



GREGG CONDON EARNS MMR #537

**M**odel railroading is a great definitive part of who I am. At age two, I received a Lionel train set from my uncle John Plichta, who was a pioneer O-scaler and a great railfan movie-maker of the 1930s and 1940s. When visiting our home for dinner and upon hearing a train whistle a block away on the Milwaukee Road's Mineral Point Line, he'd pick me out of my high-chair and put me on his shoulders to step into the street to watch the train. I can't remember a time I wasn't a railfan! Uncle John and I shared the hobby for as long as he lived.

At age 11, I decided to quit playing with trains and be a serious scale model railroader. Like so many of us, I packed my Lionel away and started an HO scale layout. Unlike many of us, I never took a hiatus from the hobby. Neither cars, nor girls, nor school ever occasioned an interruption. I've been a subscriber to one or more model railroad magazines continually since 1958.

A serious railfan and model railroader from the start, I was the last passenger to step off a Milwaukee Road train in my hometown that far-away June day in 1958. I lost count of the number of times I rebuilt my small HO pike during my junior high and high school days; they were all skill-building experiences — and great fun.

During college, I had a shortage of both time and money, and the hobby had to slow down. At intervals, I'd reward myself with a trip to a hobby shop and buy what I could

afford — usually a Jordan automobile kit for a dollar. I still have three or four of them un-built, boxes darkly yellowed with age, and still marked \$1. I'll get to them; a model railroader's projects never end!

In adult life, I've built what I consider six good layouts. Two have been featured in *Great Model Railroads* (Kalmbach) in 2007 and 2013. Two of the layouts were HO<sub>n</sub>3, the remainder HO standard gauge; but I've built operating scenes in N and On30. In a few months, my wife and I will be moving to a new home with a basement designed for a major HO<sub>n</sub>3 layout with a smaller HO pike in a separate area. The dispatcher's office will look like a depot between crew lounge and train room.

For many years, I lived in an area where there were not many NMRA members. I was an NMRA member, but never went to meets because I didn't know anybody else who was going. Five years ago, I moved to the WinnebagoLand Division of the Midwest Region and quickly made friends with a great group of active NMRA members. Soon, I was attending all the meets — giving clinics at some — and then was elected Assistant Superintendent of the Division. Just for fun, I started entering models in the contests and won some first-place awards. It occurred to me that if I was doing good work, it would be appropriate to collect the Achievement Program Certificates for it.

My message: if you live in an area that is not NMRA active, make the effort to travel a ways to attend the nearest meets, and recruit new members to go with you. Now I know what I was missing earlier, and I regret it. Second, take part in the fun of pursuing the Achievement Program. It's not about snobbery or being better than somebody else; it's about being the best you can be and

being recognized for it. Third, it's incentive to grow and improve. Before I pursued the Achievement Program, there were things I thought I couldn't do — like scratchbuilding a three-way turnout. When I challenged myself, I discovered that I could master new skills. Taking the AP seriously made me a better modeler, and I had fun doing it. I am pleased to be an MMR — it's as important as any professional recognition I ever had.

In addition to the seven Certificates I did achieve, I would also have qualified for Dispatcher, but I never kept records about it, and that prompts one further bit of advice: go to the NMRA website and get familiar with the Achievement Program, and then keep records of what you are doing so you can document it later.

Model railroading has been a wonderfully enriching major focus of my life. The artistic dimension of it has greatly enhanced my enjoyment of the world around me as I consider “how many colors of green are in that tree,” or “how would I paint these clouds?” The skills I cultivated as a model railroader enabled me to become the builder of quite a number of dioramas for museums, and that is another satisfying way I can contribute to society.

Model railroading has been a great focal point for my natural interest in history. Seeking out the prototype has led to my most enjoyable vacation trips. Model railroading is a superb dimension of my relationship with my wife — she builds some of the structures and scenery — and it's one of our favorite conversation topics. What sheer delight for me to be driving along a highway next to a track and hear her say, “Red over yellow; we're going to see a meet.”

Operating sessions are my favorite aspect of the hobby and a wonderful way to actually experience railroading with a great group of friends. Most of my closest friends have come into my life through model railroading. The hobby — and the people — are very important to me; and in a final closing word: Thank you, Uncle John. 🚂

### AP Certificates - Greg Condon

Master Builder – Cars

Master Builder – Structures

Master Builder – Scenery

Master Builder – Prototype Models

Model Railroad Engineer – Civil

Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical

Model Railroad Author