

The New NTRAK Newsletter

The NTRAK Modular Railroading Society, Inc.

March / April 2010



The Lake Erie N-scale Society Story

Looking down the pike. LENS uses Plexiglas on the front of each module to provide crowd control and to protect the structures and trains. The trains and scenery shown in the upper left corner are a reflection on the Plexiglass.





“L.E.N.S.” lights the way in northeastern Ohio

paper sign saying, “NTRAK” and an arrow was made. It was taped to the back of a chair, and “LENS” was open for business.

Among the modules were two that utilized the 6” extension to the front and the back, making it 3’ wide. The standard tracks formed a “transition

style” module which ran in a “depression”, as the rest of the table top was elevated about 3”. Clarence Hanold (one of the founders of the group) modeled a European village, with multiple trains running throughout, utilizing live catenary power. He went as far as rewiring

By Lou Dreher
(and “a cast thousands”)

Photos provided by Matt Kross, Chuck Limbert, Mike Buehner and Lou Dreher.

Longevity, talent, willingness to teach & share, innovation and above all else having fun, describes the Lake Erie N-scale Society (aka “LENS”).

Since 1981, “LENS” has represented NTRAK Modular Model Railroading in the area east of Cleveland, Ohio (primarily in Lake and Geauga counties). In March, 1982, “LENS” set up its first display of the NTRAK concept as part of a local NMRA division’s swap meet. A gymnasium at a local high school served as the location for the swap meet. However, a classroom down the hall was provided for the NTRAK display. The chairs and desks were piled into two opposite corners and the layout was set into the room at an angle. Six “4 footers”, two “2 foot cheaters”, and four “4 foot corners” were squeezed into the space provided. Some modules were fully decorated (remember the “wings”?), and one was delivered with a blank top. A visit to one of the dealers and some quick track work got the trains up and running. A pen and



N-Cat using “live” catenary. Note the single pantograph on the rear of the power unit.



A busy yard area using “live” catenary power. Note the pantographs used to get power for the consists.

some of the motive power he had, so that all of them ran using only the live catenary power. The following year, he added a third module, and displayed the 12' x 3' layout in many local and national shows for about 25 years. Sadly, Clarence has passed away and the modules are retired (for now...). His wife Luise has kept the layout in their home. This is one of the only examples of N-Cat that I have seen.

“LENS” has operated for nearly thirty years without a formal structure; but, it was realized early on there were procedural questions. It was decided about 23 years ago to write a set of guidelines as a point of reference suggesting our direction and structure. They were written to encourage the continuation of the model railroading hobby (specifically NTRAK), to share ideas and talents, and to respect all members and their opinions. Even though the club does not have officers, there is “friendly banter” among the members to encourage someone to run for “Non-President”. Rather, everyone enjoys working together as a group which leaves no room for politics or “one upsmanship”. That being said, usually one person makes sure that we have touched on all of the current club business during meetings before things break into multiple conversations about almost any topic you could imagine. And, the monthly newsletter and the web site (www.lensohio.org) have been developed and worked upon by only a few individuals over the years. Usually if a major decision has to be made, the core group of “old ones” gathers to discuss business. They present their findings and ideas to the group for a vote. OK; so there is some structure...

“LENS” is open to individuals that have an interest in N scale model trains, and a desire to learn, teach and contribute to the operation of the group. Modules are owned by individual members; but having a module is not required in order to be a member. The common equipment (power pack, throttles, skirt, signs, tools, etc) are stored in a trailer owned by one of the members. Many of our members also model in other scales. There are twelve home layouts under construction in “Z”, “N”, “HO”, “S” and “G”. Eleven members belong to the local NMRA division or other train clubs.

We do not collect dues. Prize money and contributions help to keep us solvent. We have monthly meetings, except during June or July, and the August meeting is replaced by a picnic. The location of the meetings moves around to the home of different members; we tend to go where we can run trains after the meeting. Currently, we do 5 annual set ups, which leaves us open for other invitations.

As with many clubs today, the demographics are changing. Currently we have 12 active members (average age of 53), and an additional 10 people that come to help out at the displays. We are finding it harder to get a continued commitment to our group and hobby from younger people. When I was a kid, model trains were one



Good natured ribbing gets serious as noted on this billboard on Chuck Limbert's module. LENS does not have a formal structure governing their group, but some members just won't "leave it alone".



