



Volume 33

SUSQUEHANNA SIDETRACKS

An Official Publication of the Susquehanna Division 11
Mid-Eastern Region of the NMRA



Number 5

CHOO CHOO BARN FOUNDATION

Helping Youth Get On Track

It all started well before 1961...actually, the Choo Choo Barn was originally born in 1945, in the basement of the Groff home on Franklin Street in Strasburg. George Groff had just returned from World War II, and was looking for a Christmas present for his two-year-old son Gary. He found a \$12.50 Lionel train set, and, as any father would do, he helped his son set it up. One thing led to another, and, within a few years, that simple set had begun to take over a larger and larger portion of the family basement.

Word of this train display spread throughout the neighborhood. In the 1950's, the family began opening their now very elaborate display up for townspeople and local school groups during the Christmas holidays. And, as the Groff family grew, so did their basement train display.

Then, in the early 60's, George and Florence needed some extra funds to help pay for college. George noticed a small township maintenance facility — actually, more like a barn — that became available along Route 741, just to the west of the recently reopened Strasburg Rail Road. Perhaps the trains, scenery, buildings, and animated figures in their basement could be used as a part-time business to help with the added financial burden of college expenses. And the rest, as they say, is history.



The Choo Choo Barn, as George decided to call his display, opened on Thanksgiving Day in 1961, and was very quickly a hit with local folks and visitors alike. With over 600 square feet of detailed landscaping, 6 trains, and 6 animated figures, people knew they were seeing something special and unique!

continued on page 7

In This Issue

| | |
|--|---------|
| Choo Choo Barn Foundation | 1, 7-13 |
| Superintendent's Desk | 3 |
| Second Section | 4 |
| Division Calendar of Events | 5 |
| Division Event | 6 |
| NMRA National Awards | 14-15 |
| NMRA Event | 16 |
| Non-NMRA Events | 17-18 |
| Train News | 19-21 |
| Modeler's Showcase | 22-25 |
| Addendum– Choo Choo Barn Foundation brochure | 26-28 |



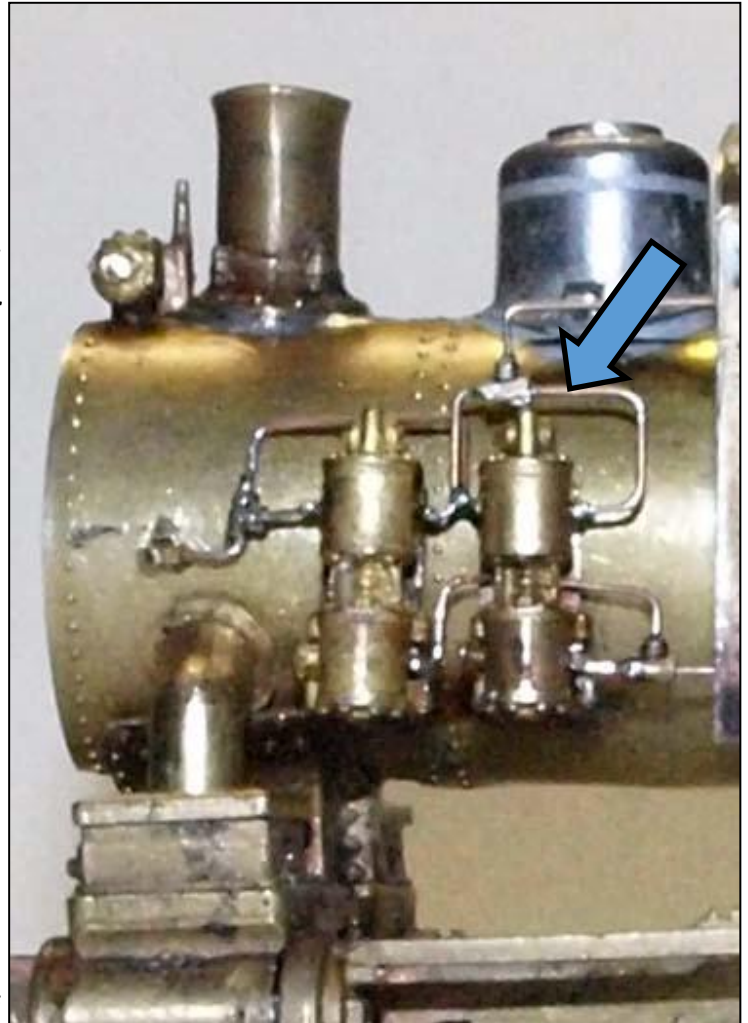
On July 29, 2025 a ground-breaking ceremony took place in the rolling stock yard of the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania. The above photo depicts the roundhouse which will be built adjacent to the Reading Company turntable (already existing). The construction phase marks a journey of almost twenty years to design and build a climate-controlled setting for five iconic PRR steam locomotives.

