



# The Signal

The Great Falls Model Railroad Club



VOLUME 27. ISSUE 8

JANUARY 2014



Member since June 1988

**NEXT MEETING**  
**January 16**  
**6:45 p.m.**

**NEXT MONTH**  
**Deadline for**  
**Febuary Issue**  
**January 31, 2014**

**MEMBERSHIP**  
**125**

### ATTENDANCE PRIZE

No one won the attendance prize this month. Maybe next meeting it will be YOU!

Will your name be drawn on **January 16**? You have to be present to win!

### **BOTTLES FOR BASICS**

- ◆ Total LAST YEAR
- ◆ \$363.85
- ◆ YEAR TO DATE:
- ◆ \$548.80
- ◆ THIS MONTH:
- ◆ \$41.00

## THE PANAMA CANAL RAILWAY

Owen Buck

Editor's Note: Last month Owen Buck was featured in "Meet the Members"

This past November my wife and I had the good fortune to spend a week in Panama. This was a "bucket list" trip; we try to do one each year. The main focus of this trip was bird watching and it included a ride on the Panama Canal Railway. Coincidentally, the January 2014 issue of Trains magazine, which arrived soon after we returned home, had an extensive article about the Panama Canal Railway.

The Panama Canal Railway, at 47.5 miles across the isthmus of Panama, is the shortest trans-continental railroad in the world. It runs from Colon, on the Caribbean (Atlantic) coast to Balboa Station, near Panama City on the Pacific coast. Its primary revenue source is transporting containers. During our visit we frequently saw long trains of double-stack articulated cars. Why is there a need for a railway running parallel to the famous shipping corridor, the Panama Canal? Because a ship arriving at one end of the canal might be carrying containers bound for multiple destinations. By unloading the containers onto the double-stack train, which takes them across the isthmus (a trip of only 75 minutes), the shipping company can avoid the passage fees for the canal itself. When the train arrives at the other side of the isthmus, the containers can be easily re-distributed onto multiple ships to match the import destinations.

Panama was originally a province of Colombia. When Colombia refused to grant rights to build a canal across its territory, President Theodore Roosevelt threw his support behind a separatist movement in the province. The U.S. immediately recognized the newly-independent nation of Panama, and in 1903 obtained favorable access rights. Construction of the canal began the following year.

The original Panama Railway (a 5-ft wide-gauge), constructed 50 years earlier in 1850, was profitable thanks to the California Gold Rush. Passengers would take a steamship to the Atlantic port of Colon, board the train for a "transcontinental" trip, and then take another steamship from the Pacific port of Panama City to the gold fields of California. The Panama Railway went bankrupt in 1877, after the U.S. had opened its own trans-continental railroad. When construction of the canal began in 1904, the U.S. acquired the Panama Railway. The railroad's infrastructure was upgraded and improved for the purpose of hauling away excavated dirt from the canal project. Once the canal had opened to shipping, however, the railway fell into disuse.

When sovereignty of the Canal Zone was returned to Panama in 1979, the U.S. left behind military housing and facilities. A 5-story radar tower on a mountain near the canal has been renovated into a lodge for "eco-tourists" where we stayed.

In 1998, the Panama Canal Railway was acquired by the Kansas City Southern Railroad and got a new lease on life. It now runs profitable intermodal freight and passen-

*(Continued on page 2)*

MEET THE MEMBERS

Norman Ness



(Continued from page 1)

ger services. Although many Panama citizens are now able to buy cars, the highway infrastructure has lagged far behind. The rush hour traffic jams on the main roads between towns, including even the four-lane toll highways, has to be seen to be believed! The Panama Railway, therefore, offers passenger service for commuters and tourists from one side of the isthmus to the other.

By Maurice Fortin

Norman Ness has been married to his wife Jean for 49 years. They have three children: Jon, Robin, and Gail. They also have six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren who are twins.

Norm retired as Director of Court Facilities for the State of Maine Court system in 2008. He was responsible for the construction, maintenance and operation of court facilities from York to Fort Kent. Prior to this position he was located in Auburn as a Regional Court Administrator for the District and Superior Courts in Androscoggin, Oxford and Franklin Counties. He began work for the court system in 1981 as a Regional Court Administrator for the District Courts in northern Maine and was located in Bangor. Norman is also the former Town Manager of Bethel.

Norman has been a member of the Great Falls Model Railroad Club for about 20 years. He joined the club and took the adult model railroad course while the club was meeting at the Merrill Hill School in Auburn.

His favorite model railroad scale is HO. He presently has the beginnings of a ten-foot by fifteen-foot railroad layout in his basement. His interests are Maine Central and Canadian National.

Last year he took the scratch building class from Ed and Brenda Leslie and really enjoys the process. Jerry Johnston, who also took the class, told me that Norman is very good at scratch building.

In addition to model railroading, Norman likes working around his yard.

