

## BOB REID EARNS MMR #534

**M**y first train was an old alternating current steamer that ran around the Christmas tree and had one of those 1930s reversing units in the tender. You pressed a button to do the Forward/Neutral/Reverse thing similar to the Lionel E units. My dad loved it; me not so much. Dad gave it to me when I was old enough. I liked it even less then, so I asked for a big train set the next Christmas. I received an AC Gilbert steamer and immediately went to work creating an empire in the basement.

The 4x8 wasn't large enough, so Dad had a carpenter friend expand it with leaves on each side to 5x9 — a modest empire to be sure, but it ran very well until I decided to create a reversing section like my Lionel buddies had. Hmm... not so good.

My folks played duplicate Bridge once a month with friends from the neighborhood. It was a round robin affair. One night, when the group was at our house, one of the guys wandered downstairs to see my "empire." He pretended to be suitably impressed and proceeded to describe his railroad to me. The Huntingdon Valley Central was an around-the-room HO scale passenger layout that filled his basement and even snuck through a hole in the wall to run into the garage. He had three A-B-B-A F-unit sets and dozens of passenger cars all neatly lettered for the HVC. When I saw it I was hooked.

I had switched to HO by then, and my new benchwork started to fill one wall of the basement. I repainted passenger cars and not so neatly lettered them, and I developed a timetable to run them by. Oh boy!

I built one of those old Athearn rubber band drive F units to power the pike. I quickly discovered it made a big difference which way you strung the darn rubber bands around the drive rod. Thus began a career, albeit haphazard, in model railroad-ing that has lasted to this day.

College, family, and then work intervened. It seemed like there was always something. After much moving, building, tearing down, and moving again, I finally wound up with a basement that I had built to my specifications to facilitate my "empire." Of course, there was a house on top of the basement, but it was clearly not the star of the show.

I opened one of my first conversations with the builder with the specs for the basement and then had to explain to her that the purpose of the house was "to keep the rain off my trains." The house was finished



in 2003. Within six months, I had the double-decked benchwork installed around the basement walls. Unfortunately, my job with the Treasury Department required long hours and many airline miles to speak at financial conferences both here and abroad, so progress beyond that point was slow. I retired in 2008, and at long last I was able to devote myself to creating that "empire" I dreamed about as a kid.

My railroad empire is now nearing completion. Benchwork not only goes around the wall, but also occupies a spiral peninsula that fills the room. The environment is fully carpeted, and more than 35 light fixtures have been installed in the drop ceiling. The fully scenicked mainline is 720 feet long. More than 600 cars and 300 structures populate the layout, which is set in 1925. A group of experienced and dedicated operators run intricate op sessions 20 times per year. My childhood dream is now a tangible product you can see and touch and most importantly have *fun* with!

My modeling career took a very fortunate turn in 2007 when I was invited to join the Chesapeake Trainmasters Club — a round robin operations group. I finally was enjoying some real fast clock operations sessions and was being introduced to folks that had decades of experience. It was at this time I started to think perhaps I should look into the Achievement Program more seriously. I had built and dismantled at least two dozen layouts — a couple even had scenery on

them. I thought perhaps I could somehow manage to meet the requirements that still seemed very daunting.

I am fond of saying the most difficult thing about any kit is opening the box. By that I mean that the first step is often the hardest. With that in mind, I began to work on one Achievement area at a time, and over time was able to stumble my way to this point.

I certainly would not have arrived at the MMR without my wonderful association with the Chesapeake Trainmasters. They have provided me with many friends, fabulous advice, and operational experience I couldn't have received anywhere else. I would be remiss if I didn't thank them all and tell them how important to my modeling efforts they have become. I would not have achieved this much-treasured status as a Master Model Railroader were it not for all the assistance they have provided me.

Finally, my most important thank you needs to be said to my longtime companion and fiancée Patti McNeese. We are always together. She travels with me in our RV, sometimes for months at a time and often to model railroad conventions and layout tours. I am a very lucky person.

Although the layout has reached the stage where all the plywood is covered by scenic material and the track is all ballasted, I am still coming up with new projects to work on — it seems a career model railroader's work is never done.