

September,  
2008  
Issue 9

# BANTRAK

# Newsletter

Volume 21



## *N-Scale – Realism in Miniature*



### *The Engineer's Cab*

by Mark Bandy, President

**Don't Forget  
the Scale  
Show!**

**October 10 & 11  
at the Timonium  
Fairgrounds**

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### **All Aboard....!**

**T**he August meeting at Arthur Boyd's house was a productive one as we tackled a few topics that had remained unresolved.

Tim Nixon started with the treasury report and the proposed layout for the next show at Bedford. We moved on to the October 10-12th show at Timonium, where Dave and Denise Clyde are the show coordinators who will send out requests for modules this month. Dave and Denise are planning on oNeTrak being available in the October show. For those who have oNeTrak modules, expect to participate in this show so that we can make any adjustments required in preparation for the Christmas Show at the round house this December. Take this opportunity to check your modules out for major running defects and get help fixing them prior to December.

During the meeting, a question was raised concerning show coordinators and best demonstrated practices for how to organize a show. This has been difficult to follow for new as well as veteran show coordinators due to the extreme growth of the club within the last few years. Also some changes in layout operations have led to some confusion. The show layouts can be complicated and overwhelming at times. Coordinators need to know when to draw the line. It seems the real problem is a lack of basic guidelines to help. Historically it takes some time for new members to learn the whole process of the shows, and some basic guidelines and some mentoring from our tenured members would help this process along. Below are a few problems that I noticed during the shows and some ideas for what a coordinator might do to overcome them.

1. The expanding growth of club members interested in running DCC has brought about changes for how a coordinator controls the show.

In the past when having DC only; the coordinators would assign runners, spotters and trouble shooters on the layout and each runner and spotter would control all the trains within their block. Having DCC removes this task where the runner follows his/her train around. The coordinator should still assign spotters and /or trouble shooters on the layout, in order to call out any derailments or break-a-ways to the runner when something occurs.

2. Members who come to help work at Set-up and tear-down with or without a module should get running time priority.

*(Continued on page 3)*



## RIP TRACK

### An Argument for Built-ups

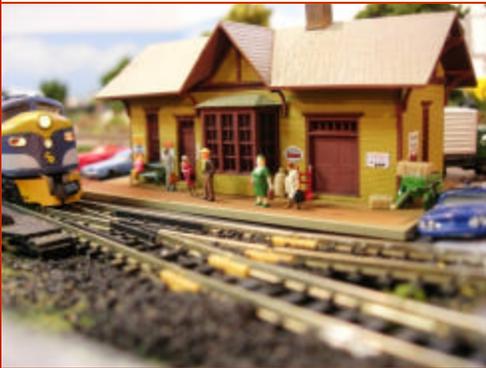
By Phil Peters

**A** few months ago, as I was preparing for an operating session, I became painfully aware that a critical junction on the layout was without any noticeable landmark. The only thing to tell operating crews that they were at Baltimore Junction was a pathetic piece of folded cardboard with the name “Baltimore Junction” written in pencil. It worked for me. But it seemed the area needed something more significant – a station, perhaps. Now there are lots of drawings and plans for small, local stations in the magazines and on the Internet. One of these could be built. However, the session was only days away. Even using a commercial kit would have taken more time than I had. And, despite the rather large inventory of unbuilt model kits in the back of the basement, (Hey, don’t we all have a small model shop in the back room somewhere?) I did not have a station. The next day I went to the local hobby store down in Blue Ridge Summit to pick up some other material and, of course, one more DCC-equipped locomotive. The sort of stuff I, like every other model railroader, can’t turn down. Besides, I *really* needed it. At least that’s what my Visa card told me. Heck, if modelers only bought what they *REALLY* needed this hobby would have died on the vine decades ago.

