now, I use a paint brush dipped in water. If the cloth is too dry the slurry dries slightly too powdery. This is messy until the seal coat is applied.

You can also see that I am not too particular about the color of the slurry, as long as it is not white. The color is just to keep white from showing through if I miss a spot with the paint or if I chip the surface doing later scenery. I always seal it with a light coat of earthy colored, cheap, indoor, flat latex paint.

Here's my slurry recipe:

No two batches are exactly the same. I use a 3 oz Dixie cup to measure each part, but any size will do depending on how much you want to make.

- Start with 2 parts plaster of paris, 1 part latex paint, 1 part water, 1 part play ground sand.
- The sand creates texture in the slurry when it is applied to the plaster cloth.
- Add water, sand, or plaster as needed to get a slurry that can be applied with a paint brush and give the desired level of texture for the area.
- Add water and stir as needed during application if the slurry starts to set up.

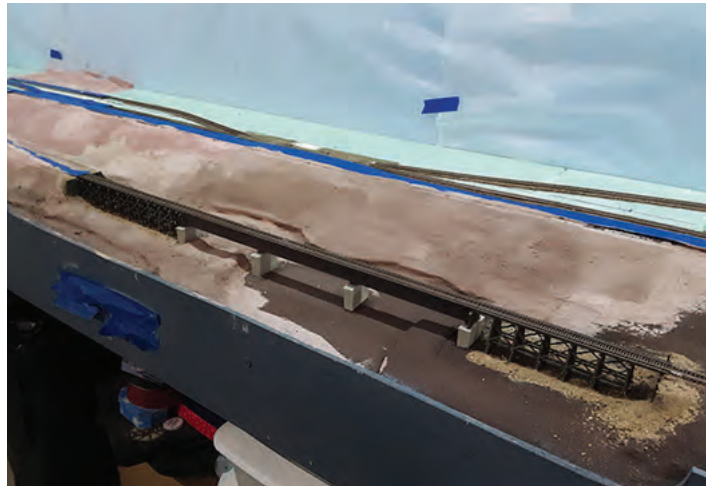
I buy the plaster cloth is from Amazon: Plast'r Craft Modeling Material P0052720, Fan-Fold, 6" Wide, 20 lb. <https://smile.amazon.com/Plastr-Modeling-Material-P0052720-Fan-Fold/dp/B0006HXP4A/>

The plaster cloth is 6" wide and almost 400' long. It currently runs \$66.50 for a 20 pound box.

Below is a photo of the plaster hardshell (white) that has been applied over the foam-core board and nylon window screen.



Below is a photo of the same area that has been coated with my "ground goop." Remember the goal is to color the white plaster and provide some texture on top of the plaster cloth at the same time.



I have assembled a tutorial on the whole hardshell process - start to finish with words and pictures and my recipes. It is available as a download off the FVD clinic web-page. Select the December 2021 clinic tab to access the download.

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

This has been an effective and reliable scenery base process for me. Give it a try and have some fun."

B. McG.

**Discounted registration  
fees end December 31st!  
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Four Full Days  
Three NMRA Regions  
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Three Day Train Show  
One Convention  
May 18-22, 2022

Clinics  
Layout Tours  
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Prototype Tours



<https://www.indyjunction2022.org/>



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## Mike's Minute ...



Last month I mentioned snow several times trying to get into the Holiday mood. Darn, didn't the storm on the first day of 2022 really remind us of what the season is about. As you know, I offer swap stuff at the Great Midwest Train Show (aka: the Wheaton swap). The first swap of

2022 was on January 2nd, and the weather noticeably impacted many of the vendors proven by the number of empty tables that day.

As disappointing as that may have been, it gave the opportunity for closer browsing by those who were looking for bargains and a chance to talk to the 'customers' in greater detail. We found several families and individuals who were just starting out in the hobby and soaking up information like sponges. One gent said he had been out of the hobby for 15 years and he now has the opportunity to get back in. He was amazed at the technological advances in the hobby over those years. It was great to get to know the person on the other side of the table better than when it is really busy. One gent and I had a lively conversation on the pro's and con's of DCC and whether it is the right thing for him. He was also concerned about having to obtain all new DCC equipped locomotives to keep up with the times and technologies. Hopefully, he now has a better understanding and can make an informed choice thus increasing his enjoyment of our hobby. Education is an area of focus for an NMRA member.

Speaking of Train Show / Swap Meets, the FVD shares an NMRA member table at the Great Midwest Train Show at the DuPage County Fairgrounds with our friends in the DuPage Division. The FVD has the table in February, April and June. We still need someone to be our rep on February 6th and June 5th, 2022. Let me know if you can assist and I can fill you in on the details.

I reported last month that NMRA members had the satisfying experience of re-purposing a layout to a new owner. Read about the endeavor on page 1 in this issue of the **Semaphore**. Can you tell I'm smiling?

