



THE SEMAPHORE

January 2026

A new year, a new look & a new logo. What the heck is going on with the NMRA? You have probably already heard about the NMRA's plans to re-brand our public image. Well, it is here. I you received the January NMRA Magazine you got a big dose of the changes.

I down-loaded a 40 page document covering all the standards & changes that form the basis of the re-branding effort. All the colors and type faces are standardized, so our publications will display uniformly regardless of the device you are using to view our messages. The appearance of our logos will also span across regions & divisions - providing a degree of consistency across the organization. We are allowed to keep our Fox image in the logo but it will have several different colors going forward. I will cycle our Semaphore Masthead through the various color combinations in future issues. I have already designed them and I think they look good. If you care, this type face is called "Nuckle" - no relation to the knuckles we are all familiar with. Change is always concerning but give this some time and it will grow on you just like it has for me.

One thing has not changed - we need content for the "**Semaphore**." This month I made my way to the N-Trac holiday display at the McHenry Library. I took a few pictures of some of the modules to share with you in this issue. I knew nothing about N-Trak so FVD member Keith Dart helped with some contextual information about the N-Trac system. Keith is an avid N Scaler.

If you have a layout or display you want featured, just contact me and I will get it organized. Wishing every member a safe and fruitful new year. Jim Osborn, MMR®, Temporary Editor

The December model Celebration featured Loads spanning 2 or 3 cars. There was one entry by our Super, Michael Hirvela. Click on this link to see a photo of the model he brought to the meet.

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

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Next Division Meet - January 18, 2026 at the Glenview Public Library - 2:00 start.

Clinic Presentation: **Meat Packing Plants: The Prototype and Models** by Douglas Harding, MMR®

January Model Celebration: **One Illuminated Structure**

Mike's Minute ...



HAPPY NEW YEAR! With the turn of the year, we have a blank slate of life to fill with enjoyable activities. To start filling in that blank slate, our FVD season continues January 18th at the **Glenview Public Library - 2:00 Start**. We will use the GPL whenever the room is available because we can save \$135 each month. We are exploring other options in Mt. Prospect and Arlington Hts. for the same reasons.

Our December clinician, DuPage Division's Patrick Golden, presented Part 2 of his clinic on how a multi-lever interlocking machine works and how the interlocked tappets, bridles and dogs work to prevent conflicting signal indications, routes and collisions. His presentation was insightful and informative and now I understand better how the parts interact and how the tower operators worked their magic. Also, the holiday snacks were great and if you weren't in person, you missed out on some calories, conversation and personal holiday wishes.

The Division runs on volunteers – we can't do this alone. We **STILL** have some Division opportunities. Your Help is needed:

- * We still need a back-up person who can assist with equipment set-up for the meetings and Zoom sessions. Mr. Osborn has figured out how to reduce the number of computers to make the set-up quicker and a little more user-friendly.
- * We also need an Editor for our newsletter, The Semaphore. Here is another opportunity to participate. It is not that tough and is very rewarding.
- * The Mid-West Region is looking for candidates for Director-At-Large. Lately it seems the members of the Central Indiana Division (CID) are volunteering more than those of other divisions. A good spread of representation across the region would be nice. Could it be you? It's not tough. I hear we have one FVD member who stepped forward. Good on ya. Contact me if you can pitch in.

Also, In the Spring of even numbered years, the Division holds election for Superintendent and for Chief Clerk. Now is not too late to indicate your interest in running for either of these positions. Voting takes place at our April meeting. Contact the Chief Clerk if you are interested.

I always look forward to seeing many of you at the next meeting, whether in person or over the net. Whichever method you choose to participate, your presence is always appreciated.

Happy New Year to all. May your signals be green.

Regards, MH

You can see the full schedule, clinics and model celebration topics at:

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

Always check the Timetable on the website for the latest meeting updates and locations.

Also check out other RR events at:

<https://www.foxvalleydivision.org/fvd2016/rrevents.v2.html>



N-Trak Holiday Display at the McHenry Public Library - Photos by Jim Osborn, MMR®

There were a number of model railroad display events going on prior to the Christmas Holidays. One such event the Northwest N-Trak Model Railroad Club display at the McHenry Public Library. I was able to take a few photos of great modules during my visit. Unfortunately, I am unable to credit the individual module owners.



N-Trak Holiday Display at the McHenry Public Library - Continued



A Short Version of the N-Trak standards by Keith Dart, FVD

TTrak ('TT' from "Table Top") standards were originally established by NTrak co-founder Jim Fitzgerald for both HO & N scales (Z has since been added), based specifically on OEM Kato Unitrack dimensions, and allow for a variable module depth of 5"-14.375"/125-365mm, and 'Nx' width modules with the baseline 1x/Single = 12.125"/308mm, up to a 4x/Quad.

According to their TTrak wiki ('bible'), similar to NTrak 1.0/2.0 (aka "NRail"), participants can now also 'freelance non-standard'-sized individual or grouped modules so long as they ultimately conform to height, trackage, & electrical Stds, flush @ their ends that will interface with the remainder of the intended layout: 1) 2 flat & level* tracks @ 33mm O.C. 2) 'BWVB' wiring continuity.

* < 3% grade is allowed within the boundaries of individual/integrally grouped modules exclusively off branch line internal subdivisions (i.e. off & separate from the primary 'through' RoW)

Wikipedia ("TTrak"):

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T-Trak#Basic_Requirements

T-Trak was designed to be a loop type layout on a single banquet table. To get started, all you need are some basic measurements.