**A FEW MONTHS AGO, AS I WAS PREPARING FOR AN OPERATING SESSION, I BECAME PAINFULLY AWARE THAT A CRITICAL JUNCTION ON THE LAYOUT WAS WITHOUT ANY NOTICEABLE LANDMARK**

**SMALL, A PERFECT FIT FOR THE PLACE I HAD IN MIND, PAINTED IN COLORS THAT WERE MUTED AND SIMULATED SOME WEATHERING.**

At any rate, as I was walking down the aisle after looking at more N scale freight cars – I really need another box car – I spied some built up model buildings on the shelf. These are a far cry from the Plasticville of my youth. Nice colors, lots of detail. And, best of all, you just take them out of the box – like that’s an easy task nowadays! – spend a half-hour removing the building from the cardboard packing base, and put it



on the layout. A small station caught my eye. I believe it was in Walthers Cornerstone series. It was just the right thing.

Small, a perfect fit for the place I had in mind, painted in colors that were muted and simulated some weathering. What’s more, it came with a package of detail parts, benches, hand trucks, baggage, passengers, to fill out the platform and give it some life. And it was reasonably priced! Sold!

It didn’t take long to make this gem at home on the layout. I cleaned out the area, built up a parking lot, put in a road and lengthened the station’s platform to make it conform to the curve of the track, and Baltimore Junction came to life. Like so many of us I would prefer to be the builder of everything on the layout. However, there are times when it just doesn’t pay to reinvent the wheel. Take a good look at these the next time

you’re at the hobby shop. I am sure you’ll be pleased with what you see.



## N-Scale Weekend 2008

By Tim Nixon

**A**s the leaves started to change and Labor Day weekend approached, an intrepid group from BANTRAK once again headed “north of the border” into the wilds of Pennsylvania to attend the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual N-Scale Weekend in Bedford, Pennsylvania. I volunteered to coordinate this year’s show and so wound up in charge of this merry band. Twelve members (Dave & Denise Clyde, Ken Greenhorn, Ralph Grutzmacher, Skip Hayes, Bob Mohr, Martin Myers, Eric Payne, Al Potter, Steve VanMetre, Bob Winterbottom and myself) went up for the entire weekend; Alan Del Gaudio (Friday), Mark Bandy, (Saturday), Frank Hogarth (Saturday), Jon Monsein (Saturday)

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In the past, the coordinator would send a form to members requesting run times and track position (red, yellow or blue). This has been removed, and now a sign up run time sheet will be set out during the day of set up. It is expected that we be respectful and honor these times. If you've swapped times, then just notify the coordinator. Your dues in to the club do not automatically give you access to top position for run times. (This has been a BANTRAK guideline for years. It's up to the coordinators of the show to enforce it).

3. The scenario of members putting their trains on the layout when they feel like it has been a problem for some coordinators. This presents confusion and crowding at the yard area, where runners who have legitimate time slots get pushed off or now have to deal with sharing their assigned track with ambitious and "can't wait" runners. During the show the coordinator has total control of who runs. It has always been the coordinator's option to use their authority in resolving member to member conflicts. He/she should resolve the issues and not ignore them.

4. It takes 5-7 hours to set up the layout at Timonium and 2-3 days at 4-6 hours per day for the Christmas Show. During set up, members usually work on what they like to do, then stop and watch or talk to others. I have seen the best and quickest installs happen when a "To Do List" is incorporated. Folks see what needs to be done next and begin working on it. I would ask that if any member has a draft list of "To Dos" required at set up that they send it to me and I will distribute for review and revision if necessary. We might have 1 or 2 lists that we pick from to use at a show depending on the complexity and variety on the layout. The list choice would be the responsibility of the coordinator. Coordinators should know who is working on what, so that there are not any gaps in the set up time.

These are some basic common sense things that can help the club reduce set up times and reduce friction between members. Let us all be considerate and obliging to the coordinators, so that this becomes a fun task to take on, not a hassle or headache.

Keep on N-traken.

*(Continued from page 2)*

and Tom Hoover (Sunday) all made day trips to join in the fun. Joining us train nuts were Steve's wife Sandy and Ralph's wife Jill.

