

Guest Editorial, Reflections from the North Woods of Wisconsin

As we understand it, the NMRA Achievement Program is an educational platform rather than a competition. True, many of the projects appear under contest rules and are compared with other entries for good looks and dependable operation...but the underlying reason for the Achievement Program is to promote skill and enjoyment within the avocation. This means many things to us, not the least of which is satisfaction in producing an action layout upon which everything works as expected. It does not matter if the layout is a length of track and some rolling stock, or a filled three car garage annexing the spare bedroom off the living room controlled by a system of interconnected computers and a couple hundred miles of wiring bossed by masters of the trade and directed by an offsite dispatcher via Skype. The point being if it works, it is a joy in which to immerse oneself!

Since we are driven by the enjoyment inherent in the various aspects of model railroad building and operation, when it isn't performing then that portion of the fun is absent and we are left to rely on the enthusiasm offered in building, rebuilding, fixing, repairing, replacing and just digging in and finding out why these obstinate things refuse to bend to our will. And here is where the Achievement Program shows dividends:

We gain experience in setting up a model railroad and getting it to work to a certain point of satisfaction. We gain more experience when rolling stock doesn't roll, power units don't power up and tracks don't...well, track... and we have to shine some light on the problem and discover what is going wrong. And then fix it. Local clubs help us share this astounding knowledge with each other. NMRA supplies a standards framework from which we are able to learn a language of applied skill held in check by those important standards we have accepted. And in this very lattice of standards learned over years of trial and error, we are now able to begin the ultimate process of fine tuning everything!

Unfortunately, this process sometimes is misunderstood and is thought to be a case of those in the know showing off to those still in the dark. This is not so. Our communication with one another must be respectful, kind, supportive, introspective, illuminating and above all absolutely enthusiastically given solely for the purpose of sharing the wealth of knowledge that in the end, give us the enjoyment we all hope for in our chosen hobby, avocation and challenge.

To make this work on a universal level, it is necessary that every level of achievement be met with acceptance regardless of the condition of the offering. And then carefully taken apart (literally or metaphorically) and examined to discover what would make it better. This to our way of thinking is what the Achievement Program is about.

It is not about limiting the resources available to each project, or withholding critical information until the last minute, or posing a pons asinorum* for those submitting effort, but in finding ways that raise the project to a level of uniqueness in the eyes of the person or group passing some form of judgment on the quality of both operation and appearance. If we do this, we insure the participation of existing members and open bigger doors to those still looking in the windows.

Bob Lake Member #147088 12/15/2013

* pons asinorum (a problem that severely tests the ability of an inexperienced person)