Superintendent's Desk

Summertime and the livin' is busy. I haven't had a lot of time for model railroading, mostly because of my other hobbies. I had the engine of our Model A Ford rebuilt during COVID, and I finally got it back in the car. There are still a lot of pieces to put on it before I can attempt to start it. I'm sick of seeing tomatoes; I've made so many jars of spaghetti sauce and salsa that I've lost count. There are still more ripening in the garden, and the peaches are just starting to ripen. I made a dozen jars of peach jam just today (August 18th). And the lawn is so overgrown, it should probably be baled.

On Saturday, August 16th, we had our Division meet at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania. We had two marvelous speakers. David Trussell spoke about how he built the layout at the Colorado Model Railroad Museum. It is massive! Then in the afternoon, Gary Russell introduced us to The Choo Choo Barn Foundation. While many decry the lack of young people in our hobby, Gary showed us that it is **our** fault! He showed us how the Choo Choo Barn Foundation is taking model railroading into schools and have the children build their own modules. They learn how to use power tools, how to carve Styrofoam with hot wire, soldering (how many of you shy away from that skill), track laying, ballasting, scenery, etc. Gary and his helpers show the kids how to do it, and then the kids do it themselves. Consequently, the Foundation is swamped with requests to put on their program at other schools. If all goes as planned, Gary will present the Foundation at the MER Philly Express Convention in October.

Yes, I have done a bit of scratchbuilding when I wasn't otherwise occupied in the kitchen or the garage. I continue to make progress on my CRR of NJ Class D9s 4-4-0 camelback. The piping for the dual 9-1/2" air pumps took hours of cutting, fitting, and soldering .015" wire. Yes, I'm crazy.



Slow



Second Section

Susquehanna Sidetracks

Official Newsletter of the Susquehanna Division 11
Mid-Eastern Region, NMRA

Contributing to Sidetracks are always welcome. Division members wishing to contribute articles, photos or features may do so by emailing items to the Editor at the e-mail address listed below.

Submissions should be in WORD format with photos sent under separate cover. Photos which are part of the submission should be identified as to their location in the WORD document.

The deadline for submission for the next issue is October 15, 2025.

Officers and Directors

Superintendent: Alan Mende super@susquehannanmra.org

Asst. Superintendent: Chris Kier assist-super@susquehannanmra.org

Chief Clerk: Dean Johnson treasurer@susquehannanmra.org

Director: David Ellis dellis@susquehannanmra.org

Director: Jim Mattern jmattern@susquehannanmra.org

Director: Barry Schmitt sbschmitt@susquehannanmra.org

Director: Rich Wurst rwurst@susquehannanmra.org

Committee Chairmen

Achievement Program Chair:

Bob Charles, MMR achievement@susquehannanmra.org

Model Showcase Chair:

Bob Charles, MMR showcase@susquehannanmra.org

Membership Chair:

Howard Oakes membership@susquehannanmra.org

Web Designer:

David Collison

Webmaster:

David Ellis webmaster@susquehannanmra.org

Sidetracks Editor:

Rich Wurst editor@susquehannanmra.org

Susquehanna Division:

www.susquehannanmra.org

Mid-Eastern Region:

www.mer-nmra.com

National Model Railroad Association

8414 Gulf View Drive, Suite A & B

Soddy Daisy, TN 37379-2200

Greetings Model Railroaders,

With this issue the start of the Fall season begins. With cooler weather the interest in model railroading is on the rise. It is quite evident in the number of train meets and other similar events. These opportunities create situations where fellow modelers can 'rub' shoulders with other modelers and share knowledge and experiences. This fact certainly advances the hobby's knowledge base.