The main contingent left the Baltimore area early on Friday, with Skip Hayes towing the trailer and Martin Myers driving his van stuff with BANTRAK equipment. The advanced team (Martin, Ken, Steve, Al Potter and Bob Winterbottom) arrived at the Pro-Care Sports Complex just before noon to stake out our space, while the rest of us met at the Bedford McDonald's for a pre-setup lunch. The entire group rendezvoused on-site about 12:30 and unloading of the vehicles commenced. I checked in with Mike Phillips and discovered that we were not in our accustomed spot along the bleachers this year; instead we had been given a 16'x36' space in the middle of the hall next to the Tex-N-Rail's sales tables. This called for a quick adjustment to the initial layout plan, which was 14'x36' and assumed one side of the layout would be along the wall. Luckily we were prepared to handle this, since Martin had brought his 2-2" modules and the temporary yard skyboards from Louisville.

Actual set-up of the layout started around 1 PM, and even before most of the modules were unpacked there was another change to the plan when Mike Phillips informed us that we could have another 4' of length since one of the other clubs didn't need as much space as allotted. We dug into the trailer and managed to come up with the lift bridge for one side and the club's 2-2' modules for the opposite side to fill the space; I think the only things we took that we didn't use were Bob Mohr's 2-1' modules and the inside corner!

Set-up proceeded smoothly, and by 4:30 PM we had all lines up and running on both DC and DCC. The only problem we encountered was that one of the L-fittings on the poles for the banner was missing, so we couldn't set up the banner. With all the major work done, the group decided to get an early start on the traditional Friday night dinner at Hosse's, hoping to beat the rest of the crowd (most of whom were still setting up) by eating dinner at 5:30 PM. As usual, we all had more than enough and were noticeable slower walking back to the cars. Since we finished dinner around 7 PM and the complex was open till 8 PM, a few of us headed back to the layout; Alan Del Gaudio to run trains prior to heading home, Martin to work on a couple projects, and Ken and I to hang out. On the way, Martin stopped at the hardware store and bought a new L-fitting so we could put up the banner. The four of us played until Mike kicked us out at 8 PM, then Alan headed back to Ellicott City and the rest of us to the hotel, where we joined the rest of the crew at the hot tub and the pool (sorry, no pictures this time guys) and socialized for a couple of hours before bed.

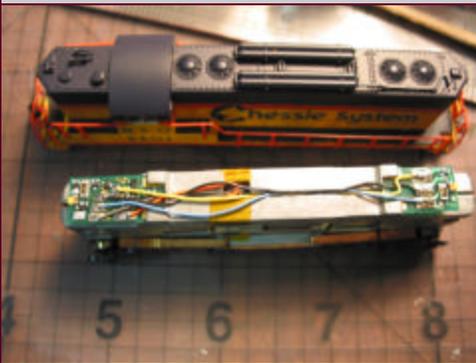
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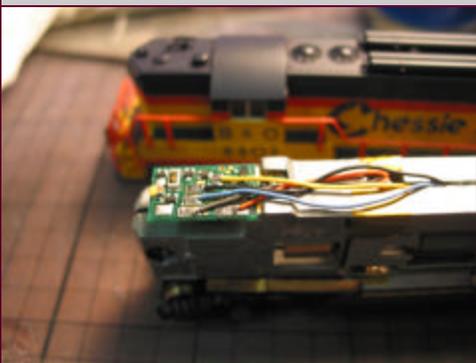
## Converting Classic Diesels to DCC

By Bob Mohr

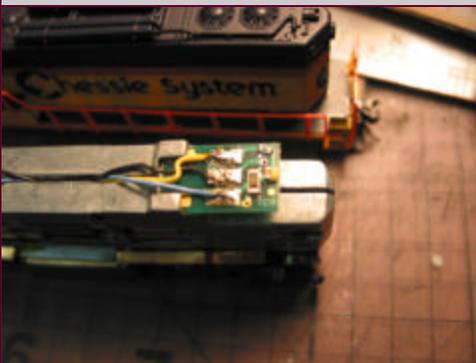
I had reached the point that eventually everyone does when retrofitting n scale engines to DCC. The easy conversions and drop-ins were done. Now I had to decide what to do with those classic, split frame Atlas and Kato diesels. As I saw it, I had three choices; 1. Sell them at the Scale Show, 2. Send the frames to a third party to be milled for space to insert a wired decoder, or 3. Attempt to modify the frames myself in order to install a small wired decoder. As I was making plans to implement these choices another option presented itself. This is what I would like to talk about in the next few paragraphs. This is part review and part installation guide for the Train Control Systems Classic N Decoder.



