

# CMR CUSTOM MODEL RAILROADS

It all started with strong encouragement from Howard Zane, organizer of the Timonium shows, and someone whose opinion on model railroading is to be valued. The encouragement was directed toward Jeff Springer, a then-recent graduate of the Maryland Institute, College of Fine Arts with a BFA in graphic design. Jeff was working full time in the Baltimore area as a graphic designer, and he had just made a display model for one of the Timonium scale train shows.

The foregoing encouragement was like a small acorn. And from that small acorn, a well-formed oak tree (CMR Custom Model Railroads) is continuing to grow. Jeff has been an active model railroader since he was nine years old. Each year until the end of high school, he would tear down his layout and build a new one. During most of this period, he lived in Switzerland (his father was in the Foreign Service). Jeff's interest in Swiss railroads still remains strong, and his personal 12' x 20' home layout depicts Alpine Swiss railroading. In addition to being a source of relaxation, this layout serves as a good R&D site for many situations.

Encouraged by Howard Zane, Jeff started a part-time custom layout business in his basement. After about two years, he went into custom layout building full time, and shortly thereafter moved to the rented industrial space he now occupies in the Hampden area of Baltimore.

Jeff does business under the name CMR Custom Model Railroads. He has been building layouts for others for over ten years, and has one part-time employee. Jeff works in all scales from N to G, and will consider building any size layout, "brief case to club." Depending on the needs of the customer, he will do any and all phases of layout construction, including but not limited to benchwork, roadbed, trackwork, scenery, structures, wiring, signaling, and computer control.

He can also perform regular maintenance where appropriate. All but the smallest layouts are modular to permit transportation from the CMR shop (where most of the work is done) to the final installed location. He particularly enjoys opportunities to build up rather than just out -- shades of John Allen! His commercial jobs have included many store, mall, and train show displays, in addition to a 300' long #1 Gauge loop in a restaurant. The loop is suspended ten feet in the air, over the customers' heads.

Surprisingly (to me!), most CMR customers are individuals rather than businesses. A few individuals, of course, are the "it's neat, gotta have one now" type of person. But most are more thoughtful, and quite knowledgeable about railroads and modeling. For example, some people want to have the fun of owning and operating a layout but simply can't take the time to build their own. Others may have very specific desires.

For example, suppose someone enjoys operating, and also building rolling stock, locomotives, structures, and scenery. But they just don't enjoy layout design, benchwork, trackwork, or wiring. They might logically contact CMR to get themselves in a position to do what they really enjoy, without having to slog through what looks like drudgery. Where necessary, Jeff has custom-designed structures to meet specific customer desires.

This is leading naturally into expanding his basic business to include marketing a line of laser-cut craftsman structure kits. Three have been created so far: The famous Bromo-Seltzer Tower in Baltimore (full scale, no selective compression, over three feet tall!). The American Brewery in Baltimore. A generic factory, modeled after the building where CMR is located.

Jeff notes that a lot of work is needed to move from the first pre-production model to a kit you can sell to others. Writing the instructions frequently takes more time than preparing the design. In addition, the small design details such as supports must be more complete and carefully done if you expect others to take the pieces out of the box and go to work.

He hopes to create three new kits each year, and will soon have a brochure describing them to prospective customers. CMR has a display at all Timonium shows. The CMR website includes seventeen color photos illustrating the type of work that Jeff does. It now also includes pages for the structure kits.

Interested parties can also reach Jeff at 410-235-7624 (office/fax), or at 410-889-0100 (workshop).