The minimum T-TRAK standards are:

	Width	Depth	Height	Kato track pieces
Single straight	308mm 12 1/8"	125mm - 365mm 5"-14 3/8"	70 - 101mm 2 3/4" - 4"	20-000 & 20-040
Double straight**	618mm 24 5/16"	125mm - 365 mm 5" - 14 3/8"	70 - 101mm 2 3/4" - 4"	(2) 20-000 & 20-020
Outside corner	365mm 14 3/8"	365mm 14 3/8"	70 - 101mm 2 3/4" - 4"	(2)20-110 & (2) 20-120
End Cap	732mm 28 13/16"	365mm 14 3/8"	70 - 101mm 2 3/4" - 4"	(4) 20-110 & (4) 20-120

** These two tracks need to be 33mm (centerline to centerline) apart. It is recommended to use a piece of Kato double track to help get an accurate alignment. (20-042)

Wiring: The outside loop, the red line is wired Blue/White (outside to inside and the inside loop, the yellow line, is wired White/Blue. Finally, electrical connections are made using Kato connectors from the track on the module to a power pack or to a bus so individual modules can be taken to shows as part of a larger layout.

A chart of Kato track is available at: N-Unitrack <https://katousa.com/>

From here, a more substantial set of standards and recommended practices has evolved:
<https://ntrak.org/T-TRAK-Standards>

Questions or want to learn more : Please contact me.

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

Keith Dart

The 2025-2026 FVD meeting schedule:

Date	Clinic or Program	Model Celebration	Time & Location *
Sep. 21, 2025	Lighting basics for model Applications by Jim Osborn, MMR	Any Freight Car	1:00 at the GMC
Oct. 19, 2025	Basics of Interlocking pt. 1 by Patrick Golden	Any Structure	1:00 at the GMC
Nov. 16, 2025	Pan Pastels by Randy Allio - Live Demonstrations	Any Locomotive	1:00 at the GMC
Dec. 21, 2025	Basics of Interlocking pt. 2 by Patrick Golden	Load span 2-3 cars	1:00 at the GMC
Jan. 18, 2026	Meat Packing: Protos & Models - by Douglas Harding, MMR®	1 Illuminated Structure	2:00 at the GPL
Feb. 15, 2026	Railroads & the Natural Ice Industry by Bruce DeYoung	2-4 unit Odd Consist	1:00 at the GMC
Mar. 15, 2026	Revolutionizing Model Railroading with AI - by Pat Fleming	2 max Billboard Reefers	1:00 at the MPL
Apr. 19, 2026	TBA	A Kit-bashed structure	TBD
May 17, 2026	TBA	A Favorite Locomotive	TBD

*Location note: GMC = Gary Morava Center, Prospect Hts. - GPL = Glenview Public Library
New location >> MPL = Mt. Prospect Public Library >> <https://mppl.org/>

Happenings:

The picture on the right is of our display case at the Mt. Prospect Public Library. Thanks to Michael Hirvela, Superintendent, Denis Zamirowski, Assistant Superintendent and Jim Landwehr, Achievement Program Trainmaster for setting this display up for the division. The library loves it!



Other events:

ROCK RIVER VALLEY DIVISION MEET February 1 @ 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Paulson's Agriculture Museum of Argyle 6950 Belvidere Rd, Caledonia, IL

Contest: Open Loads Clinics: Tom McCabe on researching what isn't there anymore Tours: TBD

The **MAD CITY Train Show**, at the Alliant Energy Center, Madison, Wis., February 21-22, 2026

ROCK RIVER VALLEY TRAIN SHOW. Harlem HS, Alpine Road, Machesney Park, IL, March 21 & 22, 2026

ALL AMERICAN RAILROAD SHOW, Lyons Township HS Field house, 100 S. Brainard Ave, La Grange, IL, Saturday, March 28 only. DuPage Division sponsors this show.

For more details on these and other events, please visit the FVD Railroad Events webpage

<https://www.foxvalleydivision.org/fvd2016/rrevents.v2.html>



Midwest Region

Semaphore Content and Help Wanted

Interested in keeping the Semaphore alive? Send us your model or prototype pictures, stories, modeling tips, etc. to share with others in the hobby. We are also looking for an editor! Contact any officer with your interest at:

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

About the Fox Valley Division

If you receive this newsletter, you are an NMRA member & live in the Fox Valley Division area of the Midwest Region and of the National Model Railroad Association (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 130 members of varied ages and modeling ability levels are in the FVD. Almost all modeling scales are represented in our division. Subscriptions to the Semaphore newsletters are free. NMRA membership is available through the NMRA at:

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

2025-2026 FVD monthly meetings are held September through May on-line via the ZOOM virtual meeting technology & at various physical locations per the schedule in this issue. Each meeting features a clinic, modeling celebration of member projects, and information of interest to the membership. Outings, layout tours, and operating sessions may also be organized. 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:

<https://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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Regular meetings are held virtually via Zoom and in person at the Gary Morava Center generally from 1:00 until 4:00 PM per the schedule listed in this publication and on its website at:

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

Temporary Editor: Jim Osborn, MMR®

Assistant Editor: Michael Hirvela

Assistant Editor: Keith Dart

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<https://www.facebook.com/fvdmra/>

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Need to contact any BoD members? Click this link to:

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

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