A special event is upcoming in October (see page 16). It is the MER Regional Convention in King of Prussia, PA. This convention is hosted by the Philadelphia Division and portends to be a fantastic experience. I urge everyone to register and attend. The "Philly Express" is located within driving distance of all our members. Hope to see you there!

This issue is one of the last two I will be producing. My retirement from the editorship of Sidetracks will commence January 1, 2026. At that time Kevin Macomber will take over as the new editor. I wish him well as he continues the traditions set forth by past editors!

Happy Modeling,

Rich

Susquehanna Division 2025 Calendar of Events

| Date | Location | Type of Meeting or Event |
|---------------------|---|---|
| March 3/08/25 | Harrisburg, PA. Scottish Rite Harrisburg | Division Information Table Harrisburg Railroad Show |
| March 3/15/25 | Allentown, PA. Bridgeworks Enterprise Center | Rescheduled Membership Meeting with Philly Division |
| April 4/12/25 | Invitation will be emailed | Virtual Membership Meeting on Zoom |
| May | | |
| June 6/21/25 | Zion Lutheran Church, Dauphin, PA | In-person Membership Meeting. |
| July 7/18/25 | Mount Union, PA | "Flying the Flag" Information Table |
| August 8/16/25 | Strasburg, PA Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania | In-person Membership Meeting |
| September 9/27/25 | Invitation will be emailed | Virtual Membership Meeting on Zoom |
| October 10/16-19/25 | "Philly Express" Convention, King of Prussia, PA | Attend or volunteer MER Regional Convention |
| November 11/15/25 | Mechanicsburg, PA Good Hope Fire Company | In-person Membership Meeting |
| November 11/1-30/25 | <u>Model Railroad Open Houses</u> | On your own model railroad visits. We will publicize the link when ready |
| December TBD | Invitation will be emailed | Virtual Membership Meeting on Zoom |



Pictured here is the confluence of the Conestoga River (left) and the Susquehanna River (right) in Conestoga, PA. The lower trackage is the Norfolk Southern water-level route from Enola, PA to Havre de Grace, MD. The upper trackage is the abandoned Enola Low Grade line from Enola, PA to Atglen, PA. The ELGL has been turned into a Rail Trail.

