

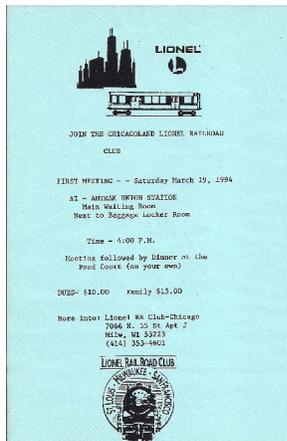
The Chicagoland Lionel Railroad Club: A Short History

By Edward Carter

Late on a cloudy 50 degree Saturday afternoon in March 1994 a group of Lionel model train enthusiasts began to assemble in Chicago's Union Station. The gathering was the result of the efforts of Gerry Brettschneider of Milwaukee. As a boy in 1947 Brettschneider had formed the Lionel Railroad Club of Milwaukee and during a military career that saw him posted in San Francisco and St. Louis he founded similar Lionel railroad clubs in those cities. Brettschneider thought the time had come for Chicago, the nation's railroad capital, to have its own club.

The Club Is Born in the Great Hall of Chicago's Union Station

In the weeks leading up to the gathering Brettschneider had hand bills printed announcing an organizational meeting for a Chicagoland Lionel Railroad Club (CLRC) to be held at Union Station on March 19, 1994. With the help of fellow Milwaukee Club member Dwight Safer he left stacks of the hand bills at Chicago area hobby shops. At 4:00 p.m. when Brettschneider called the meeting to order in Union Station's Great Hall the Chicagoland Lionel Railroad Club was born.



The handbill announcing the organizational meeting of the CLRC

Records from that meeting indicate that in addition to Brettschneider, there were 13 other people in attendance. At least one long time member whose name is not shown in the records of that meeting remembers attending suggesting that attendance records are incomplete and that more than 14 people were present.



Wally Sehnert addresses the organizational meeting of the CLRC in the Great Hall of Union Station. Wally remains a member to this day.

What is beyond dispute is that little more than 20 years after that meeting the Chicagoland Lionel Railroad Club, now based in the Chicago suburb of New Lenox, Illinois is a success probably well beyond anything those who attended that March afternoon meeting would have dared to imagine.

Today the Club owns its own clubhouse, has the largest interactive O-scale layout in the Midwest, and in April 2016 began building an even larger and more operationally and technologically sophisticated interactive layout that was ready to run trains by the fall of 2016. This is the story of the Chicagoland Lionel Railroad Club and the many members who, over the years, contributed thousands of man-hours of labor to make it the success that it is today.

At the Union Station meeting Brettschneider collected names, addresses, and \$10.00 in membership dues from 12 people who were

interested in joining and scheduled a second meeting. The second meeting was held on the evening of April 29, 1994 at Berwyn Toy Trains then located on Harlem Avenue in Berwyn, Illinois. Well over 40 people attended that meeting. Many of those present decided to join the Club that night and paid the \$10.00 membership dues. That night the Club began the long journey to becoming what it is today.

The Club Is Formally Organized

On April 7, 1994 the nascent club had received permission from Lionel to use the Lionel name as part of its official club name. Shortly after the meeting at Berwyn Toy Trains the members formally organized, adopted the name "Chicagoland Lionel Railroad Club", adopted by-laws, and elected the Club's first officers and its first board of directors:

- President . . . Herb Koch
- Vice President . . . Rich Thayer
- Secretary . . . John Flinn
- Treasurer . . . Tony Wallis
- Directors
 - Edward Carter
 - David Curtin
 - Joel Hastings
 - Tom Svetska

Following the April 29 meeting director Ed Carter prepared and filed articles of incorporation for the Club with the Illinois Secretary of State. On July 5, 1994 the Club was formally incorporated as an Illinois not for profit corporation and became the Chicagoland Lionel Railroad Club, Inc. After incorporation the Club applied to the Internal Revenue Service for 501(c)(7) status which the agency granted approximately one year later.

