

Hands-On with MCR Division 1's Member Retention Initiative

Article by Jasmine Trocchia and photographs by Frank Trocchia

How do you keep members returning to your local Division meetings? Mid-Central Region Division 1 has a great idea — give members T-TRAK modules!

The Mid-Central Region Division 1 (Akron, Canton, and Youngstown, Ohio) used matching funds from the NMRA's National Member Retention funds to foster a project to retain new and existing members. The Division has formed an initiative to give each new and returning member a T-TRAK module to assemble and lay scenery as they see fit.

The modules provided can be HO scale (single) or N (single or double size). The module kit comes with a base made of either Masonite or MDF, Kato Unitrack, and four leveling screws. The base pieces were laser-cut by Portland Locomotive Works.

While the Division will own the corner modules that will complete a layout, each module is owned by the individual members; they are free to display them when and where they wish.

The goal of the initiative is not only to give members a gift, so they feel welcome, but also to refocus the Division's efforts on creating a module from top to bottom along with the scenery, track placement, and guidance on other basics of model railroading.

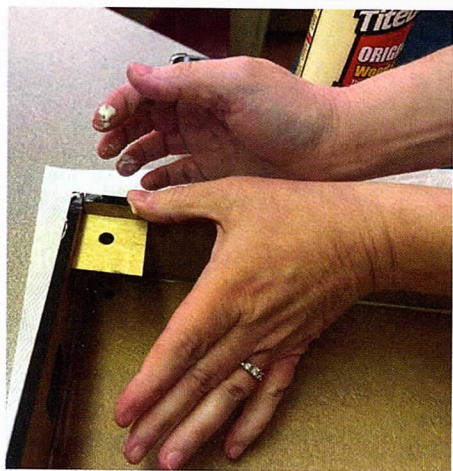
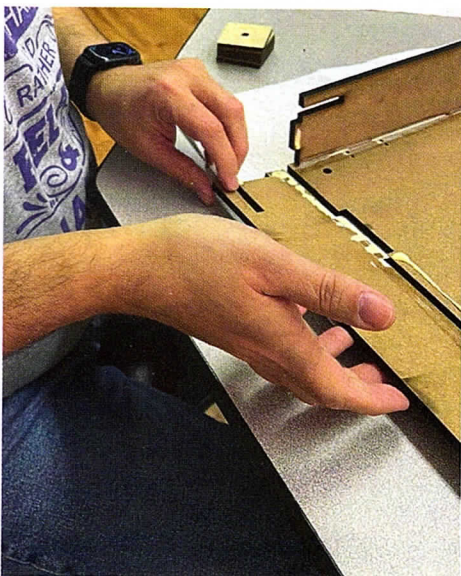
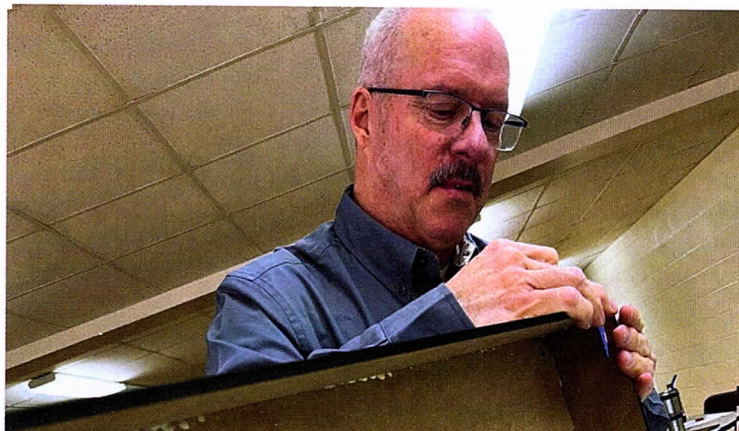


Top: Jasmine applies wood glue to the edges of the module frame pieces.

Bottom right: Members of Division 1 all pitch in to assemble modules.

Below: These square chips hold the leveling hardware in place in each corner.

Bottom left: Frank glues the pieces of his module together.



The Division members often found themselves so focused on setting up and maintaining their existing HO-scale modular layout that they had lost sight of the fundamentals of model railroading. Creating a new T-TRAK layout for the Division accompanies a let's-get-back-to-our-roots approach of starting a module from scratch. The result is multifaceted: the Division gets a new layout to take to shows and events, existing and new members receive a practical way to stay connected, and the hobby benefits from fresh faces who — hopefully — stick around.