There are actually two different models the CN and the CN-GP. Both of these decoders are designed for relatively easy installation in those old split frame decoders with the two piece light boards. The TCS decoder comes as a two piece decoder to fit in place of these light boards. The decoder piece with wires attached is inserted in the front space in lieu of the front light board. The orange and gray wires are then brought to the motor brush locations and soldered to the motor brush holders. TCS has worked out two different methods to accomplish this task. I have used both and find no appreciable difference. I think that it is personal preference. Once you have attached the motor brush wires and insulated them from the frame halves it is time to reassemble the diesel and insert the rear decoder board in the rear light socket. Now the yellow, black and blue wires are brought to the rear board and cut to length and soldered on the appropriate pads per the diagram in the directions. This is actually quite easy given that the solder pads on the board are pre-tinned and relatively large (especially when compared to pads on a Digitrax board).



Now you are ready to test. Due to the nature of the board it is easy to check for isolation of the motor from the frame. With your multi-meter set on the continuity setting place one probe on the orange wire pad and the other probe on first one frame half and then the other. If you get a beep or a zero reading then you have a wire touching and this needs to be corrected. Repeat this procedure for the gray wire. If this is o.k. I set the unit on a programming track and change the address. If I get any strange flashing lights its back to check on motor isolation. If everything is o.k. then its time for a test run. If I made it sound easy, it is. If I made it sound hard that is because it is easier to do than to write about it. One thing though, while generally there is no cutting or grinding of the frame needed you must make sure that there is clearance under this board. It is not shrink wrapped and it can short out if it is grounded at an inappropriate place. TCS has an excellent website at [www.tsc.com](http://www.tsc.com) that contains very helpful detailed and illustrated installation diagrams and photographs to assist in decoder selection and installation. In addition they feature a goof-proof warranty that will repair or replace your decoder at no charge if you happen to let out the "magic smoke".



In addition to the ease of installation and factory warranty I also like the operational features of this decoder. It features automatically adjustable back EMF; which is a fancy way to make your engine operate at a very stable speed at slow throttle settings.

There is plenty of power in these decoders: they are rated at one amp continuous and two amps peak current draw. There are also a number of user adjustable CV's for the special effects lighting, speed controls, and momentum. There is even a setting for automatic mars light at slow speed. All of these CV's are changed by working your way through a series of tables that instruct you on what CV's to change. I have not used Decoder Pro with these decoders but I can imagine that this would be even an easier way to work with these decoders. So the next time that you are looking for a project, rescue one of your old diesels from the surplus bin and install a TCS decoder. You'll be glad that you did!



## A Good Idea Improved Upon!

by John Darlington

I was reading through my back issues of Model Railroader the other day trying to catch up, and I came across an article entitled “*Realistic Operations on a Modular Club Layout*” (MR August 2008) written by Mitch Rosset. While the text was interesting and the concept is something we should try ourselves, it was a photo and it’s caption that caught my eye. Apparently this Club (*Northwest Trainmasters in Chicago, Ill*) has made a schematic drawing of each of their industries so that the operator will know exactly where to set out and pick up freight cars. I thought that this was a pretty clever idea, and the more I thought about it the more I wanted to try it on my home layout. After thinking about it further, and knowing that I had just purchased a new digital camera for our upcoming vacation to Ireland, I thought that I could improve on this schematic concept by photographing the actual industries and marking the spot locations on the photo.

