

Relations with Special Interest Groups

PCR is very strong in supporting SIG programs and as the OPSIG regional coordinator; I've been active in organizing an annual LDSIG/OPSIG meet. For the last 4 years PCR has joined as a sponsor making it the PCR/LD/OP SIG meet and this meet (bye week between playoffs and Super Bowl) has drawn over 100 attendees. PCR has provided administrative support, video projectors, and insurance coverage. The meet consists of a day of clinics and panels, an evening layout tour and Sunday Op Sessions. PCR has also strongly supported SIG participation in its regional conventions including a SIG clinic track (at least one all day track on Thursday and often more), SIG round table meetings, and Op Sessions. It's hard to go to an op session here without running into someone in the senior leadership of the PCR!

The PCR puts out an excellent publication (Branch Line) on a quarterly basis with announcements, regular columns on various topics, product reviews and news.

Since I live in the Coast Division I am familiar with Coast Division meets: on a quarterly basis CD puts on a meeting (in addition to the annual PCR/LD/OP SIG meet above) attended by about 100 members with 2 or 3

clinics, photo and model contests, and an auction of several hundred items.

Seth Neumann

I'd like to toss in a couple of extra thoughts on this, from the perspective of a regional officer for the PCR. First, I hope that folks will notice Seth mentioning that a LOT of the organizing activity was matched between PCR/Coast Div. and SIG members -- that is, it was a case of "the usual suspects". That's something which I consider very special within our region, we have always promoted a strong cooperation between the two groups. In effect, it really isn't "two groups", but just one group in which many of us wear two or more hats. As soon as folks stop looking at it as two entities, but one group with multiple interests, the "us and them" attitude starts dissipating. Another thing which Seth didn't really touch on is, while Saturday was spent with a wide range of clinics and that night was layout tours (also promoted as a regional/divisional activity), Sunday was spent with operating sessions on various model RRs around the S.F. Bay Area and more layout tours which included some of these operating layouts. This gave us the opportunity to accost unsuspecting tourist and draft them into operating positions. This way we had the opportunity to expose them to operations at a low key level and create an even wider base of operationally oriented modelers. Again, this allowed us to point out the strength of a multi-faceted layout design, which would support operations as a key structure element. This allows participation in the hobby by some folks that for whatever reasons don't currently have a model railroad

and by inviting them into an operating group increases their sense of being part of a community of modelers (the ever popular, "what do I get from the NMRA?"). I have a feeling that the bad seed was planted in many fertile fields this weekend, we just need to nurture them when they start to grow.

Enjoy,

Pat LaTorres, V.P., PCR/NMRA

As you all know we hold an annual SIG meet in the Bay Area which is co-sponsored by the PCR's Coast Division. The meet was this weekend. This arrangement has been going on for several years and the arrangement is that the PCR gets an extra meet and set of layout tours and the SIGs get publicity and insurance coverage. The meet has drawn about 100-110 people for the past several years and has always just fit into the Santa Clara Depot operated by the South Bay Historical Railroad Society.

This year a member of our committee, who is also the PCR's webmaster, offered to take over maintenance of our web site. David Grenier also updated our sign up mechanism, borrowing a sign up page from the BayRails (a separate operations event organized by more or less the same group) web site and adding some special sauce. David also updated the links on various other railroad sites he manages. The result is that the SIG meet committee had much better and quicker access to information on registration, which was starting to move at a much faster pace, probably as result of better publicity.

Our final participation was 132 and this will result in a small surplus, some of which will be returned to the sponsoring organizations.

We also used the PCR infrastructure for maps and instructions for layout tours (the Coast Division tour committee also being closely associated

with the local SIG meet committee). This allowed us to provide a major attraction (tours) with a very small effort (a few hours) by leveraging the Coast Division tour list rather than a couple of days of work (I used to organize these for the SIG meet). So all the organizations got an important benefit for very little incremental effort.

The SIGs are always interested in promoting local SIG meets with regional and divisional participation and in participating in regional and division meets wherever our local members are interested.

Seth Neumann

Vice President OPSIG Inc

Vice President, Layout Design SIG

Some SIGs to Work With

There are innumerable Special Interest groups that we can connect with to provide us with content and lead us to new members. Here is a fairly random sample with a few comments.