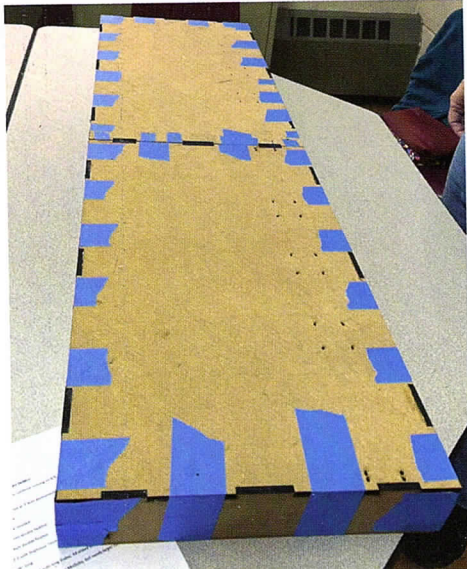
Before anyone received a module, leadership emailed the existing members so they could order what they wanted. By the next meeting, we were able to pick up the pieces of the base of the module. After the business portion of that meeting, we held a hands-on clinic with tips on gluing the pieces together and assembling the leveling screws. The track was delivered at the following meeting, along with advice and instruction on the T-TRAK standard for track placement.

The last meeting in March 2023 included a clinic focused on creating realistic module scenery.

Taking the members step-by-step through the practical process of creating their modules to display them together has an amazing side effect of fostering discussion, sparking mentorship, and experiencing new ideas.

Creating my own N-scale T-TRAK module from scratch has been an intriguing learning experience. So far, in my model railroading journey (which you can follow here at <https://www.youtube.com/thattraincouple>), I have only just begun to

Below: Two assembled module bases waiting to dry.

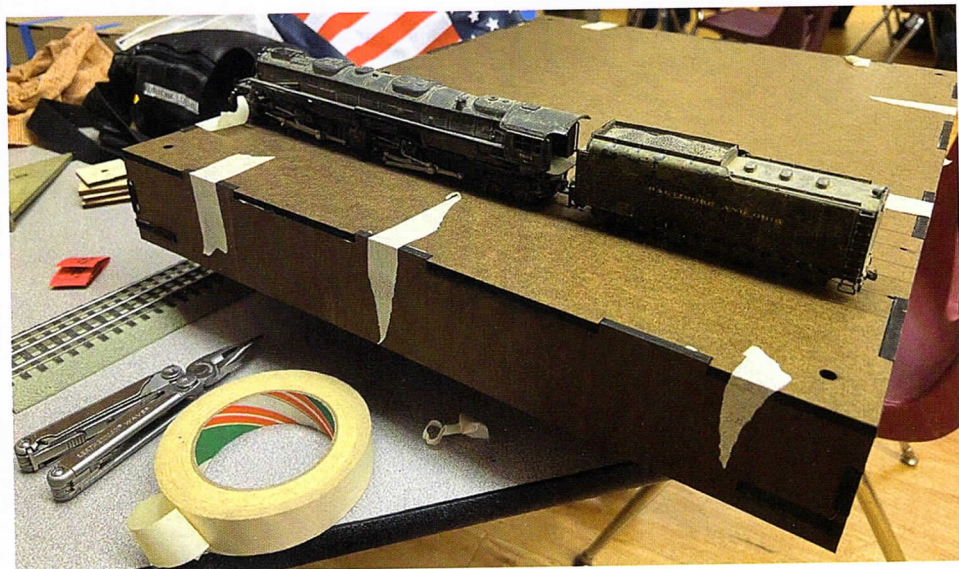


Above: Frank and Jasmine (That Train Couple on YouTube) work together to tape a module base as it dries.

scratch the surface of what the hobby is all about. I am delighted to get the chance to create a module from start to finish alongside my fellow Division 1 members so that I can share ideas, glean inspiration, and truly experience the fellowship of the model railroading community.

Will free T-TRAK modules entice new members to join the NMRA? Who knows? Perhaps this will happen at one point via

Below: A Division member's HO-scale module assembled.



the many shows and public events where the T-TRAK modules will be displayed. The ultimate hope is that existing members will feel like they are a part of something great.

I now have two double N-scale modules to work on, so the real question is, what do I want to model? The possibilities are truly endless, which is the most exciting part!