



DONALD HAM EARNS MMR #491

**M**y entry into the Achievement Program started in September 2005 when the San Diego Division Layout Tour chairman contacted me to see if I would be interested in showing my layout to the Division members who contacted me. At the time, I was an NMRA member but not active on the local or national level. I had just finished a small 4x12-foot portable HO scale layout that could be stored with block and tackle below the ceiling of my garage. The tour went well. The Division AP chairman at the time, a gentleman by the name of Ed Hatch, told me I should qualify for a Golden Spike award. He gave me the necessary paper work to be filled out, which I did, and I submitted it to him. He also encouraged me to participate in the Achievement Program.

Unlike most people, I became interested in model railroading later in life. After finishing high school and college, I joined the Navy, became a Naval Aviator, got married, and had three children. After being transferred to the inactive reserve, I started a general contracting business specializing in remodels. My college-age son was working with me during the summer of 1992. We were driving down Victory Blvd in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles and passed a hobby shop specializing in model railroading. My son, Carlos, pointed it out knowing I had bought several Model Railroader magazines. He knew I would be interested. At the time, I was big into

the old car hobby — both restorations and street rods. Carlos also knew I was tired of oil dripping on my face and having to wash and maintain the five collector cars I owned at the time. We stopped at the shop to check out what was available to model railroaders — I was hooked. In all honesty, early in life I had a Lionel train set my father gave my brother and me. We had a great time with it. I was also very active in Boy Scouts and achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. Through the years, I have always been interested in anything to do with planes, trains, or cars.

After the layout tour, I decided to dismantle the 4x12 and build a larger, permanent 11x18-foot layout in one stall of my garage. About this time, *SCALE RAILS* (now the *NMRA MAGAZINE*) ran a series called “The Year of the Master Model Railroader.” I read each monthly article as they came out and decided to earn each of the Certificates as I came to that stage of layout construction. As you can guess, it went like this, Civil Engineering was first, Electrical Engineering second, Scenery third, and so on. This was a great learning experience for me. It introduced me to such things as hand-laying track and turnouts, scratchbuilding structures and cars, and, as I call it, “remodeling” existing locomotives, structures, and kits or as they say in model railroading “kitbashing.” The Scale Rails articles were very helpful when preparing the paperwork for judging and submitting the different Certificates.

Meanwhile, I joined an N scale club (even though my layout is HO) and be-

came active in the local San Diego Division of the NMRA. I am now the Layout Tour Chairman for the PSR San Diego Division. We schedule eight layout tours during the year, which gives me the pleasure of reviewing each before the actual tour. This is a good way to meet other model railroaders and see some great layouts. Through judging of my work and becoming more active in the hobby, I met several MMRs who have been very helpful and encouraged me to finish the requirements for my MMR award. One in particular is the late John Sigurdson, MMR 236. I would encourage everybody to participate in the Achievement Program. It is a great way to improve as a modeler and as a model railroader.

*Don earned the following Certificates: Golden Spike, Master Builder—Scenery, Model Railroad Engineer—Civil, Model Railroad Engineer—Electrical, Master Builder—Motive Power, Association Volunteer, Master Builder—Structures, and Master Builder—Cars.*