

NMRA BULLETIN

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ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

NMRA AP CERTIFICATE REPORT NOVEMBER 2024

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MMR® #780 Dave Adams, San Jose, California

MMR® #781 Jack Dziadul, Sanford, North Carolina

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AP QUESTIONS: If you have questions about the AP program or requirements, start with your local or Region AP manager. If you still have questions, contact Ray Persing at achiev@nmra.org.

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BENJAMIN MAGGI

EARNs

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #776

My start in the hobby is a common tale, beginning with a train set at a young age and lots more trains in various scales from my parents over the years. My grandparents loved to take me to the train station to see trains come and go, and one of my favorite times was when the family rode a steam-powered excursion railroad on Father's Day. My family encouraged an addiction that continues to this day.

After college, I moved to a new city and joined a live steam (7.25-inch gauge) club. A digital camera and a willingness to write led me to author a half-dozen or so articles on various aspects of the 1:8 scale trains, including prototypical operation with car cards and the nuances of various steam locomotive designs. When I realized I could use these toward my Model Railroad Author certificate, I decided to try for my MMR. I quickly earned the Model Railroad Author Certificate, but my journey stalled for a while since I only had a tiny home layout, which was still in the plywood stage.

When we bought a new home years later, I based my next HO layout on the Delaware & Hudson in Albany, New York, in 1984. I made sure to incorporate as many Model Railroad Engineer – Civil and Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical elements as possible to earn both certificates simultane-

ously. Those elements included installing a turntable, superelevating curves, and adding block control, even though I didn't really need them. The wiring wasn't so difficult until I realized about an hour before my layout was going to be reviewed for compliance with the requirements that I had a short circuit somewhere. That led to a frenzied search for the culprit.

Scratchbuilding track scared me because everything seemed fiddly and small, but when I found a stash of LGB track buried away, I decided to handlay a turnout using this large Code 332 rail based on an article in a magazine. I had to learn some new skills along the way, like how to handle a blowtorch without burning down the house, but I managed. Spiking rail is fun when you can easily handle the spikes. A diamond crossing based on a Fast Tracks template and a gantlet track soon followed, and before I knew it, I had my two certificates.

Around this time, local modeler Bob Hamm (MMR #322) offered to teach classes at his house on how to develop modeling skills. I jumped at the opportunity and started scratchbuilding an O-scale D&H bobber caboos, which I selected for its simplicity and larger size, making it easier to form parts. It took a year or so to finish, but it was my first scratchbuilt car. Bob taught me a lot along the way but most of all he stressed making the parts yourself if possible. He was right. It was fun, led to more merit points, and allowed me to replicate the prototype more closely.

I decided I wanted the challenge of scratchbuilding all eight cars instead of modifying commercial kits. But that would be a lot of work, so I searched for something easy to build. I found the NMRA Lone Star Region's website, which has excellent tutorials on scratchbuilding flatcars. I used those instructions to build a pair of cars with custom loads. With those done, I wanted to push myself, so I took what I learned on how to build frames and made a Borden "butterdish" tank car with a styrene-over-wood-former body; a B&M steel milk express car complete with fabricated plug doors, corrugated ends, and paneled roof; and a short line Maintenance-of-Way boxcar/flatcar. Jumping scales again, I built a Great Western Railway cattle wagon in OO scale and a Maine two-foot gauge ice cream dairy reefer in On2. This dabbling in O scale would come back to haunt me later on.

I insisted that Bob Hamm and another mentor, Kevin Surman (MMR #528), conduct the merit evaluation on my cars. They are very skilled modelers but also very tough, and I knew if they passed my cars, I must have done something right. All eight earned merit awards, and my Master Builder – Cars certificate was done.

That winter, I told my friend Irwin Nathanson (another accomplished modeler) that I wouldn't work on Master Builder – Structures because my current HO layout wasn't the right place to put them. Then, I realized I could build each structure on a cheap wooden base and set them in my display case, which gave me the freedom to do lots of different things, and I was off to the races. I made a list of things I wanted to try: full interior detailing, lighting effects, a farm scene to pay homage to my wife's family, several wood structures (I prefer working in styrene), a model based on a local industry, a structure in N scale so that I could appreciate how much of a challenge it is to work in the smaller scale, a church to pay homage to my Christian faith, a structure based on plans by noted draftsman Harold Russell, MMR®, etc. I also decided all 12 would be scratchbuilt but wouldn't superdetail them all. Then, I combed through magazines for plans and drew up others myself.