Rich Wurst photo

Division Event

Susquehanna Division Virtual Meet - Saturday, September 27, 2025

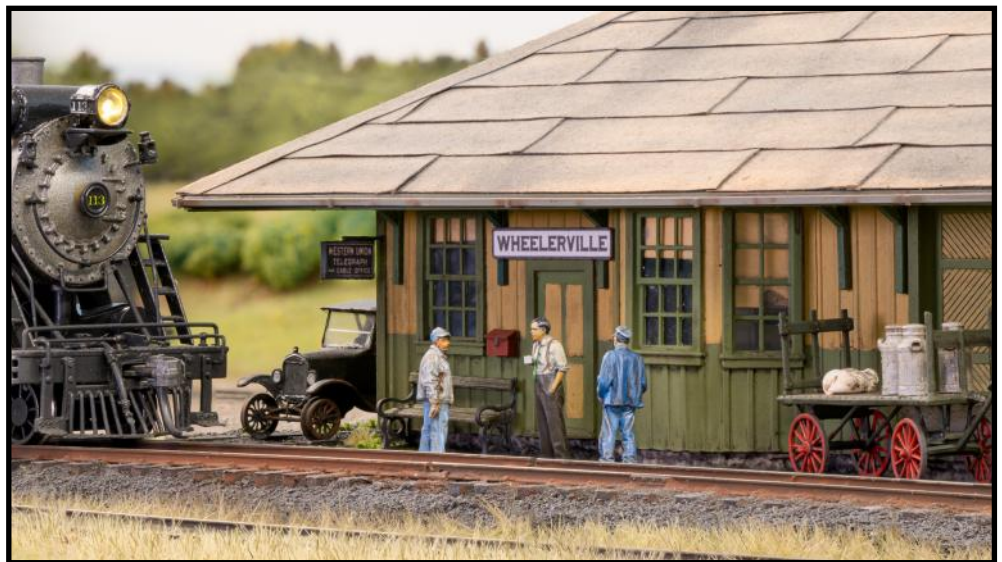
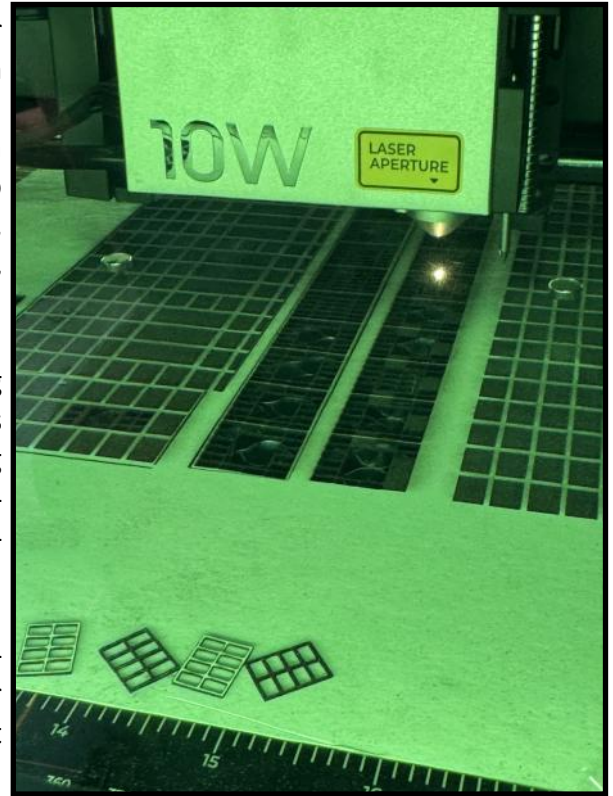
All members and any interested guests are welcome to attend our September division meet to be held virtually on Zoom. We will send an invitation link to the members after our August meet at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania. If you are not on the Susquehanna Division email notification list, please contact any of the officers for the link to the scheduled Zoom meeting. We have two interesting clinics lined up, so mark your calendars now for Saturday morning, September 27, 2025.

One presentation will be by our own David Smith. He will be talking about doing your own laser cutting. The first step is using graphics software to make the design. The second step is tuning the engraving and cutting parameters to the design and material to assure a successful result from the cut itself. We may be able to organize this presentation to include live video of part of the process in action.

Mike Hauk, the Superintendent of the Allegheny Western Division, Division 12 of the MCR, will give a tutorial on painting Modelu and other 3-D printed figures. Mike will present some techniques that bring out the fine details on these newer generation of 3-D printed figures.

If you are interested in exploring the options with 3-D printed figures here are a couple of links: [Modelu](#) is based in the UK, but [Yarmouth Model Works](#) distributes their figures in North America. Another source for 3-D printed figures is [Miniprints](#).

Another feature of our membership meets is "Model Showcase" where folks share something they are working on. On Zoom, one of the easiest ways to do this is to share a couple of photos of your project (complete or in process). Photos from your smart phone are fine. Insert them into PowerPoint and have it open on your desktop. Then during the Zoom meeting you can share screen (typically it is a green button at the bottom of your Zoom screen) to discuss what you are working on with the group. Here are a couple of tips: Make sure your PowerPoint with the photos is open on your desktop *ahead of time*. Choose the PowerPoint when the share screen opens with options. To practice this or any other part of using Zoom, please email dellis@susquehannanmra.org and we can set up a short practice session.



The Choo Choo Barn Foundation (continued)

Over the next few years, the display continued to grow, as George added something new each year. In time, his children began to help out, from collecting tickets to adding their own ideas to the growing display. A gift shop was added to the front of the building, and a picnic grove was constructed to the west of the parking lot (free tickets to the grove were available to all Barn visitors). And the display continued to grow...

When the elder Groffs retired in 1979, their youngest son Thomas, and his wife Linda, became the new owners, builders, and operators



of the Choo Choo Barn. In 1983, the second generation business owners opened the

Strasburg Train Shop, a model train hobby shop catering to the “layout builder”. Tom says that “detail and originality are what has contributed to the Choo Choo Barn’s success and popularity, and other modelers should be able to purchase the same items that are used in the layout.” Due to this credo, their train shop has become known far and wide as the place to locate “oddball” things such as garbage cans and the like.

