



# Prairie Ponderings

For the enjoyment and edification of model railroad operators

## Crews continue to earn hours toward Achievement Program dispatcher certificate

The year just ended provided a record number of hours for Wisconsin Dakota crew members to experience and enjoy operations on the layout, which celebrated its five year anniversary last May.

The year ahead likewise promises landmark events, including hosting out of town, state, and country visitors during the May 20 home layout visits. The Sunday afternoon tour of a dozen or so layouts marks the end of the Thousand Lakes Region annual convention, being hosted this year by the Dakota Southeastern Division.

### Check YouTube's Rails to the Rocks 2012 video for a snazzy preview of the May 18-20 TLR convention

On top of the dozens of guests expected for that event, the WisDak expects to see even more in October during the annual open house layout tour, the seventh consecutive year members have opened their homes to the public.



Dispatcher Don Miller confers with the WisDak crew via radios (courtesy Dan Horner) during a recent Sunday afternoon operating session. Dan joins Bill McKean and Larry Feay among those with 10+ hours as dispatcher



Road engineer Richard Dahl brings DME L922, the Beloit local, into town for switching at Stauffacher Packaging

Around that time, or a month or so earlier, a gala one hundredth anniversary operating session celebration will take place. Over the past eight years, counting over a full year in our Twin Cities (Eagan) home, hobbyists literally from all over the world have enjoyed operating my home layouts. This past year was no exception. Guests from Minnesota, Missouri, and Melbourne, Australia visited Harrisburg, including mentor Gary Freseman, from Mahtomedi, MN; fellow DME enthusiast Brad Hinton from Melbourne, AU; and just a week ago, generous and talented fellow hobbyist Mike Porter, from Kansas, City, Missouri. Mike's electrician skills proved invaluable, as he corrected a wiring deficiency in our electric control panel located in the layout room (affectionately dubbed "the train room" seven years ago by my wife Jan.)

Thanks to all of you who made 2011 a great year of model railroad operations. Your friendship, advice, and encouragement are greatly valued. I promise 2012 will have plenty of surprises and enjoyment in store too.

## Regional carriers express pessimism heading in to new year

Decreased carloads and increased fuel prices sound alarms for DME, WSOR, and WC

Despite increased numbers of trained crew along with a higher level of experience, all three regional carriers reported difficulties in 2011. Car volumes dropped for each of the three railroads. Only short line haulers Ellis and Eastern, which provides sand along the DME Chicago sub, both in Byron and Beloit, and the Dakota and Iowa Railroad, provider of limestone for the cement plant in Beloit from McKean Aggregate in Anderson, reported profits for the year.



Midwest Railcar Repair, while not a regional carrier, managed a reported “just okay” year as far as volume of repair, inspection, and paint shop workload. Here the company switcher drops a WSOR covered hopper due for inspection at the Anderson, Wisconsin, facility.

As a result, motive power was sold off by WSOR as well as DME last fall and trains will run without multiple units. “This might not be the end of that,” was a comment from an unnamed executive. “We don’t know for sure where things will end up.”

However, “rock solid” was the word for aggregate haulers in 2011. Due to the L.G. Everist cement plant, DME also gained carloads in Beloit and at Byron, where Meyer Concrete generated demand which the short lines were able to readily meet.

The coming year promises plenty of activity as we build to the 100th operating session celebration in late summer or early fall.

## DSED Division Doings

The division’s annual business meeting and dinner attracted nearly 30 members and spouses at the Harrisburg firehouse on Saturday evening, December 17.

A tasty meal catered by Tony’s of Brandon marked a departure from the division potluck past practice the past eight or nine years at Terry and Darla Anderson’s.

Mike Kaufman agreed to serve an additional term as chief clerk and was elected for 2012 and 2013.

DSED’s next meeting is in two weeks—Saturday, January 14, beginning at 1:00 p.m. at superintendent Alan Saatkamp’s home at 902 Chestnut Street in Harrisburg.

Agenda will focus on nailing down the timetable, costs, and assignments for the many responsibilities for which we need all hands on board for Rails to the Rocks 2012 (plus dry, warm weather). Please be there ready and willing to express your commitment!



Official Mike Porter from the Kansas City UP division point visited stations along the DME’s Chicago subdivision recently, troubleshooting problems that have plagued the regional railroad and threaten its viability in 2012.