

## MMR EARNED

### DON COOK EARNS MMR #479

**R**ailroading is in my blood. My grandfather and an uncle were engineers on the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern. I can remember sitting on my grandfather's lap and driving the local yard switcher when I was about 10 or 11 years old. The next day, none of the kids at school would believe me when I told them that I had driven a train.

My introduction to model trains came at about 7 years old when I got a used Lionel streamlined passenger train and a loop of track for Christmas. We moved shortly thereafter, and I had nowhere to set it up, except for an unheated basement floor. Later, I discovered a guy in the neighborhood who was building a 4x8 Lionel layout with his son. I managed to worm my way over there almost every night. We moved away when I





started high school, so I gave him my Lionel set in appreciation of his hospitality. I now had a heated basement and started a 4x8 HO layout. After three or four track plans,

the layouts was never finished. I then got out of the hobby for several years.

While waiting to catch a Chicago & North Western commuter train into Chicago one morning, I was looking over

the magazine rack in the depot. I saw a copy of *Model Railroader*, and I bought it to look at on the train. It had a track plan that fascinated me, and I was hooked again. Shortly thereafter, I joined the local model railroad club where I learned many new techniques and got to know many of the nearby modelers. There were also a lot of guys in the club who were not modelers, but railfans. That got me started in train chasing and riding. I have logged almost 70,000 miles on non-commuter trains, 24,000 of them in Canada. I pretty

much gave up railfanning and riding in the early 1980s. Most of the neat old stuff was gone, and no matter what railroad you were on, all that you saw were SD40-2s.

I have been asked why I model the Great Northern. The club that I belonged to was called the world's largest brass loco test track in a national magazine. So naturally, after being a member for awhile, the brass bug bit, and I started looking. I needed something small because I only had a 5x8 layout at the time. I saw a GN 2-8-0, factory painted in the four-color Glacier Park paint scheme, and I knew that was the one. I then had to build a GN caboose to go with it. I have been modeling the Great Northern ever since. I am a charter member of the Great Northern Historical Society. Back when I joined it was called The Fraternal Order of Empire Builders. I am also a member of the C&NW Historical Society, the Operations SIG, and the Layout Design SIG.

Many people ask me why my auto license plate is CNW 26 when I model the Great Northern. The Northwestern was always my favorite road to railfan, so I applied for CNW 400 (a locomotive number), but did not get it.

In 1985, I got married and bought a house that had a big empty basement. Six months of drawing track plans followed. Then, I started the layout room by drywalling the walls, putting in lighting, and installing a drop ceiling. Finally, benchwork started on my dream layout. It is now 27 years later and the layout is 99 percent done. It supports an operating crew of one to seven people.

I got started in the Achievement Program when our former regional AP chairman, Bill Meyers, stopped on a layout tour on the way home from a Regional convention. He said that I had everything that I needed for the scenery and electrical awards. When he got home, Bill sent me a completed scenery judging form with enough points for a merit award. That was back in 2004. It was another three years before I got around to doing the paperwork for Electrical. Since I have been entering regional contests from back in the 1970s, I had many merit awards already for Cars, Locomotives, and Structures. It just took a little more work, mostly scratchbuilding, to get the Structures and Car awards. I also have earned awards for Chief Dispatcher, Association Volunteer, and Civil Engineering. 🛠️

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