In 1989, Tom & Linda expanded the Choo Choo Barn into a complex of specialty shops, known as the Shops of Taintown, designed to appeal to everyone. The Groffs opened Railroad Books And Videos, which carries over 600 different books and video tapes devoted to both model railroading and to real trains, along with novelty items, t-shirts, glasses, signs, posters and many other items, all with a train motif. Railroad Books & Videos is also home to a very extensive collection of used trains. Many visitors have commented about being able to find the train they played with when they were young in our cases!



A lot has changed since the days in the Groff family basement. This train layout has grown into an attraction for all ages and all groups...you don’t need to be a model railroading enthusiast to enjoy the scenery and animations presented on this display. The display continues to re-open each spring, and Tom Groff and his talented team continue to add, update, clean, renovate, and restore the display, so there’s something new to see every year.



In 2023, the reigns of the Choo Choo Barn and the Strasburg Train Shop was handed over to Gary Russell. Being a life-long train collector and with an extensive knowledge in electronics and automation, Gary has the same focus as Tom, and has committed to carrying the Choo Choo Barn legacy forward. We look forward to what the future holds! We are sure you will also.

Editor’s note: The above text and photos are courtesy of the Choo Choo Barn website.

The Choo Choo Barn Foundation (continued)

As Gary began his tenure as the “new” owner of the Choo Choo Barn and the Strasburg Train Shop he envisioned a future whereby youngsters would be exposed to the delights of model railroading. Thus, the “Choo Choo Barn Foundation” was born.

The Foundation has developed educational programs and a community outreach that advances model railroading (especially youth). With educational activities operating in several local school districts and promotional events at city, state and county fairs, the Foundation is spreading the joys of model railroading to young and old alike.

The following is an interview with Gary Russell:

1. Please summarize a brief history of the original Choo Choo Barn including date of origin, creator info, Gary Russell ownership, recent changes.

The **Choo Choo Barn** was born in **1961**, when **George M. Groff**, a World War II veteran and Strasburg resident, transformed an old barn into a model train display to help pay for his son Gary’s college tuition. What began as a modest layout with a few Lionel trains and handmade scenery quickly grew into one of the most beloved family attractions in Lancaster County. George’s eye for detail and creativity made the Choo Choo Barn stand out—not just as a display of trains, but as a living miniature world full of animation, storytelling, and personality.

Over the years, the attraction became a **family legacy**, with George’s children, Gary and Susan, working as its first employees. Eventually, ownership passed to George’s youngest child, **Tom Groff** and most recently to **Gary Russell**, who expanded the layout to over 1,700 square feet, over 185 animations, and ushered in a new era of creativity.

Under Gary’s leadership, the Choo Choo Barn grew beyond its original walls to include the formation of the **Choo Choo Barn Foundation**, extending the mission to inspire the next generation of train enthusiasts. In recent years, updates to the display have kept pace with changing times, including refreshed scenery, modern animations, and new educational outreach. The creation of the Mobile Experience, the Music Experience, the new Interactive Experience, and the 5-Week Hands-On Experience, lays at the cornerstone of the Foundation. From its humble begin-

nings in a small barn to its current role as a cornerstone of “Train Town, U.S.A.,” the Choo Choo Barn remains a timeless blend of nostalgia, artistry, and innovation.



The Choo Choo Barn Foundation (continued)

2. What is the business structure of the Choo Choo Barn divisions (Barn, Hobby Shop and Foundation)?

The **Choo Choo Barn**, **Strasburg Train Shop**, and the **Choo Choo Barn Foundation** together employ a dedicated team of **24 individuals**. The true strength of the company lies in the unique talents and contributions of each team member, whose passion and commitment bring the Choo Choo Barn's mission to life every day.

3. Tell us a little about Gary Russell and his vision for the Choo Choo Barn, Train Shop and Foundation.

Gary Russell became the owner of the **Choo Choo Barn** in 2023, ushering in a new era for one of Strasburg's most beloved landmarks. Though not a member of the Groff family, Gary shares the same passion for model trains, creativity, and community that has always defined the Choo Choo Barn. With a background in leadership and a vision for expanding the impact of the attraction, Gary has already left a strong mark on both the business and its mission.

