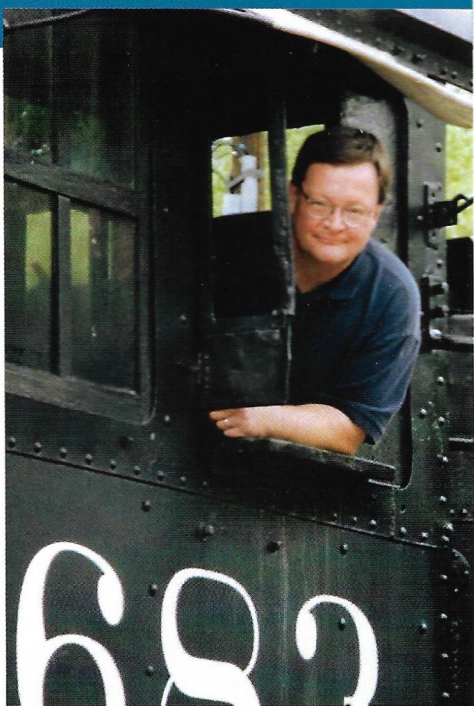


## MMR EARNED

### ALLEN MERTA EARNS MMR #459

**E**ver since I was a kid, I have been obsessed with trains. I'm an economic developer in Eastern Iowa. My dream is to build a really nice layout that is fun to operate and is a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

Like everyone whose biography appears in these pages, my interest in trains started when I was a child of seven or eight years old. My parents gave me an American Flyer S gauge train set for Christmas. Soon, I wasn't satisfied with watching that steam locomotive, two cars, and a caboose go around and around and around. I talked my dad into buying a 4x8-foot sheet of plywood. We painted it bright glossy green, nailed down the track, and away I went... watching that same train go around and around and around. We painted in a few roads, and I constructed out-of-scale structures using Lincoln Logs



and my Erector Set. Wow! Now I was getting somewhere! I collected Popsicle sticks

from the kids in the neighborhood and tried my hand at building more structures — my Lincoln Logs and Erector Set only went so far. The Popsicle stick buildings were a disaster!

One day I decided to make an electromagnet to be powered by the American Flyer transformer. I wrapped wire around a nail, connected it to the terminals, plugged in the transformer, and turned it on. Darn! It didn't work. Then the transformer began to smoke... a lot! I hustled to shut it off, take everything apart, and put the transformer in its rightful place on my layout. Damn! My train wouldn't run around and around and around! I was in big trouble, because that train set was a big investment for my parents at the time.

In college, I spent a lot of time in the periodicals room reading *Model Railroader*, but something seemed to be missing. I went to work for Patrick Lana (*NMRA MAGAZINE'S* bi-monthly N-Visible columnist), and he quickly rekindled my interest in trains and model railroading. His N-scale Cedar River & Iowa Central Railroad enthralled me. I thought to myself, this is really nice! (Don't let this go to your head, Pat!)

I started collecting locomotives and cars as I could afford them. I bought a Badger single-action airbrush for \$10 (this was the mid-1970s). I rigged up a makeshift paint

booth on top of our electric stove in the kitchen using newspapers, tape, and a cut-open cereal box to form the base. The range hood functioned as the vent and sucked the airborne paint fumes from the "paint booth." I weathered my pride and joy — my Athearn composite-side open hoppers decorated for the Burlington Route. That was my first unit train! We lived in Creston, Iowa. Creston had been a Burlington major division point, but the buildings were all gone by this time, except for the two-story brick depot. Burlington Northern used Creston as a crew-change point. Amtrak's *San Francisco Zephyr* came through every morning and late evening. I would pack the family into our little bright blue Ford Pinto (not the exploding gas tank version!) and sit down at the Amtrak station several nights a week to watch the train come in. My son, Ben, was a year old at the time; now he takes his son out to watch trains.

The next step in my professional career was Bismarck, North Dakota. I saw many Burlington Northern unit coal trains using the former Northern Pacific mainline. Oddly enough, my next-door neighbor modeled NP in N scale. He had a small, nice layout. That was my introduction to the Northern Pacific Railway!

I now live in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, my hometown. I'm building my dream layout where I'm modeling the NP on a "proto-lance" basis, and I'm having a great deal of fun with model railroading and my model railroading friends! My two sons and their families are close by (four grandchildren with two showing interest in trains... so far). Real railroads continue to interest me, and the very real CRANDIC, Iowa Interstate, Iowa Northern, and Canadian National operate in this area.

My oldest son, Ben, is also a model railroader and an NMRA member, and is working toward his Master Model Railroader designation. My father kept that old American Flyer S-gauge train set, and when he passed away, I passed it on to Ben. Ben's son — at four years old — is a model railroader and

a real "foamer." (Foamer: an avid hobbyist, somebody who is very devoted to a hobby, especially a model railroad enthusiast or railfan.) He enjoys train sets of different kinds, but we especially like to operate his Lionel *Polar Express*.

I have enjoyed my affiliation with the Eastern Iowa Division. I firmly believe everything happens at the Division-level, and the National and Regions' roles are to support the Divisions. I also firmly believe that what you get out of your Division and Region is directly related to what you put into them! Earning my MMR has taught me many things, challenged me, and improved my skills. I've gotten great advice and learned from others. I've made a lot of good friends and met a lot of great model railroaders. I'm proud to be called a Master Model Railroader.

*Allen earned the following certificates: Motive Power, Cars, Structures, Scenery, Chief Dispatcher, Volunteer, and Author.*