The first thing I did was to get out my trusty step ladder and use it to get photos of the more important industries along the MB&GL After taking a number of test shots and adjusting for height and distance, I took a series of photos looking straight down on top of the industries, somewhat like a satellite photo. I set the camera speed to 400 so that I could avoid using the flash. That gives a more realistic picture. Next I washed them through the computer adjusting the color contrast where necessary and cropping them. After that, I downloaded them into MS Publisher so that I could adjust the pictures for size and add signs marking the industry names, the spot locations, etc.

The next step was to lay out the photos and print them out on matte photo paper. After cutting out each photo, I laid them out on a sheet of white foam board. Then I sprayed the backs of each one with an adhesive and placed them on the foam board to dry. An hour later I used a utility knife to cut out the individual photos

The final step was to place them on the layout. I affixed each photo back with a small piece of Velcro with a corresponding piece on the fascia border around the layout. Each photo was placed in close proximity to the industry. I used Velcro so that the operator could either leave the photo where it was placed, or could simply detach it and hold it in his hand.

This was a very easy project to complete and I think it enhances the interest in my layout. I am providing photos opposite to show the end result. Let me know if you think it is a good idea

John

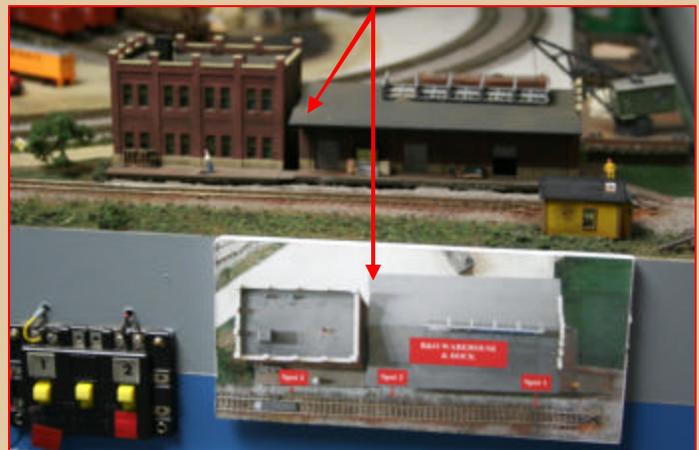
Photos laid out on a piece of white foam board



Individual photo after being cut to size



Individual photograph in place opposite industry



Shot showing three industries and their respective photos



(Continued from page 3)



Saturday dawned with a beautiful, cool morning and the BANTRAK contingent headed to Clara's for the bountiful breakfast buffet before heading down to the show at 8 AM. The crowd was sparse this year, but BANTRAK kept the trains running all day, with Ken and Dave holding down Red Line, Tim and Bob Mohr on Yellow, and Denise, Al Potter and Bob Winterbottom on Blue. Eric and Steve took the day to head north to railfan Horseshoe Curve and Gallitzin, while Skip and Ralph worked the sales table and Martin worked on the block detection system. Frank stopped by on the way to Altoona, and Mark and Jon stopped by on the way back from the Curve. The public show ended at 5 PM, and the activities for the participants began, starting with the drawing of door prizes. Mike Phillips called out names one by one, and the lucky person was allowed to go up to the prize table and select an item. Unlike previous year's, when BANTRAK seemed to always be the odd man out, we did very well this year, with three of the first five names

being Bob Winterbottom, Ken Greenhorn and Eric Payne; with Ken getting perhaps the biggest prize in the wireless rail camera. After the door prize drawing came the pig roast, with plenty of food for all the hungry N-scaler's, including a delicious banana cake for dessert. The last event was the auction, with Brian Brendel of NVNtrak once again pulling duty as the auctioneer. Unlike previous year's, there were actually some popular items in this year's auction and bidding was spirited. BANTRAK voted to include some of our club cars in the auction to hopefully generate some publicity for them; we donated a set of the new 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary cars to the auction with a minimum bid of \$55, the proceeds to go to this year's charity (Hollisopple Station restoration), and we also include a 5-car set with a minimum bid of \$70. Both sets sold for the minimum bids, with Patty Wingard purchasing the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary set for charity. Upon completion of the Saturday events, the crew headed back to the hotel, pool and hot tub for some more social interaction, including my entertaining the group with horror stories from the Louisville convention.