Under his guidance, the Choo Choo Barn has grown beyond its traditional role as a model train display into a hub for education, imagination, and hands-on learning. Gary authored the children's book *The Great Zoo Adventure*, which brings the magic of the Choo Choo Barn to life for young readers. He also introduced several new initiatives, including the **Mobile Experience**, **Music Experience**, and **Interactive Experience**, each designed to make trains and storytelling more engaging to broader audiences.

Most importantly, Gary established the **Choo Choo Barn Foundation**, which created a **5-week after-school "Hands On" program**. This program is helping students reduce media screen time while building real-world skills in creativity, problem-solving, and craftsmanship.

Gary Russell's vision is clear: to preserve the magic of the Choo Choo Barn while ensuring it continues to grow as a **living, breathing experience** that inspires new generations. By blending tradition with innovation, Gary is carrying the Choo Choo Barn into the future - keeping it a place where imagination always has the right of way.



Above left is the promotional booth for the Choo Choo Barn at the Amherst Model Train Show in West Springfield, MA. Above right is the Mobile Model Railroad Experience parked in a display hall in West Springfield.

The Choo Choo Barn Foundation (continued)

4. What are the components of the Choo Choo Barn Foundation describing activities for each component?

The **Choo Choo Barn Foundation** is built around four core components, each designed to inspire creativity, reduce screen time, and encourage hands-on learning for children and families.

The Mobile Experience brings the wonder of the Choo Choo Barn directly to schools, libraries, and community events. This traveling exhibit allows children to explore model trains and interactive displays up close, sparking curiosity outside the walls of the museum.

The Music Experience blends sound, rhythm, and storytelling with trains, introducing children to the joy of music as a creative outlet. By combining instruments, songs, and movement, this program encourages kids to make connections between sound and motion, much like the trains on the layout.

The Interactive Experience transforms learning into play by giving children the chance to operate hands-on train controls, animations, and miniature settings. This encourages problem-solving, fine motor skills, and teamwork while letting kids feel like part of the railroad crew.

The 5-Week After-School “Hands On” Program is the heart of the Foundation’s mission. This structured program guides children through building projects, model-making, and creative problem-solving activities. Each session emphasizes teamwork, patience, and imagination, helping participants build real-world skills while reducing reliance on digital screens.

Together, these components ensure that the Choo Choo Barn Foundation isn’t just about trains—it’s about empowering youth with creativity, curiosity, and confidence.



This trailer has been customized to carry a 1924 Wurlitzer Caiola. It is a type of calliope that is powered by electric and has percussion instruments to complement the music which repeats itself every three minutes.



Here is the Caiola trailer drawing parents and kids as it plays music. The children are watching a model train run on the floor of the trailer. The music attracts visitors to the model train exhibits. At local fairs.

The Choo Choo Barn Foundation (continued)

5. Describe the after-school model railroading programs offered at local schools. How can interested seniors volunteer participate in the program?

The **Choo Choo Barn Foundation's After-School Model Railroading Program** is offered in partnership with local schools, giving students a chance to step away from media screens and discover the excitement of building, designing, and operating their own miniature railroads. Over the course of **five weeks**, children learn hands-on skills such as track planning, scenery building, wiring, and detailing miniature structures. More importantly, they practice patience, teamwork, and problem-solving while seeing their creative ideas come to life. Each session is designed to balance fun with learning, providing students with both technical knowledge and confidence in their abilities.

Seniors play a vital role in the success of this program. Retirees and train enthusiasts are invited to volunteer as mentors, sharing their skills and life experiences with a new generation. Volunteers may assist in guiding students through projects, teaching basic model railroading techniques, or simply encouraging children as they work. This creates a special opportunity for **intergenerational connection**, where seniors pass along their love for craftsmanship, storytelling, and railroading while making a lasting impact in their community.



Both left and right photos illustrate how the Foundation transports the necessary model railroading supplies to schools in their trailer.



A Foundation volunteer instructs students on the finer points of gluing track onto a foam module.



Students hard at work adding scenery details to their foam modules.