Rail-Marine Information Group

The Railroad Marine Operations Yahoo! Group is the official online meeting place for the friends of the RMIG (Rail-Marine Information Group), to discuss Rail-marine history and modeling regardless of the era, locale or scale. They held their convention joint with the NMRA in Hartford and provided at least fourteen clinics that ran in a thread. The Yahoo group is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/railmarineops/>

Railroad Prototype Modellers

share much with us and already participate in national and regional NMRA conventions. Among other things their Mission Statement says they are out to “nurture and increase the exchange and sharing of both prototype and modelling information among modellers”, to “uncover new sources of prototype information and share the results of prototype research”, to “improve communication among modellers, researchers, historians, manufacturers, authors and editors to avoid unnecessary errors and duplication in both products and publications”, to “encourage participation, mutual support and

fellowship among prototype modellers”, to “provide guidance and encourage members to organize local meets”, and to “celebrate new and lasting acquaintances with people who share a common interest and wish to share their knowledge with others.” This year they plan on being at the National Convention and at the PSR convention in the Fall. Our relationship has been a rocky road in the past, but seems well on the upswing. They can provide us with much content both models and modellers. Their website is <http://railroadprototypemodelers.com/>

The Layout Design Special Interest Group's

prime purpose according to their mission statement “is to aid efforts to design and create layouts that achieve owner's layout goals (with minimum space and cost), avoid common design flaws, and include prototypical and model design features that maximize operating and visual interest.” They have a website <http://www.emuck.com/~rufus/ldsig/index.html> but their strongest and most lively presence is through their Yahoo group <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ldsig/> They are a source of wonderful content. Their annual convention is joint with the NMRA.

Operations Special Interest

Group (OPSIG) is smaller than the LDSIG but quite lively. Its purpose is to

discuss, develop and disseminate ways of operating model railroads to realistically emulate practices of the prototype. This includes sharing information on various methods of generating, moving and controlling traffic to heighten the feeling that our models are an active and integral part of the national rail transportation network, serving shippers and consignees throughout the nation. We also discuss and communicate information about the methods and procedures used by the real railroads and ways of most practically and realistically adapting them to the model world. It has been deeply involved in a number of regional and national conventions It too has a website <http://www.opsig.org/> but like the LDSIG its Yahoo group is the active connection. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Ry-ops-industrialSIG/>

Canadian National Lines SIG -

This group was founded to provide a forum for people with common interest in the Canadian National family of railways (Canadian National, Grand Trunk Western, Central Vermont, Grand Trunk Railway, and Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific). For more information consult <http://cnlines.ca/>. The SIG also maintains a mailing list via a list server. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CNLines-CNet/>

Circus/Carnival SIG - The purpose of this SIG is to assist in modeling and understanding circuses. The SIG publishes a monthly (except summer) newsletter, "**Red Wagon**". For further information consult the SIG coordinator: Bob Judge bigjudge@optonline.net

Digital Command Control SIG -

This SIG publishes a semi-annual newsletter, the **DCC SIG Newsletter**. For further information consult the SIG coordinator: John D. Balogh <JDB@psu.edu> <http://jdb.psu.edu/nmra/dccsig.html>

Proto:87 SIG - The goal of this SIG is to develop and promote practical and reliable standards and construction techniques for high-fidelity wheels and track in HO scale. The SIG publishes a twice-yearly newsletter, **Proto:87 Journal**. For more information consult: Rene' Gourley <rene.gourley@versant.de> <http://www.proto87.org/d/>

Railroad Industries SIG - This SIG concentrates on developing a deeper understanding of the history and operations of the industries that are served by the railroads. This information helps to understand and replicate prototypical operation on model railroads and to construct prototypically accurate models. The SIG publishes a quarterly newsletter, **Lineside**. For further information consult: Stan Knotts <srknotts@comcast.net> <http://www.trainweb.org/rrisig/>

Teen Association of Model

Railroaders - This group was created to promote, stimulate, foster, and encourage among youth and young persons, the hobby of model railroading, the activity of railfanning, and the preservation of the history, science, and technology thereof. The SIG publishes a newsletter, **The Hotbox**. For further information consult: <http://www.tamr.org/>