Sunday came sooner than we wanted, and after another trip to the bountiful buffet at Clara's, we checked out of the hotel and headed back to the complex for the final day of the show. Sunday's crowd was even smaller than Saturday's, with most of the people being weekend attendee's, but once again BANTRAK kept the trains running. After some initial early running by Ralph and Ken, we started this year's special event as requested by Eric Payne – Shay Time, where we were all Shay's all the time! From 10AM to 11 AM, we ran nothing but Shay's, with 8 operational at once. Martin ran his double-headed DCC Shay consist on Red line, with Dave and Denise operating their single engine trains on Red as well. Al Potter ran his two DC Shay's on Yellow line, with Ken Greenhorn assisting. Steve and Eric ran their



Shay's on the Blue line, also on DCC. After an hour of Shay excitement, the group posed for pictures on the Lumber Yard module, and then turned the layout back over the regular trains.



With the show winding down to close at 3 PM, the club started initial teardown activities around 2:15, including disconnecting loconet, taking down the banner and removal of skirting. Unfortunately at this point some confusion occurred, with several of those running trains believing the system had been shut down (it hadn't been), and pulling their trains from the layout early. With no guests and nothing running, we just decided to shut everything down and start teardown early at 2:30 instead of waiting till 3 PM. Teardown proceeded quickly, and everything was packed and the trailer was headed back to Baltimore by 4 PM.

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This was a fun show to do, with everything being primarily for us, the runners, to have a good time and not on providing a show for the audience. This year was smaller than the last two years, having lost the “backroom” to a day care provider, and also missing a couple of the more popular vendors in MB Klein’s and Mailbag Hobbies, who chose not to attend. However, the event is still popular among Nscaler’s; Mike Phillips indicated that he still wished he had more space as he had to turn a couple of clubs away. As a matter of fact it is so popular that Central Ohio NTrak has decided to hold their own N-Scale weekend in May of 2009!

**There are clowns in every group!**



I'd like to thank everyone that came and made this a great N-Scale Weekend! Mike Phillips is already planning next year's event, same bat-time and same bat-location. See you there!

**Tim**

**Our Next Meeting**

Our next BANTRAK Club meeting will be hosted by Frank Hogarth on **Sunday, September 21st** at Faith Community United Methodist Church, 5315 Harford Road, Baltimore, Md.

2PM to 5PM

Use side entrance on Gibbons Avenue

Parking in Rear

Map Included

**BANTRAK Organization**

Mark Bandy	President	(410) 750-2262
Tim Nixon	Treasurer	(410) 757-5045
Al Palewicz	Membership	(410) 426-0339





## RAFFLE LAYOUT UPDATE!

By Ed Aufderheide

Our raffle layout has been progressing nicely thanks mostly to a few, dedicated individuals. From my perspective it's been a great experience to exchange ideas with fellow members. As I stated from the beginning, it's not my ideas that matter, but the collective of everyone involved. Dave and Denise Clyde are the outcropping experts. They provided rock castings from their own molds. Denise created a unique tunnel opening while Dave littered the landscape with nature's best in rock formations. Enter Alan DelGaudio, the painting specialist. Alan demonstrated his favorite technique to turn paints into a wash for the rock formations. His techniques would have been instructional to those who have not ventured into this form of landscaping.

On the building side, Sandy VanMetre again added her expertise to add additional details to the city buildings. Credit goes to her husband Steve and to Eric Payne for coordinating the exchange between her and me. Not to be outdone, John Darlington who added an expertly constructed and detailed DPM kit. Finally, Ralph Grutzmacher completed the farm buildings to include a barn, chicken coop, and of course then farm house. Actually, Ralph donated buildings from his home layout that will not be going into retirement with him. They are spruced up a bunch and look great. This also returns the kit I purchased in behalf of the club to the kit for a future year.