The Choo Choo Barn Foundation (continued)

7. Describe the design contest for school children which promotes problem solving and creative thinking.

The **Junior High Animation Design Contest** is one of the most exciting opportunities offered by the Choo Choo Barn Foundation. Specifically designed for middle school students, the contest invites participants to create original ideas for a new animation that could one day become part of the world-famous Choo Choo Barn layout.

Students are challenged to think like engineers, artists, and storytellers all at once. Each entry must include a sketch or model of the proposed animation, along with a description of how it would move, interact, or add character to the layout. The process encourages **problem-solving and creative thinking**, as participants must not only dream up a fun idea but also consider how it could realistically be built and operated.

The stakes are high: the winner receives a **cash prize** and, even more significantly, sees their idea transformed into a real, working animation that will be enjoyed by thousands of visitors to the Choo Choo Barn each year. This unique contest gives students a once-in-a-lifetime chance to leave their mark on a beloved landmark, while also inspiring future inventors, engineers, and designers.



After completing individual modules they are assembled together.



Gary Russell (right foreground) inspects the handiwork of program graduates.



www.ChoosBarn.com : 717-687-7911 www.StroudsburgTrainShop.com : 717-687-0464

Choo Choo Barn Student Design Challenge

Design. Build. Inspire.

Are YOU ready to leave your mark on one of Lancaster's most legendary attractions?

We're inviting all creative and curious 6th to 8th grade students to take part in the Choo Choo Barn Student Design Challenge! This is your chance to dream up your own animated scene and have it featured inside our world-famous model train display—viewed by thousands of visitors every year!

YOUR MISSION:
Design a brand new animated scene that fits our O-scale (1:48) model layout. It could be whimsical, realistic, themed, or completely unique—as long as it moves!

You'll need to include:

- A hand-drawn design or sketch
- Explanation of how your animation works
- Motors, gears, linkages—how will it move?
- Accurate measurements scaled to O-scale (1:48)

AWESOME PRIZES!

- 1st Place – \$300 + your animation built & featured in the Choo Choo Barn + 4 tickets!
- 2nd Place – \$200 + 4 tickets
- 3rd Place – \$100 + 4 tickets

Deadline: June 1, 2025 Scan for Full Rules & Entry Info:



Entries will be judged on:

- Creativity & Originality
- Engineering Feasibility
- Clarity & Presentation
- Accuracy to Scale

Questions? Contact Rae at rae@choosbarn.com

Ready to bring your imagination to life?
Design it. Submit it. See it come alive!

226 Gap Road, PO Box 130, Stroudsburg, PA 17579
LOCATED AT THE SHOPS OF TRRAINTOWN

This is the challenge project sponsored by the Foundation. It asked students to design an animated model train feature. The winning design would be built and installed at the Choo Choo Barn. The winner also received a monetary prize.



Youngsters enjoying the interactive model train experience at a local fair.

The Choo Choo Barn Foundation (continued)



Here is the original pop-up camper converted into a mobile interactive model railroad experience.



Here are the results of the completion of the five week model railroading instructional session at a local school district. Each student's module is joined together creating an instant layout. After the closing ceremonies the students are free to take home their finished modules!



The interactive model railroad experience trailer attends another town fair.



The 2025 Lebanon Area Fair Quenn Olivia Morrissey stopped by the Choo Choo Barn Foundation's interactive display to 'play with trains'! Model Railroading certainly appeals to both sexes!

Editor's Note The Choo Choo Barn Foundation and its CEO Gary Russell are providing unique educational activities promoting the model railroading hobby. This forward thinking goal has been promoted by Gordy Robinson MMR, President of the NMRA. The future of our hobby rests in the younger generations whom we must groom to advance the model railroading hobby.

A copy of the Choo Choo Barn Foundation brochure is included as an addendum to this article. Please refer to pages 26-28.

NMRA National Convention Awards

Recently, the NMRA National Convention was held in Novi, MI. Alan Mende, the Division's Superintendent, had two scratchbuilt HO models he had constructed and wanted them to be judged at the national level. Since he was unable to attend the convention, David Ellis, a Division Director, volunteered to transport them and enter the model contest representing Alan.

