

# Membership

*Membership is absolutely central to all of us. How do we keep and hold members? What does it take? It seems like everyone has an answer and nobody has an answer. This section seems more fuzzy-headed than most. I think it is because we are pretty fuzzy-headed about it.*

*In the files section is the Pacific Northwest Region's membership recruiting and retention handbook. It is packed with specifics and worth a look.*

*Gerry Leone wrote me, "In July of 2009 I started doing a survey of NMRA members who were not renewing their membership. Every membership renewal form sent out since then has a separate piece of paper in it saying, "If you've chosen not to renew your membership, would you mind telling us why?" and then lists a dozen multiple choice answers. There's also the provision for the former member to make written comments. Bear in mind that the survey does NOT contain a postage paid envelope to return them in, so the guys that send them back really want the NMRA to know what the problem is – they're spending 44-cents out of their own pocket. To date, the return rate is something like 20% -- phenomenal.*

*"On an amazing number of these returned surveys, I'll read comments like, "No one from my local Division ever*

*contacted me," or "I never heard anything from the local guys," or "I never ever got a call or email from anyone to tell me when meetings were." On and on.*

*"A surprising number of Divisions and Regions don't recognize new members in any way, nor do they contact them. I think this needs to be mentioned somewhere in this section, probably right up front. The importance of contacting each and every new member can't be under-emphasized."*

*I think you may see evolving from that my take on what needs to be done, not that it is something new. People have been singing the same song since time immemorial.*

*This section is mostly emails from various regions and divisions struggling with the problem. I have included a couple of sample "Welcome" letters, but it seems like the issues are deeper than that.*

*Bill Kaufman*

## **Pacific Coast Region**

By Pat LaTorres

I think the two big concerns that pretty much every region deals with are

gaining members and then retaining them after their first year passes. This year I got one of the members of my club to join NMRA on a RailPass membership and then attend our regional convention. Out of this, he had a chance to tour several layouts that he had not seen, attend a "real" ops session on a local club layout, and picked up a first place in the photo contest. From speaking with him afterwards, I believe that PCR/NMRA has gained a new full member.

This touches on both of the concerns mentioned above. First I got him in the door (thanks to the RailPass membership option) and then we convinced him that our "product" is worth investing in. And yes, I did say our product. When we ask someone to kick down their money, we had better have something to give them in return for that expense.

As others have mentioned, in the PCR we've managed to put together a good convention program and we have a heck of a lot of depth in knowledge -- both of the prototype and modeling. The key is that not every region has these strengths, which may mean that regions might want to consider helping their neighboring regions at times.

Another project that I want to work on is to get the clubs throughout the Coast Division to get together and share recruiting ideas. This will help provide tools to get folks into the clubs, and then we have a vehicle to seduce them into the NMRA through the local divisions and regions. I feel that this is where we need to focus our energies, on getting folks involved on the local level. With all due respect, the national convention that

is held once a year, often far away from where a given member lives isn't going to get most folks excited enough to join our organization. We really need to help ALL of the regions and divisions develop some sort of programs that make them a point of interest for the prospective member.

## **LSR—Division 6**

By Fred Bock, MMR, Director,  
Division 6 (South Texas)

This time around as division director, I volunteered for the job because the previous director had resigned in the middle of his term, and no replacement was found. The division ranges from San Antonio south to the Rio Grande, and from the Gulf Coast west about 6 hours to the middle of nowhere. There are about 105 members; about 85% live in the San Antonio area, while the rest are scattered out in small clusters in Corpus Christi and the Rio Grande Valley, 3-5 hours drive apart.

With no funds and no infrastructure in the division, the first thing I needed was an effective way to communicate. My region quarterly newsletter, the "Marker Lamp", has always provided column space for each division's director, and I made good use of it for print-media communications.

However, I needed a faster way to communicate. E-mail was the best, cheapest way available. But I quickly found that the e-mail addresses on the "official NMRA" roster were too often absent and too often incorrect.

End result: I wound up personally telephoning most of the division's members, particularly those not in the San Antonio area, to verify their 'phone number, e-mail address, membership interest and status, and sometimes just to talk. I found a number of "life members" who had been deceased as much as 8-10 years, but were still receiving the "Bulletin" / "Scale Rails". Many others said this was the first time an NMRA official had ever contacted them. Many of them had questions or comments they wanted to share. Overall, it was a very positive experience, albeit time consuming and heavy on my phone bill.