The New Club Faces Challenges and Critical Decisions

The new Club immediately faced a number of challenges and decisions. The Club had members who had paid dues to run their trains, but the Club had no layout, nowhere to house a

layout even if it had one, and limited funds for either. Through the efforts of Herb Koch, arrangements were made to hold meetings in a private room at Klas Restaurant in Berwyn. The Club now had a place to meet, but it still had no layout.

At one of the first meetings at Klas it was decided that the Club would build a modular layout and a trailer in which to store and transport the layout for run meetings. A standards committee was formed to develop standards for Club modules. Member Swav Kojro was on that committee and was instrumental in developing the standards that the Club eventually adopted. Swav and the committee examined standards used by a number of model train clubs across the country and decided to base the Club's module standards on standards used by Tin Plate Trackers of Glendale, California.



The Modular Layout Committee. Left to Right, Swav Kojro, Gerry Brettschneider, Ken Dieml, Dave Curtin, Dwight Safter, Irwin Bross, Bob Ciolino, and Lyle Eimen

Once the standards were adopted the committee built some modules and the Club asked members to build more and donate them to the Club. Over the years additional modules were built which permitted both different and bigger running configurations the latter of which, when set up in larger venues, enabled configurations with very long stretches of straight track and the running of long freight trains.

Within several years of when the first modules were built the total number of modules had

grown so large that a bigger trailer was needed. This time the Club purchased a commercially built trailer that was much larger than the original trailer and customized its interior so that it could efficiently store and safely transport both the much bigger layout and its by now many accessories.

From the Club's inception the board of directors recognized that a quick way to acquire a club house and home for a permanent layout would be to rent space. The board and most of the early members also knew that when rents increased or leases expired many model railroad clubs that rented space were forced to tear down the permanent layout they had built at great expense and move and that in some instances instead of moving the clubs simply dissolved. That knowledge drove the first board of directors and the membership to make a critical decision which would determine the direction of the Club for the next ten years and which would put the Club on the path of fiscal prudence that led to the financial soundness the Club enjoys today: Instead of renting space, the Club would buy a clubhouse.

The Nomadic Years

As a result of that decision, for its first ten years the Club led a nomadic existence. In the early years of that period members met one Friday night a month at Klas Restaurant. On the night of the run meet a member brought the trailer containing the modular layout to Klas where members set it up, had dinner, held a membership meeting, and spent the balance of the night running their trains. Around midnight members packed up their trains, dismantled the



At left, Club Vice President Rich Thayer sets up trains at a Klas run meet.

layout, and loaded it back into the trailer for a member to take home until the next meeting.

Starting in 1997 when because of a change in ownership Klas was no longer available, the Club met at a series of different locations. From 1997 through February 1998 the Club met at Palos West Grade School. From February 1998 and until May 1999 the members enjoyed a hiatus from the continuous set up and tear down cycle when member Al Laseke allowed the Club to use an empty commercial building he owned in Palatine, Illinois.

When Al Laseke sold the Palatine building the Club returned to the one Friday night a month schedule and the set up and tear down cycle resumed. This time, however, the Club combined its run meet with a swap meet and held that combined meet at an American Legion Hall in Tinley Park, Illinois. Continuing the once a month schedule, the Club later returned to the Friday night dinner/run meet format, this time meeting in a private room at the Destiny Restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois.

By the late 1990's the Club still had a long road ahead before it could seriously think about purchasing a club house, but that did not prevent the Club from creating a virtual home on the Internet. In the late 1990's member Irwin Bross created a website for the Club that immediately raised its profile and which he managed for the Club until 2015. In 2015 member Joe Smolinski took over management of the website and revamped it giving it a completely new look and making it much more user friendly.

Business Challenges Are Recognized and Addressed

The first board of directors understood that while the Club was a hobby club, it had no realistic chance of raising the money necessary to buy a club house and of obtaining a mortgage to finance the purchase unless it first succeeded as a business. The imperative for the Club to

succeed as a business has been recognized by and guided the decisions of all of the subsequent boards of directors and, critically, has been recognized by the members themselves.