Traction Modeling SIG - This group of modelers exchanges information about traction modeling. They interpret "traction" in its broadest sense to include all electric rail transportation. The SIG publishes a newsletter, *Line Car*. For further information consult:

<http://www.pacificelectric.us/traction/index.htm>

TT Scale - This group is promoting the TT scale and telling TT modelers how to improve their TT models. The group also informs modelers about what is available in the TT marketplace as well as the advantages of TT Scale. The group's newsletter, *TT Empire*, is published quarterly. For further information, please consult: Mike Braunstein <x996tt2002@twlakes.net>

<http://www.grampas-trains.com/ttempire.html>

Z Scale - The Z Scale SIG was formed, among other things, to nurture the development of a world-wide sense of community among Z scale modelers, to promote model railroading in Z scale (1/220), to encourage the free exchange of information pertaining to Z scale and to enhance the Z scale model railroading experience. For further information, please consult: Jeffrey R. MacHan <z-scale-owner@yahoogroups.com> http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Z_Scale/

Garden Railways. Here in the Bay Area, the Bay Area Garden Railway Society started in 1988 and covers all types of garden railroaders, from families with young children and people just starting out in the hobby, to nationally recognized hobbyists and

modelers that enjoy sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm. There is a National Garden Railway Convention but the structure seems to be like the Narrow Gauge folks where there really is no National organization. They are a source of three important things. First, of course, is layouts to tour including occasional live steam operations. Second is clinics both specific to their layouts and more general. Third, they have much greater participation from women than has been traditional in the NMRA. There are groups similar to our BAGRS in many areas and many NMRA members participate in them.

Free-mo is an outgrowth of a European group and the developer of a free form standard for modular railroads. There are organizations all over the country (see; <http://free-mo.org/> for a list). They are a wonderful source of layouts for conventions and other meets.

Excerpts from the LDSIG/ OPSIG local meeting handbook

Introduction

The LD SIG (and to a lesser extent the OP SIG, to whom this is also addressed, as the authors are active in both organizations and both SIGs serve an overlapping membership base) primarily serves its membership through its publications and a robust program held with the annual NMRA convention. Unfortunately, only about 10-15% of the membership can attend the National in any given year and about half of them are “regulars” leaving perhaps 80% of the total membership without personal contact more than once every 10 years or so, when the National convention is local to them. Local meets are powerful tools for delivering service to members in the absence of a national meet in the area.

General kinds of Meets:

There are many activities that can be organized as local meets. The following list is comprehensive but does not preclude SIG sponsorship of other kinds of activities if conditions warrant and the activity would be of service to the membership within the terms of the SIG bylaws:

In-home local meet & greets

These are, by necessity, smaller gatherings and are ideal for local meets within more active areas and regional meets in areas with a lower density of model railroaders. The format for these meets is usually an all-day, afternoon, or evening meeting at a member’s house. The member usually has a layout to show as a centerpiece of the meet or a space dedicated to a yet-to-be-built layout. The program usually starts with introductions around the room followed by more detailed reports on what each participant is building, their current issues and lessons learned. This typically takes 15-30 minutes per, so the practical limit is about a living room full of people. Alternately, the organizer may choose to focus on a smaller number of design problems, usually supported by prepared handouts and exhibits. If the host’s layout is operable, an op session may follow. Breaks are taken for meals as appropriate, either by adjourning to a local beanery or the host may organize food. If food is provided, a donation is appropriate to cover costs (also including mailing, reproduction, etc.)

Local SIG meetings in conjunction with other activities such as NMRA Regional or Divisional meets, or train shows

This is a subset of the next item. What we're referring to here is a SIG Roundtable or SIG Forum event. Typically it is an evening event in a room suitable for the expected attendance held during a Regional NMRA meet. This is a good event to try as a first step at participating in given region's activities and serves as a confidence builder with the local region if they haven't worked with SIGs before.

The format is similar to the in-home meeting: introductions (with special attention to first timers), followed by more detailed reports or suggestions for topics from the audience with moderated open discussion. In the Pacific Coast Region the LD SIG and OP SIG roundtables are traditionally held after dinner, back-to-back, in the same room. The focus simply shifts from design of the layout to operating it and we often use the same layouts as examples. (Bill Kaufman has observed that you can tell the OP SIG portion has started because the Layout Design SIG coordinator is now in the audience harassing the OP SIG coordinator who was previously harassing him).