I started with what I considered the hardest building first: a brick warehouse with multiple levels and angles and a huge

billboard sign painted on one wall. It was based on a picture in a railroad book and still existed near my house. It took several years to build and barely squeaked by merit evaluation (it was too modern and “simple”), but that was good to know for the future.

A wooden house on a hill; a rustic tarpaper shack; a milk station; a fully detailed gas station with interior; a wooden coal trestle; a church; an “uncovered” railroad bridge; a big red barn with full interior detail; an N-scale Maintenance-of-Way station; a hobby shop complete with fiber optic and LED lighting effects; and a wood and steel sandhouse based on my favorite short line followed.

Unfortunately, I only earned three merit awards, but two more were very close, and Bob and Kevin offered excellent suggestions on how to improve them. This was done to get me to five merit awards. But I knew I needed to build one more structure that would “wow” them, and it was obvious they loved old wooden buildings. Hence, I decided the Hamm & Surman Lumber Company needed a new wooden board-by-board engine house for its steam locomotive No. 13 (my 13th structure). It worked, and I had my certificate.

My Chief Dispatcher certificate was possible thanks to the efforts of Doug Dederick, who organizes “OpTober” operating sessions on various local layouts every year. Getting enough credits took me five years, but they slowly added up. One stumbling block was that I didn’t have a home layout on which I could serve as Dispatcher, and you need those hours. Who would open their layout to a complete newbie and let them Dispatch it for 10 hours? My friend John Valachovic did; without his help, I would never have earned it.

My last certificate was Association Volunteer, and it was perhaps the most rewarding as it involved me assisting with my local Division and at the National level with train shows, open houses, and other events. I met a lot of great people, and interacting with the public who wanted to learn more about model trains and the NMRA as an organization was very enjoyable. I never thought I would talk with NMRA President Gordy Robinson, MMR, about British railways and other such things (another interest of mine).

The MMR process was a lot of fun and pushed me to learn new skills. Wiring, soldering (torching?), scratchbuilding craftsman-style structures, researching and

drawing scale plans, hand-laying track... all of it was because of this program. One of the only good things about the pandemic was that I had a lot more free time to work on this.

I worked in multiple scales (N, HO, OO, On2, O, G, and 1:8) to accomplish the certificates. Most of my builds are online on my blog, which serves as a diary of my efforts and may help someone in the future learn things to do (and not do). I also discovered a love for superdetailing and building larger models, and my new layout is O-scale “Hi-rail” with three-rail track because of this. My wonderful wife has been so supportive of my hobbies and encouraged me during my MMR process to keep going. My toddler son also loves my trains and is already becoming a model railroader himself. It is a really fun hobby!

Certificates Earned
Benjamin Maggi, MMR® #776

Model Railroad Author
Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical
Model Railroad Engineer – Civil
Master Builder – Cars
Master Builder – Structures
Chief Dispatcher
Association Volunteer

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WILLIAM E. BOTKIN

EARNs

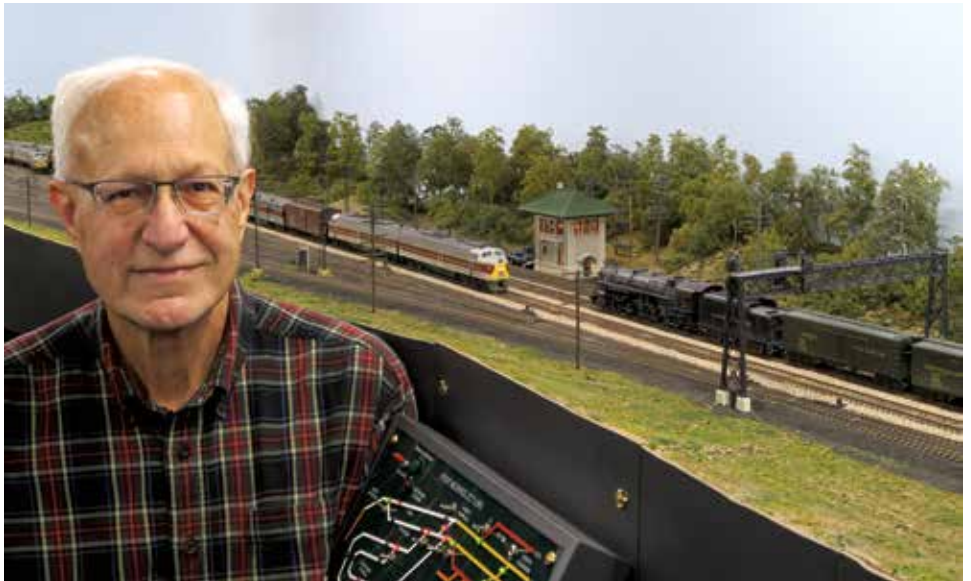
MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #778