I also reported all the changes to my Region secretary, who forwarded them up to National. For about 2 months, National would receive about 2-3 changes a week . . . but they were very helpful in making the changes promptly.

And then, I had a heart attack and quintuple bypass surgery. (I'm assuming there was no causal connection!!!). That slowed me down a bit.

That was 2 1/2 years ago. I'm already learning that the list is slowly becoming out of date again. The National HQ doesn't seem to have any way of easily keeping e-mail addresses up-to-date, and in this era of Internet communications a valid e-mail address is as critical as a valid telephone number was a generation ago, or a valid post office address was a generation prior to that. So, one lesson is: you may have to make a deliberate and sustained effort to keep your communication lines up-to-date . . . and it's a lot of work.

A second lesson is: it's good to have a "healthy" division director. That's not entirely intended as a joke. I have had two retinal detachments and repairs since December, and I won't have my eyesight fully recovered until about mid-July. Health issues slow me down, and I'm not sure that's fair to the division members. On the other hand, we are a "graying" / "balding" organization. We do the best we can with what's available, no?

## **PSR—Arizona Division**

Rick Watson, Arizona Division  
Director

I see that there are four groups we are trying to recruit

- 1) Those who are unaware of the NMRA
- 2) Those who let their membership lapse for one reason or another
- 3) Those who had bad experiences and "won't join again"
- 4) Those who have heard negative things about the NMRA and have a negative perception

Group 1: I believe this group can be addressed by providing them exposure to the NMRA. It's beyond an ad in a magazine. It's the personal interaction that helps seal the deal. You might see these folks at train shows, hobby shops, swap meets, etc. I see them regularly at the swaps where we have a NMRA table.

Many haven't even heard of the NMRA. I'll explain a bit about us as an organization and invite them to a division meet and give them a flyer for the next meet. Some show up, some don't. But my goal at a minimum is that they walk away with a positive feeling.

Group 2: This is the group that I think it's very important to find out WHY their membership lapsed. A few good questions can yield a wealth of info. I think the reason they left should be addressed. But let them explain. Don't try to provide answers or excuses. Regardless of what happened, they need to know you're interested in helping and if appropriate, making sure it doesn't happen again. The goal here is that at the end of the conversation, they walk away satisfied that their concerns have been heard and will be addressed. Again, I always wrap up with an invitation to the next meet. I've even offered free admission or 'on me' to encourage them.

Group 3: This is the most challenging. I had folks show up at the meet yesterday who are no longer members because of a bad experience, but they still go to meets. (Arizona Division meets are open to everyone as we work to be inclusive) Again, in this case I'm willing to take the bullet and apologize for their bad experience in the past. I'll let them vent. Point out that the organization has changed. And conclude with something to affect of "I really hope you have a better experience going forward. If there's anything I can help with, please let me know. I welcome all feedback. Positive and negative." Part of the challenge is the some of these folks have made statements about never

joining the NMRA again to friends, etc. Most people don't want to go back on their word and rejoining is doing just that. Not an easy fix...

Group 4: I run across these folks all the time. They have a strong opinion, but no data to support it. I'll ask questions trying to find out the source of their opinion. I will explain my position on the issue(s) and encourage them to form opinions based on facts, not hearsay. Some come around, some don't.

In all the situations, I try to finish the conversation on a positive note and usually with an invitation to our next meet. I really believe a meet is the best opportunity to make a good impression after the conversation.

## **Rocky Mountain Region**

By Harold Huber, President

I'll use the Rocky Mountain Region as an example for this question. We have a very active promotions chairman, he attends all the shows that he can and sets up a NMRA table, many times with the company store that is very active. He in the last year has recruited over 100 members using the 6 month membership as the bait and hook.

When done he sends the list of recruits to the proper division chairman including names, addresses, and email address. The division Chairs then contact the person and invites them to

the division meeting. also in talking with the person the division chair decides what the modeling interests are of the recruit and directs the recruit to the appropriate club/organization that best fits the recruit. He also sends the name, address, and email to the president of the club the person was referred to.