It seems COVID continues to impact our lives. Our FVD Board continues to monitor the situation and its impact on social gatherings. Meanwhile, the ZOOM virtual meetings over the computer continue to meet with success. It does have its advantages (as I noted last month) with attendees from our division as well as those from other states logging in. When we get back to in-person meetings, we'll have

to figure out how to incorporate some folks attending virtually as well. I don't want anyone left out for any reason. So, please join us at the next meeting: January 16th at 1:30 pm, with a log in time of 1:00 pm. We email out the meeting notice with the log-on credentials to make it easy. Be sure we have your current e-mail address and advise us of any updates via our website's address change form.

A Happy Model Railroading New Year to everyone.

Regards, MH

## Fun Stuff... What the heck is this? by Jim Allen



This GE switcher aka. **Dinky**, was built in 1918 and in use in 1984 at the Chessie locomotive shop in Huntington, WV. It is jam-packed with batteries and little else. (Hmmm. I wonder what the charger looks like?) The upper photo in Chessie colors is copyrighted by Rob Kitchen and used with his permission.

The 1988 photo below of the same unit sporting a fresh CSX paint job is copyrighted by Wade. H. Massie and used with his permission. The unit is now stored at the B&O Railroad Museum in Baltimore but not publicly viewable. More pictures and information by these photographers & others may be viewed on the <https://railpictures.net/> web-site. J.A.



## December Contest Results ...

"Northshore Lends a Hand," is an HO Scale lash-up by Mike Hirvela and was awarded 1st Place honors in the Odd Consist contest. The "Tunnel ice breaker and 86 foot Burlington Hi-Cube" is an HO Scale kit-bash consist by Mike Shockley of the Illinois Valley Div. He snagged 2nd place with his unusual car. Keith Dart's N Scale Ready to Run consist with an OP and E, 2 truck Shay w/SP DD35b @ Cottage Grove (Jct.), OR placed 3rd. Pictures are shown below. We had entries in both HO and N scales. See more and larger photos of all the model entries on our web site at:

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



Mike Hirvela's NS Consist (left)

Mike Shockley's Tunnel Icebreaker & Hi-Cube

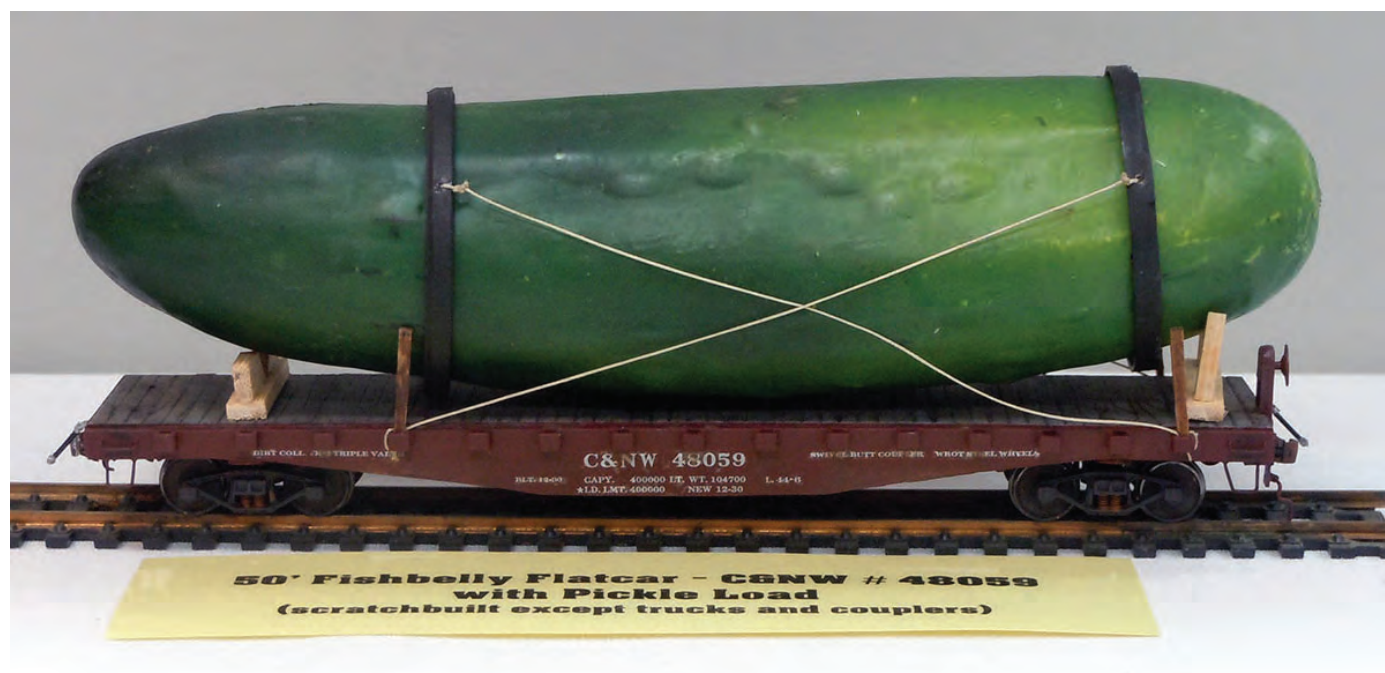
Keith Dart's Shay & DD35B (right)