Like many modelers, my interest in trains predated any thoughts about model railroading by many years. Very early in my life, my dad took me to the Lackawanna Morristown, New Jersey, station at age three to watch trains on Saturday afternoons. At that time, a local milk and express train was hauled by a 4-6-2 steam locomotive. In addition, on a typical Saturday afternoon, we saw electric MUs, the diesel-powered *Twilight Limited* and Lackawanna's premier train — "Phoebe Snow." It wasn't until several years later that I got my first HO trains, which included a Mantua 0-6-0 Docksider switcher and a Revell Union Pacific SW7, along with a few Varney freight cars with Mantua couplers.

By the time I was a teenager, I had a very modest layout built on a ping-pong table and saved up to buy my first brass locomotive — a United/PFM AT&SF 2-8-4 for \$49.95. Though I did have an affinity for the Lackawanna Railroad, I bought an eclectic assortment of equipment. When I went to college, I lost interest in model railroading and spent my spare time pursuing my interest in photographing trains around the U.S. and, later, worldwide.

It wasn't until 20 years later, in 1986, I became interested in model railroading again in a most unlikely place: sitting on a rock in Crozier Canyon waiting to photograph Santa Fe trains with my wife, Kate, and a good friend, Victor Hand. Victor was a lifelong New York Central modeler with a batch of model magazines to occupy time while waiting for trains. I had nothing better to do, and after looking through a few magazines, I realized the hobby had vastly changed since I was a teenager. The most significant change was in the level of detail available on R-T-R rolling stock and kits. Companies like InterMountain, Red Caboose, Lifelike Proto 2000, and Atlas offered highly detailed cars, and locomotives no longer had cast-on details. Also, DCC was coming onto the scene, making operations much more realistic.

I was so captivated by the equipment that I began buying one of everything I was interested in — mainly freight cars from the transition era, which I thought



might be interesting to model. Within a few years, I decided to model a specific railroad, era, and location as accurately as possible. Growing up in New Jersey and spending much time photographing the Erie Lackawanna, I decided to model the steam-to-diesel transition era on the Lackawanna, 1952–1953. One summer during college, I was hired out on the Erie Lackawanna as a towerman and was assigned to Port Morris Junction in north-central New Jersey. The location was the junction of the double-track Hoboken–Buffalo main line, the old main line that wandered across northwestern New Jersey, and the bucolic Sussex Branch. Also, there was a large classification yard and engine terminal. Based on that, I decided to model Port Morris Jct., the yard, engine terminal, and a small portion of the Sussex Branch.

When I designed my layout, I wasn't really into operations, so I failed to include staging capacity in the plans — big mistake. Also, when I built my layout, I wasn't tied into local modelers, which came much later, so the layout was basically a one-person construction job. My primary resources were *Model Railroader* and *Railroad Model Craftsman*, plus my friend Victor in Maine, who was building a huge New York Central layout. Working on my own, I did learn many new skills such as benchwork, electrical, track laying, and painting with an airbrush.

In 2008, a friend suggested I visit the not-yet-open Greeley Freight Station Museum (now called the Colorado Model Railroad Museum). Dave Trussell, the owner, was a gracious host, showing us around

the huge 5,000-square-foot HO layout soon to be open to the public. I asked if I could help out, and soon, I became a regular volunteer, ultimately volunteering more than 3,000 hours over several years. While it was fun to operate on this huge layout, the real benefit was meeting other modelers, some of whom had or operated on large layouts along the Denver Front Range. Once I got into operations, I was hooked, and now I operate on various layouts in the area, along with my wife, Kate.

In addition to meeting other modelers at the museum, I gained new skills, including dispatching and weathering rolling stock. Over several years volunteering at the museum, I weathered over 100 of their locomotives and later wrote an article for *RMC* about locomotive weathering techniques.