The president of the club contacts the recruit and invites him to a meeting. The person is always acknowledged at the meetings and welcomed by the members of that meeting. The person then is teamed with a member to be showed around. during this time it is determined what skills the recruit has or what skills the recruit wants to learn and he is teamed up with people that have those skills.

The key is active interest in the recruit, showing him that he is a valuable asset to the organization and that he is wanted. Yes, it takes a lot of work, but we are running about 65% to 70% renewal rate with our 6 month joiners. Now I want you to know that recruit is used here for clarity, first names are always used and the person is always made to feel welcome. Also the term he is used for clarity and could and has been her.

Guys this takes time, effort and common sense on the part of all people, one person can turn a new member off, be aware of theist and encourage every person to wear their freindly/kindness hat or stay away from the new member. Yes, it is labor intensive and takes time from other things but it is working well for us. I also when the monthly report comes out to me break down the report into division sized chunks and send it to

the division chairs with reinforcing instructions on how to handle these people.

I encourage the Division supers to contact all 30 and 60 day lapsed members, these are the people they are most in contact with when they are in the NMRA. The rocky Mountain Region does not have a membership chairman and I do not believe that any of my divisions do either. Remember friendship communications, and showing that the person is important to the organization is the key to retaining members. Make them feel a part of the organization and help them with their modeling problems, questions and doubts.

## **British Region**

When Nobby was our BR president, he wrote to all lapsed members about a month after their renewals should have been in. At one point he was getting about 80% re-rails, as we called them.

People had just forgotten, or changed their minds again, or whatever - point is, the re-rail program worked, big time.

*The following email was a response to the following:*

*First question. Where and how do we find members that stick?*

*Second question. Once we have got them signed up what do we as a region or division need to give them to get them to hang on?*

*Bill Kaufman*

# Mid West Region

By Chris Roeben, Past  
Superintendent, SCWD DAL, MWR

Question #1 seems like the Million \$ question. How about hobby shops? Informational booth manned on a Saturday and/or Sunday during the times of the year when modelers are more active. Example: November-March in the Snow Belt. Have copies of SR and Division and Region newsletters to hand out. Photo highlights of meets and conventions. Same booth at train shows.

Question #2: Member Services. New person joins the division, 1. Find out where he's at in the hobby? Is he just starting out, or has he progressed down the path. 2. Hook him up with the people/resources needed for him to succeed. Does he need help with wiring? Hook him up with one of the wiring guru's. Scenery help? Get him introduced with someone who can teach him scenery techniques one on one in the home. See the pattern? Also, are the meetings interesting enough to keep attending? Do the clinicians sound like Ben Stien? Do the cliques refuse to allow new people into their circle until they've proven themselves worthy of acceptance. Is the person invited to operating sessions at home layouts? Basically, does the person feel welcomed by the membership? These are just some of the things I can think of off the top of my head.

# North East Region Garden State Division

By Andy Brusgard, Director Garden  
State Division, NER.

The Division covers northern New Jersey and Staten Island, NY.  
<http://www.trainweb.org/nergsd/>  
The Division has 262 members. We run four meets each year that rotate between area clubs.

At the grass roots level of the NMRA, The Division, membership comes down to one word.

## CONTACT

I do not wish to sound like I am preaching, but contact with the membership is the most important duty of the Division staff. As I noted above, the Garden State Division with 262 members, runs four meets a year. These rotate between area clubs. The meets, usually with at least two clinics, AP judging, model display, white elephant table, are open to all. What better way of getting new members?

We try to do as much as possible by e-mail. Of the 262 members only 37 do not have e-mail. Members receive a quarterly newsletter **The Whistle Post** <http://www.trainweb.org/nergsd/Data/wp110.pdf> by e-mail and activity notices of the Division and area clubs. Occasionally they will receive a railroad or model train related blurb just to keep the contact and lines of communication open. Of course with each e-mailing you

will receive a number of "bad e-mail address" back. One of my jobs is to track the member down and get an update, usually by phone.

