



### CHIP ROMIG EARNS MMR #423

I grew up in small town America. St. Clairsville, Ohio, across the river from Wheeling, West Virginia, was quiet and quaint in the 1950s and is quiet and quaint today.

I didn't know it at the time, but a life-long love of trains began on a Christmas Day. I was 5 or 6 years old when I was surprised to find my first American Flyer train racing around the bottom of the Christmas tree. My surprise soon turned to pure joy, and from then on, every Christmas I would anxiously wait to see what new cars Santa would bring.

As I grew, so did my trains. During my teen years, I built my "railroad empire" on three 4x8s in the basement of our house. I spent hours each day experimenting, creating, and re-creating scenes, while watching my trains circle endlessly.

My romance with trains was put on hold while my life took many turns. I received my Bachelor of Business Administration at O.U. (Ohio University to those of you from Oklahoma or Texas) and then served with the U.S. Air Force for six years piloting mostly F-102As. After the Air Force, I worked for IBM for four years as a national account executive, leaving to join Rand Information Systems as vice president of sales. After 12 years with Rand, I made my last career change and became a financial consultant for Morgan Stanley Smith Barney. I had moved to Dallas, Texas, while

working for Rand, and it is here I remain today.

In 1985, 20 years after leaving behind my railroad empire, I found myself as a single parent raising two daughters. My thoughts went back to those wonderful times with my American Flyers and my romance with trains was re-kindled. My first house was a little space-challenged, but I was able to erect a 4x8-foot table and construct an N-scale coal-hauling layout loosely modeled after the Clinchfield Railroad. Several years later, we moved to a larger house, and I was able to carve out enough space to call my own for a 15x15 L-shaped layout. The extra space enabled me to move up to HO.

Over the next few years and a couple more house moves, I established "my train" area of 20x25 and developed the skills to build a quality HO railroad. During its construction, I met Lee Johnson. Besides being a good friend, I learned many things from Lee, the most important being that there is more to the hobby than just running trains. Lee introduced me to the Friday "lunch bunch," a group of two dozen fellow train lovers. Thanks to Lee and the lunch bunch, after 40 years of running trains in circles, I was introduced to "operating" a railroad and discovered (much to my surprise) that there were more than a few people willing to come to my house and operate with me.

About this time I decided to switch to S scale. Utilizing the train table from my HO layout, I rebuilt the railroad with S scale equipment and a Wangrow System

One DCC system. We operated with six people for years as my knowledge and skill levels grew.

Many years later, it was time for one last house move, and I was ready to build my final layout. The house was finished in late 2005, and a few months later the layout was under construction in a 60x30 space on the second floor. (There are no basements in Dallas.) Thanks to a lot of help from my rail buddies, we were able to have our first operating session only 2½ years from the first piece of bench work. Currently, I estimate that we are still about one or two years from completion.

Now my “Railroad Empire” is set in north east Colorado in 1958. The plan was to build a shortline railroad that would be an amalgamation of the many small railroads of the 1950s in Colorado. Connecting with the Denver & Rio Grande Western would allow larger equipment to be used to bring cars to and from staging. We decided to experiment and build an HO (Union Pacific Track 3) railroad at eye level (if you are 6-foot, 4-inches) running the ridge-line to the mountains. Although the HO railroad is primarily used for open houses, it is great to have it running in the background during an operating session. The

main level is the S scale Colorado & Silver River. The railroad runs on DCC using NCE and Soundtraxx as the main equipment suppliers. We currently operate on the second Friday afternoon of every month with a crew of 10–12 people. On the other Fridays, we continue to detail the layout, make track modifications, install Panel Pro (a computer-driven dispatch system), and have a great time! I’m lucky enough to have a lot of help.

During the planning for my final railroad, I realized it would be a good idea to document the steps so they could be used for the Master Model Railroader program. Although many of the requirements had been met on my previous railroad, I had not prepared suitable descriptions. So this time, as I constructed my new layout, I kept the requirements for the Achievement Certificates in mind and maintained suitable documentation, diagrams, and photographs. About half of my Master Builder–Structures Certificate came from models I had built for my previous railroad; the rest were built for the new Colorado & Silver River. The Master Builder Author Certificate was achieved from magazine articles about my previous railroad and my web page.

The last certificate I needed was Master Builder–Cars. The super-detailing part of the requirements was not a major concern, but the “scratchbuilt” requirements gave me pause. I finally decided to build four 36-foot cars for the railroad since 36-footers were not commercially available for S scale. I also decided to work in styrene since virtually all my current rolling stock is plastic. Most of my experience was working with wood, so with great intrepidation I began. After completion of my four scratchbuilts, I felt I had done my best work yet! Only then did I understand that one of the most important aspects of the MMR program is to challenge you to reach farther and do things you might not try in the normal course of model railroading.

Three things highlight my time in model railroading: The first is creating, whether it is a structure or a mountain; The second is that operating the railroad breathes life into your work; The third is the people you meet. The best part of the hobby is the people associated with it.

The Colorado & Silver River can be viewed at [coloradoandsilverriver.com](http://coloradoandsilverriver.com).

*(Certificates earned in Achiev. Cars, Dispatcher, Structures, Civil, Electrical and Scenery).*