It was 2011 when I joined the NMRA and learned about the Achievement Program (AP). At the time, I figured I could at least get the AP Award for dispatching since I had dispatched a lot at the museum on their 1980s CTC machine and on several other layouts. So that was AP Award number one. Then, since I had authored numerous articles in various magazines, including *RMC* and "Locomotive and Railway Preservation," AP Award number two was easy, with only the documentation of published articles necessary. I achieved those first two awards in 2017. No other award seemed within reach at that point, given where I was on my layout. Most of the trackwork and electrical work was complete, but there was no scenery, and only a few structures had been started.

When COVID hit in early 2020, it was just the incentive I needed for my modeling work. Local op sessions ceased for two years, and I put my energy into some serious work on my layout. Since I model a specific railroad, location, and era, all the railroad-related structures had to be scratchbuilt — something I had never done before. With encouragement from my friend and mentor, Victor, I began work on structures, ultimately scratchbuilding three stations, a coaling trestle, a coal dock, a turntable, and a water tank, plus kitbashing several other buildings. That work earned me the AP Award for Structures in 2023.

Next up was scenery, something I had put off for years. For me, scenery was a black box. While I am very detail-oriented and can follow plans and instructions easily, scenery was more creative without instructions. Even weathering, while creative, I could follow prototype photos to simulate various weathering patterns.

I spent a lot of time reading articles and booklets about scenery and studying scenery on the various layouts I was operating on, but there is nothing like just jumping in and doing it! I tend to overthink things, so it was a slow start, but it went fairly fast once I got the basic techniques down. Ballasting track was one of those tasks that did take a long time, but working away at it in sections got me through the process. My scenery AP Award came in 2023. Four down and three to go!

Next up were the AP awards for Electrical and Civil. Since my layout was essentially complete, I had already installed a working signal system that used relays and diodes and working crossing gates with flashers. The only missing piece to get the Electrical Certificate was having a rail crossing, which wasn't part of my track plan because none existed in the area I was modeling. When I understood that all the track components did not need to be part of my layout, I incorporated a 90-degree crossing for the Electrical Certificate and two other separate scratchbuilt track elements for Civil on a separate Homasote board.

According to the AP requirements for Civil, using the Fast Tracks templates to scratchbuild track work is allowed. I used the Fast Tracks templates to build a turnout, crossover, and 90-degree crossing. Thus the 90-degree crossing would serve both for the Civil and Electrical certificates. Since my friend Victor was also going for his MMR, we shared the cost of the Fast Tracks templates and filing jigs.

I had never scratchbuilt any trackwork but found the process using the Fast Tracks tools to be straightforward and rewarding. The first turnout took an afternoon to build, but the next ones were completed in a few hours. When I decided to build a 90-degree crossing, I thought that would be easier than, say, a 30 or 60-degree crossing due to the straight angles. This thought turned out to be a mistake, as the 90-degree crossing was much more difficult due to the tiny pieces of rail for the frogs that needed to be cut precisely and soldered to the PC ties. With the elements for my Electrical and Civil certificates complete, they were evaluated and verified in the summer of 2024, so I received my fifth and sixth AP Awards.

One of the AP certificates I needed to achieve MMR status was either scratchbuilding rolling stock or locomotives. I knew I would never attempt to scratchbuild a locomotive, but rolling stock might just be achievable. Since the requirement included scratchbuilding at least four cars with each having 90-plus percent scratchbuilt parts, I decided against steel cars or cars with steel ends, which would have a lot of commercial parts. I figured I could manage an all-wood car with available styrene sheets and strips, plus some wood to form the basis of the car. Since I did not need more wood boxcars in my roster, I built four work cars based on drawings in a reprinted Lackawanna equipment diagram book. While I did not have any actual photos of three of the four cars, I could use existing wood house cars as a guide. One of the cars was a milk car that had been

converted into a work car, and I had brass models of the milk cars as a basis to work from, plus actual plans.

Though each car was different, I set up an assembly line, working first on the interior structure using wood pieces, then on the underframes, roofs, and finally, the sides and ends. I did use some commercial parts, mainly the doors and windows. Couplers, trucks, and air brake parts are exempt from the parts count, which helped. While I had never scratchbuilt any rolling stock before, I found the process challenging and enjoyable; plus, I ended up with four pieces of Lackawanna work equipment that I probably would never have had in my fleet had it not been for the Achievement Program. My AP certificate for Cars (rolling stock) came in October 2024, and my MMR shortly after that.