## Next Meet - January 16, 2022....

**Program:** *Four Approaches for Arduino Controlled Signals* - by Gary Saxton

**Contest:** Send in photos of your favorite **Open Load** to the photo contest website. Here's one example of an open load - there can be many others. Maybe think out-of-the-box[car]. Pun intended. We have had hot tubs, golf clubs (club car), Baby-on-Board load, a giant egg headed for a McDonald's Big Breakfast and a pickle car by Dave Casey (shown below) with a 12" to the foot pickle. Let your imagination wander....














You may submit up to three photos of your model to the web site. Celebrate and share your modeling work and fun with the membership.



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



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

-  George Milkowski built a few billboards using the plastic billboard templates featured in the clinic on September 26th presented by Dave Ackmann. He says they came out "Fantastic!" If anyone is interested in using the templates, please contact the Superintendent.
-  Great Tri-State Rail Sale at the La Crosse Center, La Crosse, Wisconsin, January 29th, 9 am to 3 pm. {if you don't want to travel in January, the Rail Sale is also held on July 16th in Copeland Park. Info at: <https://4000foundation.org/>
-  The *Midwest Region* is holding its annual election of Directors at Large. Voting can easily be done on-line through our secure ballot portal. The polls close at Midnight January 31, 2022. Click on this link to vote! <https://form.jotform.com/213177297630964> Candidate biographies and an alternative mail-in ballot can be viewed at: <http://www.mwr-nmra.org/mwr2016/mwr.elections.html>
-  **Great Midwest Train Show** (aka: the Wheaton / DuPage Swap ) is under new management and is holding swap meets at the DuPage County Fairgrounds in Wheaton, IL. The dates for future shows are: February 6, March 6, April 3, May 1 and June 5, 2022. Follow the signs to the fairgrounds entrance. See <https://www.trainshow.com/>
-  **Mad City Train Show** at the Alliant Energy Center, Madison, Wisconsin, February 19-20, 2022.
-  **Tri-City Train Show** (Roma Lodge Swap), in Racine, 7130 Spring Street (Cty Hwy C) on the following dates: 8am – 12 noon: (2 shows remaining): February 13 & March 13.
-  **Rock River Valley Division Train Show** at Harlem High School, Machesney Park, IL, March 26-27, 2022
-  The **Chicago Area O-Scale Meet** will be held on April 1-2, 2022 at the Lombard Westin. See their web site for more info: <https://marchmeet.net/WP/>
-  **Titletown Train Show** will be at the KI Center, Green Bay, Wisconsin, April 9-10, 2022.
-  The *Midwest Region* 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 **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.
-  **NMRA Gateway 2022 National Convention** will be in St. Louis, August 7 – 14, 2022. Please watch the website for details: [https://www.eventsquid.com/event.cfm?preview&event\\_id=13724](https://www.eventsquid.com/event.cfm?preview&event_id=13724)
-  The **Rock River Valley Division** will host the 2023 MWR convention. Dates TBD.



## 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
Sept. 26, 2021	<i>Building Billboards</i> by Dave Ackmann	1 Diesel Locomotive.	
Oct. 24, 2021	<i>Sectional &amp; Portable Layout Planning</i> by Eric Peterson, CID	1 Gondola with Load.	
Nov. 21, 2021	<i>New England Trains</i> by Mike Wood, FVD	1 Illuminated Structure.	
Dec. 19, 2021	<i>New Hard Shell Scenery Method</i> by Bob McGeever, and <i>A Teen/Tween Explores Chicago's Railroads - The Sequel 1975-78</i> by Steve Brown	An Odd Consist - 2 units max.	
Jan. 16, 2022 <b>Next Meet</b>	<i>Four Approaches for Arduino Controlled Signals</i> - by Gary Saxton	Open Load for 1 Freight Car.	
Feb. 20, 2022	DCC Speed Matching by George Keprda	1 Large Structure. 5000 sq. scale feet or more. (eg. in HO Scale that's only 9.75 inches on a side.)	
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	DCC Switching by Mike Wood	1 Small Structure. 500 sq. scale feet or less. (eg. in HO Scale that's only a little less than 3 inches on a side.)	
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>	



### **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/>

The *Semaphore* is published by the Fox Valley Division of the Midwest Region of the NMRA once a month, ten months a year, from September to June. The Fox Valley Division of the Midwest Region of the NMRA is registered 501(c)7 not-for-profit Illinois corporation.

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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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