Recognizing the economic realities and the business imperative, however, simply begged the question: In what business would the Club engage to raise the money it needed and to create a business history on which a bank would rely to make a mortgage loan?

The First Club Car Is Produced

In answer to that question the first board of directors in conjunction with the membership conceived the idea of producing and selling CLRC club cars manufactured by Lionel.

While the idea may have been a good one, it faced one very significant obstacle: Lionel had never produced a club car for a regional club and there was a serious question as to whether it would be willing to change that longstanding policy. Initially Lionel was reluctant to do so, particularly when it would be making that change for a fledgling club then barely a year old. After a number of conversations with Lionel Herb Koch, with the help of the Lionel's Mike Braga, was able to convince Lionel's management to take a chance and manufacture a club car for the CLRC. Lionel's agreement was conditioned, however, on the receipt of a prepayment of \$5,000.

By the fall of 1995 the Club had settled on a design for its first club car: a 6464-555 Chicago & Northwestern box car. With seed money provided by a member which the Club repaid within six months, the Club began marketing the car through full page four color ads in *Classic Toy Trains* and *O Gauge Railroading*. When sufficient orders were in hand the Club made the required prepayment and signed a contract with Lionel to produce 3,100 CNW club cars. Herb Koch negotiated the details of the production contract with Lionel, a task he would go on to perform for the Club for all subsequent cars.



CLRC's first club car

The CNW club car was such a resounding success that it would turn out to be the biggest selling of all the club cars produced by the CLRC.

27 Club Cars are Produced and Marketed

Following the success of the CNW car the board formed a club car committee and tasked it with planning and marketing future club cars. The committee's composition changed over the years, but Herb Koch and Bob Ciolino were longtime members who provided institutional knowledge to the committee and a face of



Club cars packed, labeled, and ready for shipping to purchasers

continuity to Lionel. Committee members made regular trips to Lionel headquarters to discuss future club cars and production matters.

Over the years the Club produced 27 club cars, sometimes one per year, but often two per year and sometimes the same car in the same road name, but in two different color schemes. The last new club car produced was a Western Pacific/Union Pacific heritage boxcar manufactured in late 2007.

In the ensuing years the Club's board of

directors has from time to time considered producing another club car. When the board has examined marketing and production costs and taken into account the now smaller market for such cars each time it has concluded that a club car cannot be produced and sold at a reasonable price and still be profitable.

In 2015 the Club produced what could best be called a semi-new club car when it retrofitted its inventory of unsold Great Northern bunk cars and tool cars with digital volt meters and sold them as a volt meter car. Then member Irwin Bross suggested the idea as a way to reduce the large inventory of those cars and produced a prototype to demonstrate both that the car would function as planned and that it could be easily and cheaply retrofitted in-house.

The volt meter car was a financial success. Important factors contributing to the success of the car were their by now relatively low cost (The cars had been manufactured for the Club ten years earlier.), the fact that the retrofitting was able to be done cheaply, and that marketing expenses were minimal because the cars were marketed through the retail shop and the Club's website.

Some of the club cars were produced as part of a series, such as the Time Zone Series which featured box cars using the name and heraldry of a railroad from each of the four time zones in the continental United States, while others commemorated historical events such as the 1999 Union Pacific marked Golden Spike car commemorating the 130th anniversary of the driving of the Golden Spike.

The Club Enters Into an Agreement with Union Pacific

To produce UP and UP heritage marked cars the Club needed to have a licensing agreement with the Union Pacific Railroad. The Club was one of the first model train clubs to have such an agreement with the railroad. Board member Ed Carter negotiated the initial and subsequent

licensing agreement with Union Pacific.

Other cars produced were specialty cars, the most significant and popular of which was the Shedd Aquarium Car. The car was illuminated and featured large windows through which fish could be seen swimming when the car was in motion. That car brought the Club the first of two invitations to display and operate its modular layout at important Chicago cultural institutions.