SIG Tracks at Regional NMRA meets

Once the pattern of SIG meets has been set in a given region, the number of SIG members present is obvious to the local NMRA leadership and they welcome an organized clinic and discussion panel track by the SIGs in

subsequent years (they are always looking for good content in any case, and we consistently deliver good content). Since these meetings are open to all convention registrants, they provide a good recruiting environment for the SIGs. We typically do not charge a special fee for these sessions but we expect the convention to provide the room and any AV accommodations.

NMRA Pacific Coast Region (PCR) experience has been that we do best when we can organize our track so that all of the LD/OP related clinics are run in a single room (hopefully the same room that the roundtables are held in) and we try to group them so we have them all on one or two days (unless we have enough to run continuously). Using a single location makes it clear to all attendees that the "SIG Clinic room" is where the interesting clinics and activities are happening.

When dealing with NMRA regions, it's best to make contact a year or so before the convention. If you don't know the local contact, try the region president or contact the SIG Local Meetings committee and we will make inquiries for you through the NMRA. Also try to locate the region via the NMRA website: www.nmra.org.

If desired and space permits, layout design displays may be stored in the SIG Clinic room, or even better, arrangements can be made with the convention committee to display the exhibits in the contest room (contest participation is down, so there is usually space and the contest room is usually secured when closed).

The SIG committee can prepare materials indicating which tour layouts are of special LD interest. In the PCR

we have also run a series of OP Sessions during the convention, and many of the LD SIG members participate.

Again we generally do not impose any extra charges for SIG activities (although it is traditional for the OP Session participants to take their hosts out for the appropriate meal). A very nice feature of participating in NMRA Regional events is that our activities are covered by the region's liability insurance. (See insurance below)

Larger Local meets (too large for a home >20)

These meets are not part of any other existing convention. This format is advisable when attendance rises beyond the level that can be comfortably handled in a home (although a new but empty layout room may be a suitable venue – however this situation usually lasts only one year as nature abhors a vacuum). Suitable venues include Model Railroad clubs, community centers, schools, church meeting rooms, and museums. A “railroady” venue, such as a Railroad club in an old depot, is a nice touch if space is adequate.

Typical activities include:

Welcome Dinner

This is desirable if many of the participants had to come a distance and will be staying overnight. We (in the Bay Area) open it up to locals who want to meet and greet the visitors. If the venue is a restaurant, everyone pays their own way and if it is a home (a barbeque or something similar would be appropriate, weather permitting) a contribution would be in order.

Clinic Program

Similar to a SIG track at a convention. Depending on the facility, you may be able to run multiple tracks. Clinics are limited only by the availability of suitable clinic content and presenters

Discussion Panels

Same as for conventions. We try to take a topic of interest such as “Garage Layouts that must co-exist with the spouse's car” and assemble 3 or 4 people who have built one or are designing one and provide a moderator with general design experience. The panel talks about what they have done, responds to topics proposed by the moderator and to audience questions. This is great for “lessons learned”

Birds-of-a-Feather (BOFs)

These sessions are extended breaks where we facilitate gatherings of people with similar interests. These provide the small group interaction of the in-home meets while scaling the event into the hundreds of participants. Perennial favorite BOF topics include:

- o Designing for DCC
- o Designing for CMRI/JMRI
- o Multi-deck layouts
- o Further discussion about clinics presented earlier in the day
- o Follow up on presentations from previous meets
- o Topics from the floor

Consulting Program

This is another activity that scales the personal attention of the in-home meet to a larger forum. Experienced designers and operators provide design

reviews for aspiring layout builders. Participants range from first time builders trying to get started to experienced operators considering changes to their layouts. The one-on-one format is less threatening than proposing your design to 100 strangers. This is a great service to our members and a good recruiting tool.

Design Challenge

This has become a favorite at the Annual Bay Area meet. A set of parameters is published a month or two prior to the meet (centered on a given prototype, scale and space e.g. typical garage, spare bedroom etc.) Basic prototype material is provided along with any special constraints. Challengers provide a simple design and 5 or 6 charts of description and present to a panel of “experts” – usually the consultants above – who critique the designs. No winners or losers: just lessons learned.

