

A Few Bad Apples...

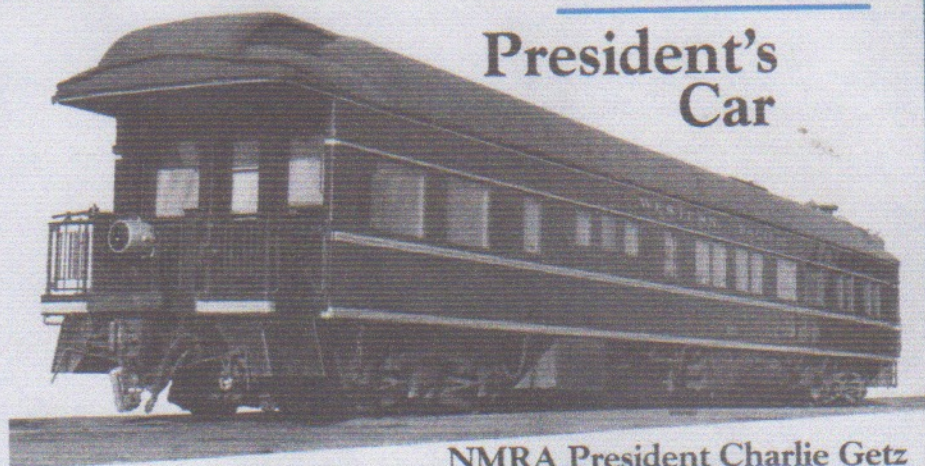
Before getting to this month's topics, a reminder or two. We still are looking for a Marketing Director, and if you have the requisite background, we are interested in talking with you. If you can help, please contact me. Also, I asked Mike Brestel to author an article (see page 8) on our insurance so you will better understand what we offer and what we do. It has a bearing on the topic du jour.

A good friend of mine corresponds each month and is delightfully honest. Make that brutally honest! Recently, he wrote that he preferred my long-running column in the *Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette* to this column — he found this one “boring” and repetitious of past Presidents' columns. Guilty as charged! There are themes in the NMRA that seem to repeat themselves decade after decade. So forgive me if you have heard this one before!

One of the greatest strengths we have as an organization is our members. You will never meet a better group of folks as a class. Many of us “old-timers” indeed cite the friendships formed as a premier advantage of the NMRA. While that is hard to sell as a reason to join, it is true nonetheless. I view my many friends at the National level, Coast Division/PCR, and throughout the organization as life enriching. Some are also excellent resources for information or inspiration. I am in awe that the “Greats of Model Railroading” were and are members: John Allen, Whit Towers, Paul Shimada, Bob Brown, George Sellios, Jack Work, and so many others.

One of our weaknesses, though, is the few members who are disruptive, anti-social, or arrogant. Granted, of almost 19,000 members, there is probably less than 1 percent in this class. Unfortunately, they can have a disproportionately negative impact on our organization.

Many decades ago, as a young 17-year-old modeler, I joined a small club in Palo Alto, California. I believe it was the Camino Ferrero Model Railroad Club. The club never had a permanent home or



President's Car

NMRA President Charlie Getz

layout, but they were great guys willing to take a chance on friend Chris Zawojski and myself. We met monthly in different members' homes and planned a big layout once space was located. Well, college came and thus the end to club membership. I mention this experience because one member told me that the worst modeler defines a club, for that is the standard set in modeling. After all, if the person is a member, how can you deny the models produced? Well, that may not be accurate, but there is some wisdom in that observation. After all, John Allen we are all not!

In the NMRA, I hate to think we are defined by our lowest common denominator, but sadly, that can happen. In my two years as President, boorish behavior by members has been the number one complaint! Here are but a few examples: a Division Super who told a female member “the NMRA is no place for women;” a Division that refused to allow a new member to run for office because the same crew was always in charge; a Super who routinely challenges any request from Region or National for information; local members who sign up new members but fail to send in the checks or forms, causing the new member to wonder what happened; volunteers who eagerly accept a post and then promptly do nothing; divisions that allow flagrant violations of membership, allowing their buddies to participate, even hold office though perennially not members; members who are rude or unwelcoming to newcomers or

ignore them; and officials who routinely badmouth the organization in chat rooms.