We have also developed a series of e-mails and letters (when needed) to welcome new members, remind members that their renewal is coming up, thank them for renewing (\*Yea, we do that), you did not renew, is there a problem? (Topic for another discussion-"I never got a notice") New members also get a phone call. I am surprised how few do not know about the local organization. Many I speak with joined to get *Scale Rails*. That, I think, says something good about the magazine.

Time consuming? Yes, but not as much as you would think. It did take almost 9 months to get the e-mail list from 50% of the membership to almost all who have e-mail. It also may take an hour once a month to make 5 to 10 phone calls to get corrections and welcome new members.

It can be done. It should be done. It just has to be done one step at a time. Start with your Division membership list from the Region. I get it as an Excel file from our division membership chairman. I keep an original copy, make a second copy "work copy", this one I can sort by expiration dates and renewal dates, name, home town and whatever. You will find most member's e-mails are already there.

## **PSR—Arizona Division**

By Rick Watson Arizona Division  
Director

I started sending out a welcome letter to new members early this year. Our region Membership Chair sends out a list of new members each month which I use to generate the letters.

Today, I send a physical letter. In that letter, I describe division activities and our newsletter. In the letter I request them to subscribe to the online newsletter (I'm editor too). I felt it important that new members receive a hardcopy welcome letter with a real signature as it demonstrates a personal effort to welcome them to the division.

## **NER Garden State Division**

By Tom Wortmann, GSD Pres.

In the Garden State Division we try very hard to make personal contact with our members. email of course is the first choice and for some reason people change their email addresses like their underwear sometimes. If we do not have a email or have a bad one, my membership crew makes a personal phone call, if that fails we get out a post card, all trying to get an email address that works for that member. If they do not have an email address we try and make a call, or refer them to our website as many people can access one at the

local library if they do not own one.

We give away our newsletter as it is posted on our website, free to anyone yet we can mail it to you for whatever it costs us to do so. Personal contact works, not with all, heck nothing will work with some but we do see and major increase in our events.

Remember, the division is the members only local contact with the NMRA, the National only contact the member to ask for money and the region? Rather if ever so it's up to the division.

## **NER Garden State Division**

By Tom Wortmann, GSD Pres.

I belong to a number of groups, not all trains and I am the President of my division (GSD). About 15 to 20% of you membership will do something, the rest will sit back and watch (or complain) if you let them. Some people will come up and volunteer, yes, but others will not so you need to look them over and see an interest in what's going on, that's all. Then you ask them to help with a simple job, say getting chairs set up, then you let them decide the how, where and why of the job. Some people will take the bull by the horn, others well, will not so they needed more prodding. I have 11 people on my staff and they are great. One guy say he didn't want to get "Involved". But he came to every meet.

One day I asked him to run the white elephant table, "Just for that day". Wow did he run it! Then at the next meeting I had him do another job, and then another and

pretty soon he was making suggestions, within a year he was on my staff and now he is the membership chair with two helpers and what a great job he is doing. Another guy we kidded and told him that he was elected treasurer, at a meeting he could not attend, but he's doing it and well at that. You need to spot them, the ones that look interested, the ones with the questions, the suggestions and start pointing them in the direction you need them. Yes you have to play politics, Know your people, and you need to master your people skills. That means in short, don't be afraid to ask for help, admit you are wrong, apologize for yourself and others and lastly, you can't say thank you enough.

## **Pacific Northwest Region**

By Jack Hamilton, PNR Prez.

Any program worth its salt and effective must answer questions that may never be asked but which are the key to success. "What's in it for me?", "Why do I need to put my time, money, and energy here?", and ""What do you expect from me if I am a member?" To answer those questions we must have down pat the story that tells the real benefits of the organization and membership. Unfortunately, when we speak of benefits, they have to be real and not just some line items on an organizational chart. The story has to convince the target that the benefit is immediate and continuing and it is available to them where they live or play.