Layout Tours

These are held in the evening after the clinic program (or the evening before depending on the layout hosts’ preferences), or in some cases while op sessions are proceeding. If owners do presentations about their layouts during the clinic program, the attendees can visit the same layouts that evening. (See insurance, below)

OP Sessions

At the Bay Area meet, we give preference to first-time operators and visitors from out of town, but we almost always have slots for everyone who wants to run (we once scheduled some make up sessions for locals). We do the

ops on Sunday after the main Saturday program. This schedule can be adjusted for local preferences and many layouts don’t operate until the afternoon to allow for church attendance. Try to provide a write-up of some kind on each layout. This will help visiting operators decide on their preferred layouts, (or if they want to come at all.) Some events don’t worry about preferences, and assign people based on layout staffing needs and car pools, but trying to match interest to layouts produces better satisfaction. When in doubt, properly staffing the layouts should take precedence. Consider whether you will accommodate groups that want to operate as a “fixed block.”

Prototype tours

It may be possible to incorporate a prototype tour into one of these programs as part of an “industry you can model” clinic.

Refreshments are typically provided and a donation (typically \$10) is requested to cover refreshments, mailing and repro costs as well as to make a donation to the organization providing the facility.

Finances

Most of these events are fairly low overhead until you get into renting halls and a lot of AV equipment. Our advice is to keep it modest, leverage public and charitable organizations for facilities and see if members can borrow projectors from other organizations (some of the historical societies and NRMA regions own projectors). The donation request should be designed to cover expenses and provide some seed money for next year’s event. The LD

SIG may elect to provide seed money to help a local group get started. I've included typical financials for the Bay Area Regional meet for guidance:

Location and Logistics

Geographical location will depend on the presence of a host committee, but suitable venues include homes, Model Railroad clubs, community centers, schools, church meeting rooms, museums and hotels, depending on the scope of the event (see table 1). A "railroad" venue such as a club in an old depot is a nice touch if space is adequate.

Sites should have the following accommodations/ features:

- Adequate seating for expected attendance
 - Adequate (preferably free) parking
 - In large meets, rooms for break outs, consulting, BOFs and displays
 - AV facilities including sound, screens, projectors, power
 - Permission to provide refreshments and facilities for providing them
 - Proximity to suitable restaurants or provision to bring food in
- Consider handicap accessibility

Layout Tours and Op Sessions

One member of the local committee should organize the layout tours. These are usually selected on the basis of :

- Overall quality
- Innovative design or construction
- Host's ability to document design process, prototype

- Accessibility and parking (don't send 30 cars up a winding, single lane mountain road at night)
- Note where layouts are not handicap accessible
- insurance – see below
- Provide comprehensive descriptions (use the LD SIG tour guides from the NMRA nationals. It is important that attendees know what they are going to see before committing to traveling a considerable distance.
- Maps, maps, maps and instructions! Be sure they work: have someone who doesn't know where the layouts are test drive them without benefit of NAV! Beware of last minute construction and road work that may affect the directions.

See layout selection criteria in the exhibits

Operating Sessions

This can be done by the layout tour coordinator or another individual

Layouts should be known to run well and have at least 3 prior op sessions with the regular crew before opening up to an event like this

The committee may want to request a private session with the owner and some of the regulars if the layout is not known to them

Very small layouts may cause carpooling problems and are more prone to problems due to last minute cancellations

Provide comprehensive descriptions (use the LD SIG tour guides from the NMRA nationals as an example and use the selection rubric below. It is important that attendees know what

they are going to see before committing to traveling a considerable distance.)

Maps, maps, maps and instructions! Be sure they work: have someone who doesn't know where the layouts are test drive them without benefit of NAV! Beware of last minute construction and road work that may affect the directions.