It was Bob Ciolino's idea to produce an aquarium car bearing the Shedd's name. The car was modeled on an aquarium car Lionel had produced years earlier which did not use the Shedd name. In the Shedd's early years it actually had an aquarium car, albeit one far different from the car modeled in the Club car, which it used to transport specimens to Chicago that its employees captured off the Florida Keys. That car is currently on display at the Monticello Railway Museum in Monticello, Illinois.

The Modular Layout is Operated at the Shedd Aquarium and The Art Institute of Chicago

When Bob Ciolino negotiated the agreement with the Shedd to use its name on the Club's aquarium car the Shedd asked the Club to display and run its modular layout at the aquarium during the 1996 Christmas season. As result, the modular layout was set up around the Shedd's Christmas tree and operated by members daily for the three weeks leading up to the Holiday. The Club also operated the layout one evening during that period for the Shedd's members only Christmas Party.

Six years later, in 2002, the Club was contacted by the Architecture Department of The Art Institute of Chicago and asked to set up and operate its modular layout in conjunction with a special exhibit entitled *Modern Trains and Splendid Stations*. The exhibit examined railroad stations built between 1990 and 2002, one of which was the then recently completed

The modular layout also made long distance trips. Club members took the layout and supplies of club cars to a number of LCCA and LOTS conventions where they set it up, ran trains, and sold club cars.

In 2000 the modular layout made one of its most important and memorable long distance trips when it traveled to Dearborn, Michigan for the combined LOTS and LCCA conventions held in conjunction with the celebration of Lionel's 100th anniversary. The layout was set up on the second floor of the Hyatt Regency Hotel and was visible from the entire bank of elevators. Because of its high visibility location the layout was visited by both convention attendees and ordinary hotel guests. CLRC members operated the layout continuously from 8:30 a.m. until midnight each day during the week long convention while selling club cars at the same time.

Between the traveling and the repeated set up and tear down cycle the modular layout "aged" quickly and required regular maintenance to keep it and its ever increasing number of accessories operating. John Flinn, often assisted by other members, contributed many hours not only to doing maintenance on the layout, but to making improvements to it. As the layout's technological sophistication increased over the years John Flinn became its first "electrical engineer", a wizard who knew the layout's electrical system and how to troubleshoot it when problems arose as they inevitably did.

The Club's Web Presence Pays an Unexpected Dividend

The Club used its web presence as an additional method of marketing both its club cars and itself. The web presence paid an unexpected dividend almost immediately when shortly after it went live, Ausable Solutions found the Club through an internet search. Ausable was a Georgia based software company which specialized in inventory control software

for the U.S. military and the restaurant industry and which was scheduled to have booth at trade show held at McCormick Place in Chicago in conjunction with Manufacturing Week.

Ausable wanted to have a 4' x 8' operating model train layout at its booth and inquired whether the Club could set up and operate such a layout. Herb Koch negotiated a deal with Ausable that included a budget for building a layout and a payment to the Club for operating it during the show. The layout, which included a number of operating accessories, was built over a period of three weeks in the garage of one of the members. Club members delivered it to Ausable's booth at McCormick Place and operated it daily during the four days the show ran.

The layout drew a large number of people to Ausable's booth and was the huge draw Ausable management had hoped it would be. That layout eventually evolved into the Thomas the Tank Engine layout currently located on the club house's mezzanine level.

In 1998 the Club began an association with the Boy Scouts that continues to this day when it teamed up with the Sauk Trail District to sponsor a camp-o-ree and give the scouts the opportunity to earn a Railroading Merit Badge (Club member Herb Koch worked with the Boy Scouts to create that merit badge.). The annual camp-o-rees were held over a three day period at different Boy Scout camps. Club members stayed at the camps during the camp-o-rees, set up the modular layout, operated it, and worked as merit badge counselors. After the Club acquired its club house the Railroading Merit Badge activity was moved there and became a tightly focused one day event.

