

# KEEPING TRACK

Official Newsletter of the Abilene Society of Model Railroaders

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Editor: Jim Gibson

## ***The Word From the Prez***

### **Busy Season's Over Now, Let's Get Back To Basics!**

It's early, but 2007 is already off to a great start. In spite of the cold weather, we have had a good number of members show up at the club to run trains on meeting days. We have also had an encouraging number of visitors, some of whom have shown an interest in joining ASMR.

Now that our busy time of year with open houses and Christmas Lane preparation and execution are behind us, it's time to get back to some fundamental things on our club layout. For example, we need to finish up the Abilene Yard, replace problem turnouts, put feeder drops in areas where we've been losing power, and touch up scenery and backdrops that are damaged or looking shabby. We also need to take our operating sessions to the next level. Our "Easter Egg Hunts" are fun, but they only represent about half of what true operations are all about. Those who have gone to Fort Worth and operated on Jim Norwood's layout know what I mean.

I also need suggestions for upcoming programs for this year so we can cover things that you the club members want to learn about. In addition, I would like to know if you have reasonable expertise in some aspect of model railroading that you would be willing to do a presentation on for the club so we could get you set up for a program.

And last but not least, thanks to everyone for your help and participation in making ASMR a great club to belong to.

***Your President, Ken Riediger***

## **ASMR Meeting Notes**

The Jan. 6 business meeting was called to order by Pres. Ken Riediger at 10:43 a.m. Minutes of the Dec. 2 meeting were read and approved, but a treasurer's report was still unavailable due to Treas. Dan Brady's continued absence. According to Pres. Riediger, Dan should be back in February. Members discussed the club's new model railroad layout display for the 2006 Abilene State School "Christmas Lane" event during December. Pres. Riediger said that the layout got an "excellent reception" from visitors and was a "complete success". Ideas for enhancing next year's display layout were tossed

around, including animations and some kind of an additional small Thomas the Tank train layout with a "red button" the kids could press to run it. Jim Gibson said that he had nothing new to report on the Habitat for Humanity building as a potential new home for the club. Members talked about the Plano Train Show on Jan. 13, and agreed that those who would like to car pool to Plano should meet at ReMax Realty at 6:30 a.m. Ken England raised the question of when the new yard on the permanent club layout will be completed, and everyone agreed that it needs to get done soon. Also, some of the switches on the layout and continuity problems which are causing running interruptions need to be dealt with. A committee was formed to identify layout problems and set up a schedule for getting them fixed. Included on the "track gang" team are: Ken Riediger, Ken England, Cody Hilliard and Jim Gibson. The meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

## **State RR Dodges Bullet; But Still Faces Problems**

It looks like the Texas State Rail Road (TSRR) will still be running during part of 2007, but it will be on a limited basis. During Jan. and Feb. there will be round trips Sat. only and only from Rusk depot. From Mar. thru May round trips will be from both Rusk and Palestine depots on Sat. and Sun., until the last two weeks of May when Thur. and Fri. runs will be added. The Thur. thru Sun. schedule will continue through June and July, then go back to only Sat. and Sun. during Aug. If nothing is done by the legislature or private entrepreneurs to rescue the TSRR before Aug. 31, all runs will be discontinued after that date, according to the TSRR website.

## **Club's Plano Show Trip Gets "Weathered Out"**

Extremely cold weather made worse by icy streets and highways put the "kibosh" on the plan for several ASMR members to meet at ReMax Realtors at 6:30 a.m. on Jan. 13 and car pool over to Plano for the annual Train Show there.

## **ASMR Duo Teaches Scouting Railroad Merit Badge Course**

For the second year in a row in support of the club's public outreach goals, Ken Riediger and Jim Gibson taught Saturday morning Boy Scout merit badge classes on January 6 and 20 at McMurry Univ. They provided training for three Scouts working toward their "Railroading" merit badge. Using props like model trains, timetables, etc., and spicing up their lessons with personal knowledge and experiences, they covered a variety of topics including railroad history, freight and passenger operations and safety, and model railroading activities and skills. All three Scouts met the requirements for their Railroading Merit Badge.

### **The Editor Speaks**

## **TSRR Crisis Raises Questions About "General Fund" Concept**

I read something related to the financial crisis being faced by the Texas State Rail Road (TSRR) that got me to thinking. I feel like it is worth sharing, along with my recommendation for a "fix". Running the TSRR, especially with maintenance-intensive steam locomotives, is a very expensive endeavor, both mechanically and manpower-wise. There are also a lot of expenses connected with upkeep of the right of way, buildings and rolling stock. There are so many expenses, in fact, that the ticket revenue generated from substantial ridership doesn't cover operating costs. But TSRR also generates income from gift shop sales and occasionally providing its equipment to movie makers who need a vintage train to appear in a film they are shooting. Even these additional funds probably wouldn't completely cover TSRR's operating expenses all the time, but they could put a dent in the large annual cost overruns bellyached about by critics of maintaining the state park's historic tourist railroad. Unfortunately, as I understand it, ALL of TSRR's revenues go into the state's infamous "General Fund" where they are allocated among all the state agencies as the Texas legislature sees fit. Many of these agencies (unlike

state parks which charge admission fees and require hunting, fishing and boating licenses, camping fees, etc., where those activities are permitted), don't generate any revenue on their own. Nevertheless, they get a share of the dollars brought in by those that do. This seems grossly unfair, especially when state funding for operating state parks has been drastically reduced in recent years even though substantial usage fees are charged at the parks. My point is this: If the state's "General Fund" concept of taking revenues from all sources, including taxes, usage fees, licenses, permits, etc., and putting them in one pot for distribution is going to adversely impact agencies like state parks, and especially a treasure like the TSRR, then perhaps the state needs to be looking at a different way of managing things. Under the pre-General Fund system, for example, revenues generated by licenses, permits, usage fees, etc., stayed with the agencies collecting them and went directly to supporting the upkeep and operation of those agencies. State taxes paid for agencies that didn't have any revenue generating mechanisms, and made up any legitimate shortfalls for the others.

Somehow, TSRR avoided an anticipated shutdown on December 31, 2006. But so far it looks like they only succeeded in postponing a financial crisis meltdown until August 31, unless something happens in the interim to fix the problem. There's got to be a better way to run a railroad, and maybe it's time we started personally encouraging our state legislators to figure it out! JG

## **Model RR Meets & Events**

Feb. 10 – Greater Houston Train Show, Stafford, TX.

Mar. 3 – Junction & East Texas Train Society Show, Longview, TX.

Mar. 3 – Railfan Day, Temple, TX

Mar. 17 – World's Greatest Hobby on Tour, Fort Worth, TX.

**Model Railroading is a Great Hobby.**