The benefits have to be anchored on core elements like Standards and Conformance. The benefits also have to be varied enough to interest a wider group than we may have appealed to in the past. (Legos is important) There are a lot of people active in the hobby who just might join us if they really thought there was direct benefit to them in the part of the hobby they enjoy. The solid benefits are the key and the story is how we present ourselves within and without. Nothing like a really good "elevator speech" or a short graphic display that peaks interest to get the ball rolling. We really need to spend some time in this area

In response to Mike B's question about the low population widely dispersed Divisions, think natural gathering spots and take advantage of them. The one thing I have noticed in that kind of area is that modelers tend to gravitate toward hobby shops. Once the association is developed they tend to gather at a common time. It is not uncommon for several modelers to have an informal get together on a Saturday morning (especially in the winter months) to bat the breeze and trade stories. Believe it or not, that is a meeting. All you need to do is get the word out and encourage more people to meet at the common time and then start funneling educational materials to them. Nothing like a group of touring clinicians who are willing to go to that kind of gathering to make things start to click. By the way, these little store groups are primary recruiting sites.

Last but not least, Mary is absolutely right. If you ask for volunteers you will

be greeted with silence. If you ask an individual to perform a task or function, you will have their attention and probably their support. Nothing like a written description of the job or task you are trying to recruit for to make finding help easier. One other hint is - recruit and train and then get out of the way. If the task has to be done your way, you do it. If the real issue is results, let the person you hired get the job done.

Over the span of 50+ years that I have been dealing with organizational effectiveness, retention, and recruiting, the basics have not changed. We have a bunch of new tools and toys to help do the job but the principles are unchanged. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. We just need to put our collective shoulders to it.

## **Australasian Region**

By Sowerby Smith

I envy your recruitment prowess but find it horrifying the churn numbers. It means all the hard work of recruiting is wasted. Better to recruit less and retain more. I think it is imperative to publicize the losses within the region and ask the hard questions that will bruise the ego of the committee at both Region and division level. Part of the process may be to make each member own the problem. We are lucky our churn is about 2% at most and several of them have to die to escape our clutches.

There is no single solution. Access to meetings and events available at the

local level i.e. within a two or 3 hour drive is what we try to provide. As you can see by the time frame local is not in the same village or even county. We have a tremendous problem with our membership being spread over a gigantic land mass and even another island. We have our journal as does the British group and we compete to outdo each other which is healthy but even MainLine that has only a 60% take up and Scale Rails is so costly \$81.00 per year we only get a 30% take up.

The 100% clubs have a lot a members who only have the most basic membership. Our \$20 million Public risk insurance cover for member events and even public events arranged by our members is an incentive and especially helps promote 100% clubs, though we only have 6 or 7. Our DVD library with hundreds of titles is available to every division and every member and we pay the postage and do not charge. The member posts them back. The Divisions hold batches of DVD's to lend to their members. Our web site is so up to date that events seem to get posted on the site before we have even thought of them.

It still comes down to making the potential member feel welcome and that is the responsibility of all the members at the meeting or convention. No single strategy works but one on one personal contact is the best

### **Scholarships Toward NMRA Membership**

Recent discussions with PNR President Jack Hamilton and Fourth Division Superintendent Dennis Hill have resulted in the following recommendation:

Divisions and Clinics are encouraged to set aside funds to sponsor non-member regular attendees at their events who cannot afford NMRA membership by providing a "Scholarship" Membership for a period of one year in the National Model Railroad Association. These scholarships should be reserved for persons who really need the assistance, not persons who "just don't want to join."

We have some excellent modelers residing within PNR who are "always" in attendance at, and taking advantage of, the meets and clinics we sponsor. The continuing attendance of these people is setting us up for a hard fall if any one of them is injured in any way at one of our many events. The insurance provider for NMRA has made this a point of emphasis and we must listen and respond. Taking an attitude against this requirement is counterproductive in all respects. We pay for all of our events through our dues. It is time we asked these non-members to share in the expenses just as they are sharing in the enjoyment of the events/activities. This is really a no-brainer. It is also a win-win situation. NMRA gets new members and people who join get to continue to enjoy all of our events. We're talking less than \$5.00 a month here. Less than two Latte's a month. How hard can that be?

I know it's not popular to "Draw a line in the sand" concerning this issue, however, we must draw that line and we must stick by it.

Walt Huston, Vice President, Pacific Northwest Region

# PCR Redwood Empire Welcome Letter

---

Name  
address

Welcome First name,

The Redwood Empire Division of the National Model Railroad Association (NMRA) is designed and intended to serve all model railroaders.