We rode in a modern dome car with full amenities. The railroad causeway goes through a marsh, and from the dome car we were able to see many of Panama's fascinating birds in that habitat. I felt very fortunate to have been able to combine two of my interests into one trip!



## FUND-RAISING PROJECT

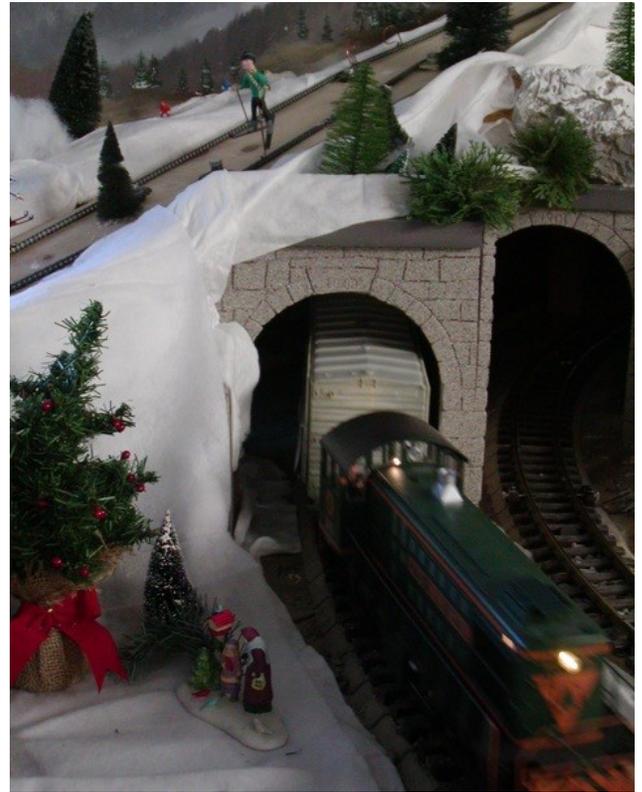
Paul Lodge

Keeping the Great Falls Model Railroad Club building functioning, costs about \$250 per club member annually. With dues of only \$30 per member, the extra \$220 needs to be made up in different ways. The model railroad shows, special events at the club, securing and selling surplus inventory, Utility Team, and Bottles for Basics help offset the difference between the dues and the financial needs of the club building.

Jerry Johnston has been inspired to suggest another fund-raising idea, a special raffle called "The Twelve Gifts of Christmas." Currently, the idea is to have twelve prizes, which might include HO locomotives from the club's inventory, \$50 gift certificates from Governor's Restaurant and Craft Mania, and a two-year club membership. The limited raffle will be restricted to 900 tickets, which will be sold at \$5 each or five for \$20. Winning tickets will be re-entered into the mix and can be selected again. That means everyone has twelve chances to win one of the prizes, and every person has a chance to win up to twelve of the prizes.

Club members would be given blocks of tickets which they could purchase or sell to others. Jerry Johnston is designing a pamphlet with pictures of the HO locomotives and an explanation of the raffle. Club members could show the pamphlet to others when they are trying to sell raffle tickets.

Every effort is made to help club members and our friends interested in model railroads enjoy our facility. Proceeds from this raffle will help to pay for the mortgage and the upkeep of the building.



## RAFFLE LAYOUT WINNER

Paul Lodge

On the last day of the ExTRAINaganza, the winning ticket for the raffle layout was drawn. Jeff Arthur of New Auburn won the layout for his ten-year-old son, Shane. Jeff works at the Walmart Distribution Center in Lewiston and enjoys golf for his recreation. In addition to trains, Shane likes to build with Lego blocks. He hopes to be an archeologist someday.

# December Minutes by Paul Lodge



## MINUTES OF DECEMBER 19, 2013 MEETING

More than forty club members and their guests attended this year's Christmas party on December 19. The evening started with a slide show produced by President Ed Leslie, which featured club activities since last month's meeting. The slides included club members at the Maine State Museum, the set up at the Woman's Literary Union in Auburn, the Belgrade movie night, the ExTRAINaganza, and a recent birthday party at the club.

After the Secretary's Report was approved as published in the Signal, Tom Coulombe gave the Treasurer's Report. Because of the major support of club members and the train show at the Auburn Middle School as well as the ExTRAINaganza, the financial burden has been lifted a bit. Tom said, "Now we can pay some bills!"

Once the Treasurer's Report was approved, Paul Lodge was asked to review some topics brought up at the December Executive Committee meeting. Jerry Johnston has proposed a "12 Gifts of Christmas" raffle. Twelve items will be available for the raffle. They may include HO locomotives, gift certificates from Governor's and Craft Mania, and a club membership. After each drawing, the winning ticket will be returned to the container and the person will have an opportunity to win another prize on the next drawing. One really lucky person could win all twelve prizes, and every ticket holder has twelve opportunities to win something. The tickets will be \$5 each or five for \$20. The limited raffle will be restricted to 900 tickets.