The Club Establishes an Annual Picnic

During the Club's nomadic years the board of directors struggled to add value to a membership that for \$10.00 in dues offered little more than an opportunity to work on Club

projects to raise money and to set up its modular layout in a restaurant and run trains for few hours one Friday night a month.

In an effort to give back to the members who



The modular layout under the big top at the 2000 CLRC picnic

were working hard to achieve the goal of owning a club house, the board inaugurated the summer picnic and initiated an annual Christmas party that evolved into the Holiday Party now held each January.

The first picnic was held in August 1997 in Herb Koch's backyard, the venue at which it would be held for a number of years thereafter. The first picnic ran from 1:00 p.m. until after 7:00 p.m. and more than 100 members and their families attended.

Planning for the picnic was done months before by a picnic committee. Set up began two days before when the picnic committee erected a large tent in Herb Koch's backyard and the next day set up the modular layout inside the tent so that it would be available to members to run trains the following day. The day of the picnic preparations continued when at 7:00 a.m. two pigs were put on a spit and began roasting over a charcoal fire. Throughout the day there were drawings for prizes, engine races, and games for the children.

Bozo the Clown Appears at a Picnic

The picnic became an annual event and in 1999, when the Bozo Show was still a popular children's show on WGN TV, Bozo the Clown made an appearance. While Bozo was at the picnic a short feature about model railroading

that included children of a number of members was filmed for the show.

The picnic was eventually moved from Herb Koch's backyard and for a number of years was held at the Illinois Live Steamers. There Club members could spend the day riding on miniature steam trains operated by the Steamers. Once again, the Club provided the food and there were games for the children as well as raffles.

In a further effort to add value to the \$10.00 membership dues, in the fall of 1999 the Club began publishing *The Prairie State Express*. *The Prairie State Express* was envisioned to be a quarterly magazine style publication for members. Lyle Eimen served as its editor and was one of its chief writers. Other regular contributors of articles were Ed Carter, Herb Koch, and then Club Vice President, Rich Thayer. Never quite achieving its quarterly publication goal for any sustained period of time, by the middle 2000's its publication had become sporadic and it was discontinued in 2008.



An issue of the PSE from the early 2000's

When *The Prairie State Express* was discontinued it was replaced by *The Semaphore*, an electronically published newsletter created by then Club Secretary Al Havlicek. Havlicek produced *The Semaphore* until 2015 when its production was taken over by other Club officers. *The Semaphore* continues to be

published today and is the primary method by which the Club communicates with its members.

The Goal of a Clubhouse is Achieved

By 2003 the Club had accumulated sufficient profits from its various business operations that it could begin a serious search for a club house. With a strong balance sheet and a now consistent history of profitability from its business operations, once it found a suitable property the Club also had a reasonable chance to obtain mortgage financing on favorable terms.

In late 2003 then member Ted Cwik told the board of directors about some new industrial condominiums being built in unincorporated New Lenox. One significant drawback to the area where the condominiums were located was that it was zoned industrial and the Club's use would not be compatible with that zoning.

After site visits by members of the board the decision was made to purchase not one, but two units and to combine them into a single unit. Bob Ciolino negotiated a contract with the builder which included in the purchase price the structural changes needed to convert the two units into a single unit.

Bob Ciolino also found local counsel which the board retained to represent the Club both in applying to the Will County Board for a use variance and in connection with the purchase of the industrial condominium.

After closing on the purchase the Club applied to the Will County Board for the use variance. To address any questions that might be raised, Bob Ciolino and several of the directors attended the meeting of the Will County Board that took up consideration of the Club's variance application. As it turned out the use variance was not controversial and the Board granted it after a brief discussion.

Bob Ciolino was also instrumental in obtaining the initial mortgage loan to finance the purchase. That loan had a 30 year amortization and a seven year balloon. Because of the size of the

down payment and the Club's history of consistent profitability from its business operations and, critically from the perspective of the Club's officers and directors, the lender did not require any personal guarantees for the loan. Bob obtained subsequent refinancings of the mortgage at lower interest rates.