Brian, Dan & Gabe represent some of the youngest members of LENS. Dan has been involved since he was 6 or 7, as his dad (Chuck L.) is also a long time member.



LENS members are willing to teach modeling techniques to the public. Dennis Lloyd is shown here applying decals to complete an "exact match" of the prototype. (Note the photos and completed models in the foreground),



This young guest is anticipating the arrival of a train from a tunnel. Perhaps she will be interested in modeling trains someday in her future.

of the few choices I had to entertain myself. Today, video games, the Internet, e-mail and personal communications are literally at our fingertips. However, all of that takes away from modeling. I was told the other day, an old issue of Model Railroader magazine had an article in it pointing out the same concern; the issue was from the late 1960's. With continued sharing of our hobby by "LENS" (and the many other groups around the world), and new concepts like T-Trak, more people will find and enjoy the hobby of model railroading.



Several individual members and the group as a whole have been recognized multiple times with awards or first place honors. We like to think we are among the first to display new and innovative ideas. For example, over the years "LENS" has displayed N-Cat (3/1982), the use of TV cameras to enhance viewing for the public (as early as 1990), the use of animation and sound to create more interesting scenes (since the late 1980's), and reversible corner bridges. We published a ".pdf" only version of the newsletter (since 6/2004), and used the Internet to show our hobby to the world (est. 11/2000). It's nice to be recognized, but that never stops our group from attempting to provide information to the public via clinics, setting up displays at local libraries or train shows, working with local scouting programs, supporting a local model railroad museum, etc.



Above: Matt Kross put his imagination to work to create this offline scene. The beach is on a river that runs under the three standard NTRAK lines. The entire scene (not shown here) contains over 100 people!

Bob Varga included this online structure in one of his modules. It looks like the workers are beginning to prepare for the arrival of a whistle stop delivery.

In fact, many years ago, a local NMRA division was working on a TV promo to encourage attendance at their Railfest train show. "LENS" set up (and then tore down) a complete display for a few minutes of interviews and taping. On another occasion, we were asked on a Wednesday if we could set up Friday for a weekend display. We were able to make that happen for a gracious town mayor. Finally, a local library asked us to set up a 1 day (non-operational) display about model railroading. We brought out books, rolling stock, motive power, a couple of modules, a table with members building things, and a small "theater" with tapes running. One person showed up; they looked around a little, and left. Oh well... we had doughnuts and trains!

Throughout the years we have met many friends that share our hobby and interests. The members of "LENS" will continue to have fun with NTRAK (in all of its many forms), and look forward to seeing you in the future.

(End)

At the top: John Evans was an early member of the LENS club and built many structures and scenes for his modules.

People are beginning to gather for the arrival of the local commuter train in this small town scene (built by John Evans - deceased).

Another example of John E.'s attention to detail, making this structure look old and worn.