Jim Vatter suggested having a railroad game night at the club. He has several railroad-related games he would be willing to share. Paul Lodge explained the game night concept and asked club members what they thought would be the best day of the week to hold the special activity. Members suggested a Saturday or Sunday afternoon.

In an effort to help get the club on a better financial footing, the Power Team concept has been expanded to include the monthly water bill (\$30) in addition to the monthly electricity bill (\$150). The new Utility Team wall poster was displayed.

As club members pledge to cover the monthly costs for electricity and water, their names will be placed on the poster.

The meeting adjourned. A video Dick Clark had made of Ken Nettleship's G-gauge outdoor layout was shown while those in attendance got food and relaxed for the rest of the evening.



## BELGRADE MOVIE NIGHT



Club Christmas Party



## AN INVITATION TO GET MESSY

Larry Cannon

Bridges, abutments and dams have been constructed, the lake bottom is in place, bridge and dam sites are finalized, materials have been gathered, and new rock molds have been made. Tentative design features have been considered, and it is time to start placing scenery for the "Grand Canyon of Maine" on the HO layout.

The project will involve most of the peninsula area of the layout. Larry Cannon, Roger Plummer and John Visco will lead various parts of the project with other people assuming roles as they become familiar with the development concepts and construction techniques.

The project is time consuming and will ultimately involve placing, coloring and detailing about one hundred square feet of rock castings plus other scenery. Some of the construction will involve techniques not used on the layout before. For those who participate there will be a number of learning experiences and the opportunity to gain some artistic as well as modeling skills.

It is expected that the whole project may not be complete until 2015. Quality and visual appeal are more important than working to a deadline.

There are still some design considerations to address and group decision-making will be strongly appreciated. Built with the assistance of a number of club members, this should be a visual highlight of the layout. Because this will be a group effort, there will be a number of people who will be able to maintain the scenery and visual appeal of this part of the layout for many years to come. They will have the training to know how to repair any future damage to this important feature.

We welcome your participation. Please contact Larry Cannon, Roger Plummer or John Visco for more details on what we plan to accomplish.



## BELGRADE MOVIE NIGHT

Ken Nettleship

On Friday, December 13, several members of the Great Falls Model Railroad Club participated in the second annual Train Night at the Belgrade Community Center. The theme of the evening was "The Polar Express." Travis Johnson and his girlfriend Anna arrived with a truck and trailer packed to the hilt--and I mean packed! Nice job, Travis! Nancy and Bryce Weeks immediately started to help unload, and before long the HO modules were set up.

Dick Clark and Ken Nettleship had the luxury of arriving a little earlier and went to work on the G-Gauge Division display. We had two 4-foot circles and an 11-foot circle. Buildings, vehicles and figures as well as "snow" and trees were added to the display to create a Christmas mood.

When doors opened to the public at 6 p.m., the little ones and their parents started to appear. The gym area was divided in half. One side contained the wonderful HO modules that Travis had brought, a very nice display set up by some members of the Maine 3 Railers and the G-Gauge Christmas scene. On the other side of the gym were the chairs where people sat to watch "The Polar Express." The lights in the gym were dimmed for the movie, enhancing the many lights on each of the layouts and adding to the ambience. Popcorn, candy canes and, of course, a visit from Santa Claus helped make this a very festive occasion for the children and parents alike.

Dick Clark mentioned that parents and children would come and sit by the track to watch the trains. The little ones had a great time finding Mickey Mouse and Tinker Bell in the Christmas coach and were excited to see them.

Nancy noticed that the one thing missing was the opportunity for the younger attendees to have hands on trains. She and Bryce have already made plans for next year to bring the children's table and wooden trains along with the train rug. Her emphasis will be on channeling young energy towards creative train play.

As the clock struck 8:00, the crowds headed out and the layouts were dismantled. Being part of this event and observing both the setting up and taking down processes was very impressive. One can't help being proud to be a part of a hobby and a club that has such dedication to spreading joy to others. Despite the 6 degree temperature outdoors, the hearts of all involved in this really special event for this small community were warm!



## THE GREAT FALLS MODEL RAILROAD CLUB

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### An Educational Foundation

#### MEETING POSTPONEMENTS

If severe weather threatens on a meeting night, Tom Coulombe will notify local television stations that the meeting will be postponed until the following week. This would make it the fourth Thursday of the month instead of the third. Club members who receive the newsletter via e-mail will be notified by e-mail about the postponement.

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### THE SIGNAL

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## Upcoming Events



**January 9**, Board Meeting

**January 16**, Membership Meeting

**January 18**, Operating Session

**January 25 - 26**

West Springfield, MA

Amherst Railway Society Railroad Show

**February 1**, Operating Session

**February 11**, First Model Railroad Class

**February 13**, Board Meeting

**February 15**, Augusta Train Show

**February 20**, Membership Meeting

**February 22**, Operating session

**September 7-10, 2016**, 36th National Narrow Gauge Convention at Augusta, Me.