After the loan was closed, the board made the decision to make an extra \$100 payment each month both to reduce the principal that would need to be refinanced when the balloon came due and to reduce the amount of interest the Club would have to pay over the life of the loan. Later, in an effort to retire the debt more quickly and further reduce the amount of interest the Club would have to pay, the board decided to make large additional principal payments each quarter.

Once the builder made the necessary structural changes the purchase of the clubhouse was finalized and in August 2004, a little more than ten years after its formation, the Club became owner of its own home--a 60' x 60' space which, except for two bathrooms, was completely empty.



The CLRC club house as it appeared just after being purchased.

Improvements are Made to the Club House Interior

The board of directors realized that before moving in it was necessary to identify the different uses the club house space would need to accommodate and to devise a plan that would

allocate space to serve those uses in the most efficient way. Also, because the Club now had a mortgage with monthly payments, real estate tax obligations on two units, and was now liable for other expenses associated with property ownership, the board recognized that prudent business management required the Club to diversify its sources of income so that it would not be dependent solely on dues and club car sales.

The board appointed a committee to develop both a new business plan and a plan for the new club house. The committee, whose members included Bob Ciolino, Ed Carter, and Lyle Eimen, ultimately decided on the idea of building the mezzanine as a way of increasing the amount of usable square footage and developed the idea of diversifying the Club's income stream by holding open houses for the public at which admission would be charged, building and renting lockers to members, and creating and allocating space in the club house for three business centers: a retail shop, a back shop, and a diner.

The decision to diversify the Club's income streams proved to be as critical as it was prescient. At the time the club house was purchased club car sales had been slowly declining for a number of years, not just for the Club, but also for other clubs that sold club cars. Within three years of purchasing the club house new club car sales had dwindled to the point that the board decided to discontinue production completely. As a result of that decision club car sales thereafter were made solely from existing inventory and became an ever smaller source of income.

With a plan for the club house in place, shortly after closing the board hired a contractor to build the mezzanine and to make certain other changes specified in the club house plan. When the mezzanine and other construction was completed, following the plan developed for the

club house, members began making further improvements and changes to the interior. Those changes included moving a bathroom from one side of the unit to the other, tiling the floor of both bathrooms and the retail shop, and painting the interior and floor.

By the fall of 2005 with the build outs and other improvements complete and with the venerable and by now much expanded modular layout configured to its maximum size and set up in the center of the club house, the club house was ready to be formally opened.

The Club Holds a Gala Grand Opening

On October 29, 2005 the Club held a gala grand opening for members and their families. Guests included Gerry Brettschneider, Union



At the Grand Opening, Left to Right, Neil Besoughloff from *Classic Toy Trains*, Herb Koch, and Lou Kovach from Lionel

Pacific Railroad's Brenda Mainwaring from Omaha, Neil Besoughloff from *Classic Toy Trains*, and Lou Kovach from Lionel.

Since its grand opening the club house has hosted a number of important guests and events. In September 2006 the Club was visited by rock musician Neal Young, then a minority owner of Lionel who, along with Lou Kovach, had developed the TMCC system. Later, for several years in a row, the club house was chosen by Lionel as the site for the Midwest unveiling of its new products for the upcoming year.



At the CLRC club house in 2006, left Lou Kovach and right, Neil Young who jointly developed the TMCC system

The Club Continues to Make Improvements to Enhance the Club House Experience

During the ten years following the grand opening the Club perfected its open house business model and the managers of each of its business centers refined the business models for their respective centers. Lyle Eimen took over management of the back shop and to enable it to become a Lionel Authorized Service Center, the Club sent several back shop workers to Lionel for training. Angela Reed and Kevin Barry developed a business model for the diner and developed the idea of renting the club house for birthday parties and of offering several different food plans in conjunction with the rental, while Bob Ciolino developed an appropriate product mix for the retail shop.

During that same period the Club continued to make improvements to the club house and six years after the club house's grand opening the Club took the first significant step toward a permanent layout. In 2010, with donations from members, the Club built the belt line, the permanent layout that starts on the west wall of the club house, runs along the south wall, and several feet short of the east wall turns north where it links up to the modular layout.