You might think I exaggerate, but each of the above is based on a real experience we have had to deal with over the past few years. Blessedly, those examples are the exception. However, they cause real damage — indeed, a disproportionate impact. A rude rebuff or dismissal can scar a new member. They quit and badmouth the NMRA to friends. Refusing to do what you were elected or volunteered to do can impact those relying on your help. New members waiting months for contact while their paperwork sits in the local recruiter's desk does not speak well for us and discourages the new member.

This month, the Board of Directors meets for its mid-year meeting. I will ask them to discuss and consider a code of behavior for members and officials. I will also ask them to discuss a procedure and process for expelling members who violate that code or common decency. Some years back, in a highly controversial decision involving gay rights, the United States Supreme Court clarified that a private organization such as ours can set the rules for membership and accept or reject members as they see fit, provided they do not discriminate on prohibited grounds. Well, the NMRA does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, sex, nationality, creed, or orientation. However, we should not tolerate or harbor boorish or disrespectful behavior. We can and should expel members — after warning and due process — who are disruptive or

act against our charter or in violation of our mission and purpose.

I do not suggest a witch-hunt, nor would ejection come lightly. By the same token, we must be able to police our own to prevent the very real damage that can occur. Using insurance, allow me to give an example from years past. We had a couple of Divisions that routinely allowed a substantial number of non-members to actively participate in Division events, even hold office. While we love visitors and encourage non-members to see what we offer, the invitation is not open-ended, and it risks our insurance, which is intended for members. Why would any NMRA official allow blatant violations of our rules and charter? Why would members allow non-members to reap the benefits of membership without paying their fair share? Call it what it is: "free-loaders," not friends. Yet, it has happened.

So has all the boorish behavior described above. We have lost too many members due to the actions of a few. Some years back, an entire Division voted to dissolve because of one disruptive member. Extreme? Yes, but the Division members saw no other choice.

I want to provide that choice. I raise the issue not because boorish behavior is common, but it does happen on occasion, which is far too often. I value your thoughts and opinions on the topic and especially on the appropriate steps to take in such cases. I am not looking for a list of bad behavior as much as your opinion on how to handle it as an organization. What should we do? What would you do?

My recent columns on growing the NMRA have struck a chord. The idea of wearing a tag or pin at train shows that says, "Ask me how to become a model railroader" resonates with some Divisions who wish to embrace this idea. A new member coincidentally wrote that he signed up at a recent train show hoping to learn how to be a model railroader, and no one at the show could point him in the right direction! He joined the NMRA hoping we could help. We have the knowl-

edge, and our mission is to share that with the world. This is something we all can do.

My local Division, Coast of the PCR, may begin referring to our quarterly get-togethers as "model railroader events," for that is what we do. Yes, we have a 10- to 15-minute business meeting in a day that often stretches from 10AM to 5PM! A day of clinics, roundtables, show-and-tell, contests, and our famous auction is more than a "meet." Our December event featured more than 400 lots in the auction! "Events" may be of more interest than "meetings," especially to our younger members. *The* premier model railroad event happens this summer in Portland, Oregon. I am referring to our National Convention, which offers a fun-packed week of classes on model railroading, layout visits, operations, contests, the National Train Show, and modeling inspiration for all ages. If you have not signed up, it is not too late to do so! If you have not considered attending, please reconsider. The next time the convention is out west is 2019 in Salt Lake City, Utah. Wherever you live, it is worth the journey to attend Model Railroading 101+. We hope to see you there.

Also on the positive side, the NMRA is doing well. Please remember to vote in the upcoming election (see the pull-out ballot in the middle of this magazine). The hobby remains a great source of joy and fun for so many of us. Next month, I'll address some of the positive things that are happening in the hobby. Of course, I will report on the mid-year BOD meeting as soon as deadlines allow. I have even found time to build some models. Yes, my good friends, "Model Railroading is Fun!" The NMRA enhances that fun for us all. We do far more good than "harm," and that truth provides comfort each and every day.

Well, those are my thoughts — what are yours?