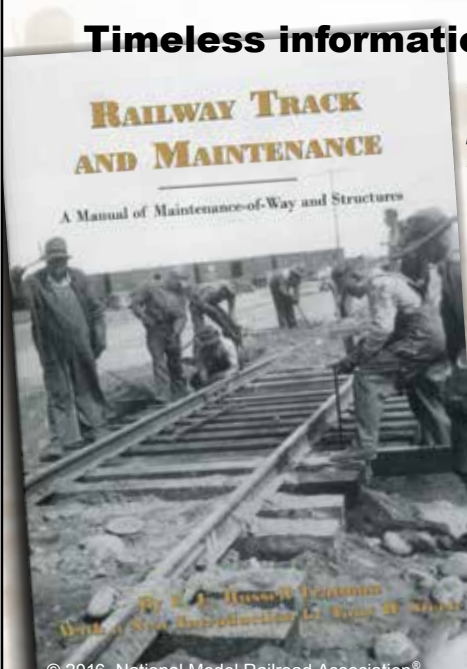
Overall, I found the AP and MMR program challenging and a great learning experience that enhanced and added new skills to my model railroading abilities.

Thanks to our Rocky Mountain Region AP Chair, Gary Myers, for organizing the evaluations and the local NMRA volunteers for participating.

**Certificates Earned
William E. Botkin, MMR® #778**

- Chief Dispatcher**
- Model Railroad Author**
- Master Builder – Structures**
- Master Builder – Scenery**
- Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical**
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JACK DZIADUL

EARNs

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #781

My getting started in the model railroading hobby fits the usual pattern of youthful starter layouts interrupted by college, career, and raising a family. But each of us has our own story that adds color to those incremental steps along our journey. Here is mine.

I received an American Flyer train set one Christmas that I set up in the basement on top of a ping-pong table. But, just one year later, my younger brother, David, received an HO train set. Since we could fit a lot more track and downtown Plasticville onto the ping-pong table, the American Flyer was boxed up, never to be seen again.

The HO layout grew by a boxcar or structure or two each birthday and Christmas, assisted with a bit of lawn mowing money spent at a hobby shop for good measure. That layout, along with cousin Ed's Lionel empire, kept us entertained on rainy summer days and cold winter Saturdays. Divvy up some game-board play money and we young capitalists created our own version of Monopoly.

The prototype was not to be ignored. Ed and I were quite into baseball. Fortunately for us, Boston & Maine's Eastern Route was adjacent to the ball fields of Ipswich, Massachusetts. There were no batter or pitcher time clocks in those days, so we always paused to watch local freights going to Portsmouth or heading back to Boston, Massachusetts. And we could keep time by the "Buddliner" schedule as those short consists flew by.

It would not be unusual for Ed and me to spend a Saturday exploring Boston. A B&M RDC was just 60 cents each way. Lunch at Joe & Nemo's was affordable (15 cents for chocolate milk and a dime for a hot dog). After a morning of exploring Boston, a bleacher seat at Fenway Park was ours for just 50 cents.

David joined Ed and I for one of our excursions. We made our way to Lynn to explore some sidings near the passenger depot. One lonely boxcar with an open door beckoned us to "climb right on in."



So, of course we listened and climbed on up. Much to our chagrin (er, panic) there was a jolt, then the car started to move. During our 10- to 15-minute journey, we wondered if we would be killed on our way to Chicago, or when the police brought us back to our parents. But we lucked out. A switcher just moved us to a different track, uncoupled us, then went on its way never the wiser that three passengers got a free ride. Yes, God does look out for fools.

Fast-forward to April 2005 when my wife and I moved to North Carolina. An internet search led me to the Carolina Piedmont Division (CPD) of the Mid-Eastern Region (MER). I met some very nice and knowledgeable model railroaders. This was really what brought me from basic train sets and accessories and taught me what model railroading as an adult hobby was all about.

Since CPD was hosting the MER convention that year, I had the opportunity to do my bit part with some volunteer work. That was followed by more volunteer work at the NMRA 2006 National Convention in Philadelphia. There was a call for apprentice contest judges, so I signed up. What an eye-opener to see so many expertly built models close-up. That and layout tours were very inspirational; a bit intimidating, but inspirational. Accumulating time unit credits for the

Association Volunteer was actually quite easy. I just had to keep track of activities I would have done anyway.