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Publicity

- Obtain mailing list of SIG members in the target region and do mailings
- Obtain mailing lists of members of other sponsoring organization in the target region and do mailings (check for overlap first, there will be a lot of it)
- Publicize in LDJ/LDN, DO, local NMRA region and pubs of other sponsoring organizations
- Calendar on LD SIG Wiki
- Magazines: Scale Rails, MR, RMC, RMJ etc.
- Publicize early and often on email lists of all sponsoring organizations
- Flyers at local hobby shops, train shows
- Refer to the websites of the layouts, if they have them, in the publicity, also refer to published articles about them

Web sites – see the Bay Area site at <http://homepage.mac.com/jacobsen/LOR M2006/>

Liability

There is a concern about liability for personal injury in any public event. Two main concerns are for injuries that may occur at a central meeting place and

injuries that might occur in a home or club where a layout tour or operating session is held. In the case of injuries at a meeting place, the owner of the space (club, school, church, community center, etc.) may request a certificate of coverage.

As of this writing, neither the OP SIG nor the LD SIG has its own liability insurance. After discussion with the NMRA leadership, the OP SIG recommends the following (and the same should apply for LD SIG events):

1. Arrange for the local NMRA region to jointly sponsor the event. (See above under “Joint meets with OP SIG and NMRA Regions or Historical Societies, or RPM”). Note that the NMRA region's name must come first as in “Pacific Coast Region/LD SIG/OP SIG meet”

2. If a certificate is required, write the NMRA 6-8 weeks in advance asking for the certificate. Be sure to indicate the “who, what, when, why” and who the certificate is covering. There is a processing charge for the certificate (as of this writing it is \$25), this can paid out of the contributions.

3. For layouts, make sure that all the homeowners/clubs are NMRA members. If not, enroll them (As of this writing, you can use the \$9.95 6 month “railpass” introductory membership, however if the owner is going to open every year it would be better to use a full membership.). We suggest you pay for this out of the registration funds. The layout owners must be NMRA members for the coverage to be in effect. Do this far enough in advance that the membership is sure to be in effect at the time of the meet.

There is some ambiguity if the

attendee is not an NMRA member, so everyone involved should be encouraged to join. The OP SIG is considering an NMRA membership requirement to remove this ambiguity.

Reporting/Sharing

The LD SIG is a 501c(3) educational organization and our bylaws call for us to:

- To act as a forum for the members' exchange of information and ideas, and to develop improved ways for hobbyists to learn the art and science of layout design.
- To provide leadership for planning, developing, coordinating, and expanding the knowledge of planning model railroads; and
- To promote, develop, support and encourage participation by the public in model railroading.

In order to help fulfill these obligations, we strongly encourage that all meets have one or more designated scribes who will note the proceedings with a view towards recording the events and especially innovative ideas. These ideas may be found in the clinics, panels, BOF sessions and of course on the layout visits. The reports should be submitted to the LDJ editor for publication and clinic presenters should be encouraged to put their material into article form for use by the LDJ or DO as appropriate. We also provide a summarized version to the editors of the newsletters of any co-sponsoring organizations.

Registration process

Two or more people should man the desk, Bay Area experience suggests the registration table be "remote staffed" after the first hour up to the lunch break by someone chartered to keep their eye out late arrivals and get through the registration sign in process.

The registration team should be at the venue 1 hour prior to the advertised opening. Our experience suggests the registration table be "remote staffed" after the first hour up to the lunch break by someone chartered to keep their eye out late arrivals and get through the registration sign in process. Be sure to provide for the following:

- * Chairs and tables for registration
- * Pre printed registration signs that include the meet name, date, time, sponsoring organization(s) and registration fee.
- * Masking tape to post registration signs
- * Pre-registration lists
- * walk-up registration sign in form separate from the pre-registration sign in lists
- * Pre-printed badges for pre-registrants (The Bay Area group uses badges with a space for name, era, road, interest)
- * Badge holders
- * Transparent tape to use on name tag holders if the badge holders are prone to popping open.
- * Box of pens for name tag fill ins.
- * Dollars for making change for those ATM \$20 bills everyone has.
- * paper weights of some type to keep the stacks of handouts in check

- * Blank badges for walk ups
- * Agenda/schedules
- * Special arrangements for parking, if necessary (e.g. change for parking ticket machines, validation stamps as required)
- * Membership application forms for all of the sponsoring organizations
- * Sample copies of publications of all the sponsoring organizations
- * Container for receipts

Each attendee should be checked in and any fees collected, the registrant is given his (her) badge and agenda