In 2014 the Club hired MoGraphics to create and install a panorama behind the belt line which used photos taken near New Lenox by Herb Koch and Swav Kojro. The panorama begins on the west wall with a picture of a refinery, becomes more suburban and commercial as it continues along the south wall, and culminates on the east wall with a dramatic six foot tall view of downtown Chicago taken from the perspective of Lake Michigan.

To further enhance both the visitors' and the members' club house experience in 2015 new lighting which will be able to simulate a 24 hour day across the layout was installed and so that the sound features of the model trains can be

heard more clearly sound absorbing materials were hung from the ceiling.

Most importantly, during the ten years after purchasing the club house the board of directors remained relentlessly focused on paying off the mortgage. In July 2014 the Club made its final mortgage payment and fully realized the goal of home ownership set by its original board of directors and its charter members 20 years earlier.

Construction of the Long Awaited Permanent Layout Begins

In 2013, with the mortgage payoff in sight and the financial resources that would free up able to be re-directed to construction of a permanent layout, the board of directors decided it was time to begin seriously planning one. The board recognized that because of the income generated by open houses and consequently the necessity of completing construction between open house seasons that serious planning needed to include both logistics planning and scheduling.

To develop those plans the board of directors created a permanent layout committee. Swav Kojro, who over the years had drawn up different concepts for a permanent layout was tapped to chair the committee. Over the course of two years he, along with Steve Goshko, Al Havlicek, and John Billone began to plan not only a layout, but to develop logistics plans and a construction schedule that would enable the layout they were designing to be constructed in 18 weeks.

The committee faced a daunting design task because of the multiple and not necessarily easily reconciled functions the new layout would need to perform. Some members wanted a layout where trains could be run prototypically, others were not concerned with prototypical operation and instead were simply interested in running their trains on a large layout. Some members wanted realistic scenery, some wanted point to point passenger train operation, while

others argued there was insufficient space for passenger trains.

In addition to the desires of the members there was the business consideration that the Club earned significant income from open houses and the sales driven by open house visitors. That meant the new layout had to be visually interesting to the public at large and like the modular layout needed to be interactive.

Over the course of approximately two years the committee worked on a plan which at various stages was submitted to the membership for comment. The committee did its best to incorporate many of the members' suggestions into the final plan that it unveiled in April 2016.

The final plan featured a large interactive layout that could be operated prototypically when desired, that could be operated as one large layout or as two separate layouts, which allowed for point to point passenger train operation, has a logging railroad, and on which trains can be operated with Legacy, TMCC, and DCS, and on which they can also be operated in pre and post-war conventional mode and modern conventional mode.

The Modular Layout Dismantled for the Last Time

With those plans complete, immediately after the April 2016 open house, the Club dismantled the now more than 20 year old modular layout for the last time. After having served the Club so well and having earned income for the Club so often during its life, the modular layout earned income for the Club one last time in its death when the individual modules were sold off to interested buyers.

Immediately after the tear down, with Al Havlicek acting as the construction foreman, the Club began construction of the new permanent layout which technologically if not also operationally, exceeds anything that its charter members could have envisioned back in 1994. The new permanent layout was up and

operational, albeit without scenery, by the beginning of the 2016 open house season. Scenery consistent with the overall plan of the layout is scheduled to be added and is expected to take several years to complete.

With the completion of the permanent layout the Club finally achieved the last of the goals set by its first members and toward the achievement of which those and subsequent members devoted countless hours. Completion of the permanent layout closes one chapter in the Club's life and opens a new one which its current and future members must necessarily write for themselves.

Thanks to yesterday's members and today's members tomorrow's members will be able to write that new chapter of the Club's history in a club that is financially sound, that fully owns its own club house, and that has a permanent layout for the 21st Century. In short they will face the future with the Club which the founders planned in their first meetings at Union Station and Klas Restaurant and which the members spent the 20 plus ensuing years successfully creating.

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