The NMRA is made up of 17 Regions around the world, and Northern California is part of the Pacific Coast Region (PCR). Most of these Regions are divided into Divisions. The primary purpose of a Division is to promote and foster model railroading at the member-to-member level.

The Redwood Empire Division (RED) is made up of the eight coastal counties north of the San Francisco Bay and meets quarterly at different locations around the Division area. Meets are usually held on Saturday afternoons. Membership in the RED is acquired automatically by joining the NMRA.

In addition to the NMRA SCALE RAILS and the PCR BRANCHLINE, you will receive the RED CALLBOARD. The CALLBOARD is published quarterly about two weeks before each Division meet. It will provide details on the upcoming meet and material on other modeling and railroad events, as well as hobby shop and club information.

A typical RED meet will present railroading, model railroad, and model construction features. The program will usually provide a contest and other model railroad displays. You receive a door prize ticket just for walking in the door and refreshments are also available. In addition, the May meet is our Swap Meet and August our Picnic Meet. Bonus door prize tickets are given for bringing a contest entry and wearing your name badge. RED name badges are available for purchase from the Chief Clerk. An RED meet is the place to meet other model railroaders, exchange ideas and increase your enjoyment of the hobby.

In addition to the quarterly meets, RED also sponsors special events such as PCR conventions (on a periodic rotation) and model train shows.

There is no admission charge to attend RED meets. The majority of the attendees at an RED meet are members of the NMRA and PCR, but guests are always welcome as well. All you need is an interest in model railroading to be welcome at a Redwood Empire Division meet.

For more information, check out our website at <http://www.pcrnmra.org/redwood/> or call our Chief Clerk Ed Merrin at 707-542-3620 707-542-3620.



# North Shore & Western

(A Division of the Midwest Region of the NMRA)

August 20, 2009

«XName» «ADDRESS2» «CITY», «STATE» «ZIP»

Dear «FNAME»:

Welcome to the National Model Railroad Association! My name is Bert Lattan and I am the Membership Coordinator for the North Shore & Western Division of the Midwest Region. NS&W is your local connection to the NMRA. As an NMRA member living in the Division's geographic area, you are automatically a member of NS&W at no additional cost.

The National Model Railroad Association offers many tangible and intangible benefits. The most significant intangible benefit is the opportunity to form life-long friendships with people who have similar interests.

Tangible benefits include Division meets, which provide excellent opportunities for sharing knowledge about the prototype, modeling techniques, etc. NS&W generally meets monthly from September to May, frequently on the fourth Sunday of the month. For the 2009-2010 season, meetings will be held in the Maynard Room of the Glenview Public Library at 1930 Glenview Road, Glenview, Illinois from 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm. A list of meetings for the 2009-2010 season is enclosed for your information. Meetings are free, but a donation is requested to defray the cost of refreshments.

The Division publishes the *400*, a periodic newsletter/meeting notice that provides information about Division meets and other activities. The September issue is sent to all members. The October through May issues are e-mailed to members who have provided e-mail addresses and are mailed to members who subscribe. Please feel free to contact me for information about subscribing.

The Division is part of the Midwest Region. The Region holds a convention each spring. Conventions provide benefits similar to Division meets but are larger in scope. They typically begin on a Friday afternoon and extend through Saturday and Sunday. Activities include clinics, operating sessions, layout visits and prototype tours.

The Midwest Region also publishes a newsletter, the *Waybill*. Among other things the *Waybill* covers Region news, convention plans and news from the Divisions in the Region. The *Waybill* is published in the Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter and is usually distributed in late February,

May, August and November. When the *Waybill* is published, a *pdf* version is made available on the Region website (<http://www.mwr-nmra.org/>). Members with e-mail addresses receive an e-mail notifying them when an issue of the *Waybill* is available for viewing and/or downloading. You can also subscribe to a printed version of the *Waybill*.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at Bert Lattan, xxxxxxxx, xxxxxx, xx xxxxx-xxxx; at (xxx) xxx-xxxx; or at xxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxx.xxx.

Again, welcome to the North Shore & Western Division. I look forward to meeting you at a Division meet.

Sincerely,  
Bert Lattan

PS: Visit NS&W on the web at <http://home.comcast.net/~nswnmra/>

Membership - 12