For the city streets, Mark Bandy designed the layout and is hand cutting the streets from sheet styrene. His design called for kit-bashing a DPM building to create an angled back to fit against the sky board. Mark also customized one of my HO-scale tunnel portal castings to fit our N-scale tunnel.

I understand that the fuel issues of this summer have made it difficult for our northern members to travel to the sunny south to help. That is unfortunate. Also, I understand that we have some newer members who have little or no experience with layout building. I would encourage anyone who wants to learn to participate. After all, few of us do this every day and we are all learning as we go.

In the end, the creativity of our membership will result in a great layout. We are progressing well against the target of the October Scale Show.



## SPIKES AND SLEEPERS

## Meeting Minutes August 17, 2008

Our meeting of August 17th was hosted by Arthur Boyd. There was a sparse turnout (9), but that did not deter those attending from attending to some important business.

Tim Nixon reported on the upcoming show at *Bedford*, Pa (see report beginning on page 2 of this Newsletter). At that time, twelve members had signed up to attend. The layout was designed by Tim and it was planned to cover an area of 14' X 36". (its size and location was subsequently changed per Tim's article)

Dave Clyde brought us up to date on the upcoming *Scale Show* in October. Dave and Denise are the prime Coordinators for this show. It is anticipated that we will have our usual space (50' X 50'). Dave will be calling for modules for this show within the next few days.

Tim Nixon brought us up to date on the Club finances and mentioned that he was looking for another source for the *raffle tickets*. He discovered a few on the internet and the assembled members gave him permission to use his own discretion in making any purchase of these tickets.

Next, Eric Payne, the prime coordinator for our Christmas Show at the B&O Museum, advised that it is likely that we will have the same size space or maybe larger. As last year. One Trak modules will also be used which will afford those interested to work in some "operational" work..

After the report phase of the meeting concluded, we entered into a general discussion concerning our set up and tear down procedures during public shows. There were some comments made about attending members not lending a hand with some of the jobs that need to be done thereby extending the time it takes to set up the layout. It was acknowledged that some jobs may not be that interesting (putting in rail joiners for example), but in the end it has to be done. It was agreed by everyone that those involved in set up and tear down must do a better job of getting these tasks accomplished faster and more efficiently. It was decided that the Coordinators have the ultimate authority to assign individuals to specific jobs. Furthermore, the Chief Coordinator will enforce the long standing Club rule that those members in attendance at set up will be given priority run times over others who just show up to run trains. If we are going to be an 80/20 organization then that 20% will benefit.

Finally, it was decided to move the Raffle Layout to either Al DelGaudio's home or Martin Myers' shop so that it will be closer to Baltimore so that our Northern members can try a hand in finishing it up in time for the October Scale Show. Further information will be forthcoming.

After the business part of the meeting, Bob Mohr and Al Delgaudio presented some of their projects

## COMING EVENTS

1. **BANTRAK Club Meeting @ Faith Community United Methodist Church, 5315 Harford Rd., Baltimore, Md.**
2. **Scale Show @ Timonium—10/10 & 10/11 Set up on Friday 10/9 beginning at 1PM.**
3. **BANTRAK Club Meeting on 10/19 @John Darlington's house in Timonium**

*The BANTRAK Newsletter is the official publication of the Baltimore Area N-Trak Club.*

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BANTRAK Newsletter

Editor – John Darlington

Copy Editor – Elaine Darlington

We are on the Web! Try "BANTRAK.NET"

Bob Mohr showed us his handiwork in putting in a Digitrax decoder (DN16311C) into a Shark Nose engine made by ER Models. Digitrax discontinued the manufacture of a decoder specifically designed for this engine. Bob modified this new



decoder to work as a replacement.

Al Delgaudio brought his new warehouse (first seen at the N-Scale Convention in Louisville) that he kit bashed from two kits made by Walthers



Its great to have such talented people in BANTRAK.