One of my early mentors was Dave Lynam, MMR®. Before Dave moved to Tennessee, he handed over the editorial reins to the newsletter to me. That led me to do more article writing. The Division articles and clinic presentations at every level allowed me to accumulate the points needed for Model Railroad Author.

I learned model railroad operations by signing up for callboards at several conventions and local operations weekends. Those hours, plus operations on Bruce Faulkner's N-scale and Jack Frame's HO-scale layouts, were my path to Chief Dispatcher. A couple of stints as Director-At-Large of the MER earned me the Association Official certificate. Four Achievement Certificates were now in hand without using any glue or paint.

In 2019, MER President Kurt Thompson, MMR®, encouraged us to achieve Master Model Railroader® status in time for the 2021 75th Anniversary NMRA National Convention. I saw that as an achievable goal. So, the Master Builder – Scenery and Master Builder – Structures certificate boxes got checked in 2021. But I stalled out on certificate number seven. It would take me three more years to check the Master Builder – Cars box.

NMRA National AP Manager Ray Persing suggested that my MMR® journey article include some focus on my involvement with giving back to the hobby. That was a great suggestion, and what follows will hopefully inspire others to step forward with active engagement. Within the Carolina Piedmont Division, I have served on the Board of Directors as Clerk; have been the newsletter editor and continue as a proofreader; present one or two live clinics each year; have organized many prototype excursions, factory tours, and home layout open houses; assist with building layouts; and host a monthly lunch for 15 to 20-plus members.

At the Mid-Eastern Region, I have served on the Board of Directors, co-chaired two conventions, been newsletter editor and continue as a proofreader, serve on the Nominating Committee, and am the Clinics Coordinator providing clinic assistance to other conventions. I typically present one or two clinics at MER conventions. At the National level, I was *NMRA MAGAZINE* proofreader for two years and have been a clinic presenter.

Outside the NMRA, I contribute to the hobby as an active volunteer with the Boston & Maine Railroad Historical Society, which includes the position of Editor of its *Modelers Notes* publication, among other responsibilities.

Many have pushed and pulled me over the Master Model Railroader finish line. Hands-on clinics by Martin Brechbiel, MMR, and Clint Hyde were quite helpful, as were Martin's many presentations on MMR Jim Kellow's "New Tracks Modeling" webcasts and his numerous articles archived on the Potomac Division's website. The experienced team of our Division evaluators led by AP Chairman Vic Bitleris, including Charlie Rausch (MMR®), Gene Sing (MMR®), and Bill Hanley, provided much coaching that improved my modeling. Joe Walters, MMR®, and Dave Chance also encouraged me along my journey.

Certificates Earned
Jack Dziadul, MMR® #781

Model Railroad Author
Association Volunteer
Chief Dispatcher
Association Official
Master Builder – Structures
Master Builder – Scenery
Master Builder – Cars

2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTIONS

In February, we will be holding our 2025 Board of Directors Elections. The following positions are up for election: At-Large World-Wide Director, Atlantic District Director, and Western District Director. The following candidates have been moved forward and will be on the ballot for 2025:

ATLANTIC DISTRICT DIRECTOR

Alain Kap

Jonathan Small

AT-LARGE WORLD WIDE DIRECTOR

Martyn Jenkins

WESTERN DISTRICT DIRECTOR

Lee Calkins

Lowell Didas

Bob Ginger

Mike Mackey

All voting-eligible members worldwide will vote for the At-Large World-Wide Director.

Some voting-eligible members will also vote for the Director for their district. Ballot packages are designed specifically for your district. Your ballot package will include candidate statements, the No Campaigning Policy, and the ballot. As we have for the last few years, the ballot will not be published in the magazine. Candidate statements will also be posted in the members-only section of the website.

All voting-eligible members worldwide with an email address on file will be invited to vote electronically through Electionbuddy, a secure online voting system. Your election invitation should arrive around February 1 and the election will close on March 1. All voting-eligible members worldwide who do not have an email address on file will receive a paper ballot via postal mail. Your ballot should arrive in late January. Completed paper ballots must be postmarked no later than March 1.

Do not be alarmed if you learn that one of your friends has received their ballot when you have not. Since the ballots are being distributed from different locations and in different manners, the ballots will most certainly arrive at their destinations at different times. Please take the time to vote, and thank you for being a member of the NMRA.

Thank you to all the members who have submitted their names for consideration!

Mike Cummings, Secretary NMRA