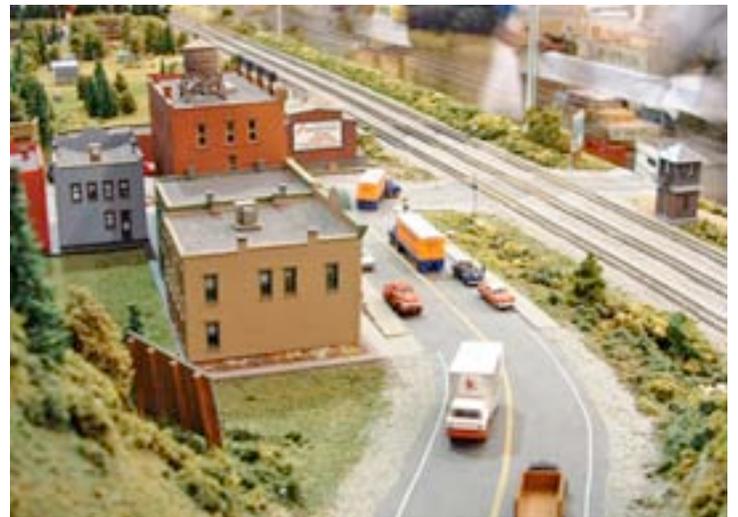
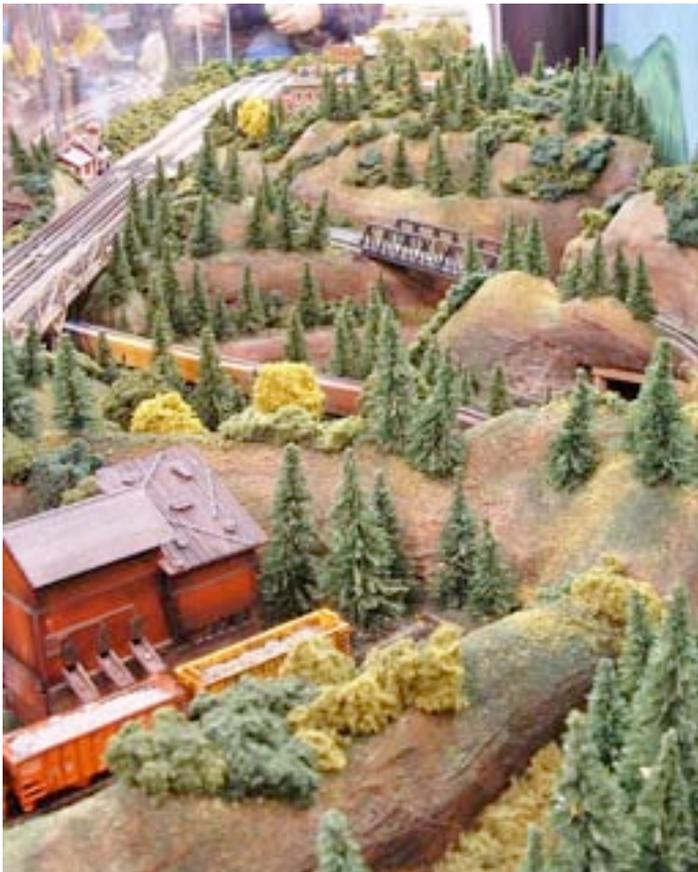


Dennis L. is shown here in a “Throttle Control Clinic”, operating an “0-5-0 Helper” to clear the tracks. He swears it’s the first time this ever happened...



Dennis Lloyd loves to make buildings for his modules (and for other’s too). This is just one example of the many buildings he has assembled or scratch built. His favorite activity is to take a picture of a building, buy some kits and styrene sheets, “bash” it all together, and see how close he can make the model match the photo,

Looking down the hill into town on Chuck Linbert’s module, provides a different view of the roadway and structures shown. Note the attention to detail which makes for an interesting image.



Note the train running below the bridge in the center of the picture. Bob Varga’s multiple module set provides plenty of action for guests by operating a “private railroad” below (and behind) the standard NTRAK lines.



John Evans (deceased) was a stickler for details as seen in this small town street scene. Note the operating street lamps, signs, window shades, and posed people. The “implied action” of the details make the scene appear to come alive.



Plexiglass barriers. As noted in the front page caption, the LENS club uses Plexiglass instead of rope or chain barriers on all of their modules. Here is a quick rundown on their solution.

For a four foot module most use panels 3/8" thick by 16" high and 47-3/4" long. They are held in place with two 1/4-20 bolts with large “fender washers”(also used to hold up the skirt. Nuts or threaded inserts are used in the front frame of the module.

Some leave the barrier in place when transporting and storing the modules. Others remove the Plexiglass and wrap with an old T shirt or other soft cloth.

Cleaning is done with spray cleaners designed for use on plastics. Window glass cleaners have abrasives and are

not suitable for cleaning plastic. For removing light scratches, a polish such as “Novus Plastic polish #2” (Novus Inc., Minneapolis (800) 548-6872) is their choice.

Earlier the club had tried stanchions, with rope or with chain, and have found the setup and tear down goes quicker with Plexiglass and there is no creeping in of the stanchions and the continuous adjustment of them.

Another plus is that without the space between the ropes and modules, the aisleway between layouts can be less while still providing ample room for guests.. Operators can still reach over the Plexiglass and re-rail cars and get things running again.