One of the models is a Class A Shay geared locomotive. The Chimney Rock Quarry had a former CNJ Alco HH660 for moving cars. Since Alan likes Shays, he theorized that in earlier times the quarry might have owned a steam locomotive, hence Engine #3 was lettered for the Chimney Rock Quarry. This scratchbuilt brass engine was awarded the Chairman's Award. This model won Second Place with a score of 112 out of 125 points.

The other HO model is an 0-4-0T tank locomotive. Engine #840 was a Jersey Central Lines small switcher first used at the Bronx Terminal and later as the Communipaw Shop switcher. This model won First Place in the Scratch Built Steam Locomotive category with a score of 122 out of 125 points and also the Judge's Award.

Both models represent the detailed research and elevated modeling skills of one of our Division member. Alan's New Jersey heritage is exemplified in not only these two engines but numerous other steam and diesel locomotives, as well as, prototypical structures of the Central Railroad of New Jersey.

Congratulations to Alan as he has achieved national recognition for his skilled model building!



David Ellis (right) presenting Alan (left) with his awards.



Central of New Jersey Railroad #840 tank engine was awarded the First Place for Scratchbuilt Steam Locomotives.

NMRA National Convention Awards (continued)



CNJ #840 received the Model Contest Judge's Award in addition to the 1st Place Scratchbuilt Steam Locomotive Award.



Chimney Rock Quarry Shay # 3 won the Model Contedt Chairman's Award.





Coming Soon!

Check back at phillyexpress.org often
for updates regarding all the
exciting events planned for **PHILLY
EXPRESS**

Welcome to the

PHILLY EXPRESS

2025 NMRA/MER Convention

October 16-19, 2025

Crowne Plaza Hotel – **King
of Prussia, PA**

Clinics, Prototype Tour, Home Layouts

Vendors, Operating Layouts on Site

Ops Sessions

- **Hosted by the Philadelphia
Division NMRA**



This year's Mid-East Region of the NMRA will host their annual convention in King of Prussia, PA. The convention is sponsored by the Philadelphia Division 3.

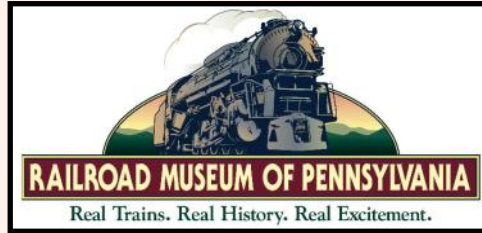
On the left is the information distributed to all members. Planning, organizing and gathering volunteers is starting to ramp up. As more details are announced registration and programming will be shared.

For current information you can check out the Philly Division's website:

<https://www.phillynmra.org/>

Mark your calendar and set your sights on a great model railroading event!

Non-NMRA Event



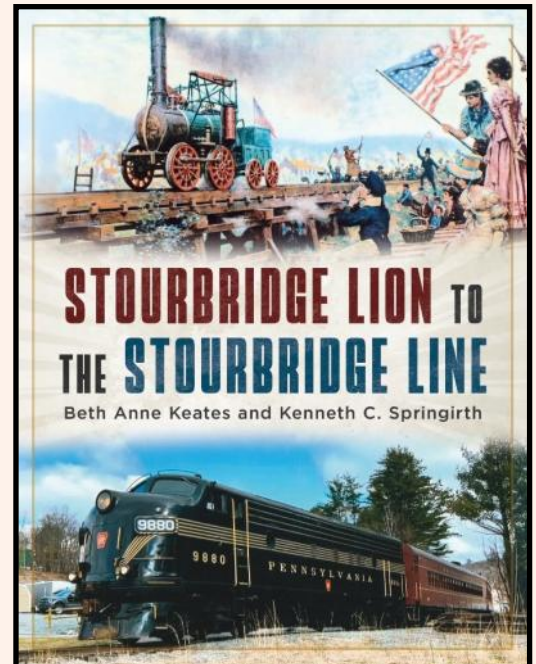
300 Gap Road (Route 741 East), Ronks, PA 17572



Railroad Heritage Day is set for Saturday, September 6th, 10 AM-4 PM at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania. Some highlights of this family-friendly event include a:

- **Presentation**, "The Evolution of Rail," by Beth Anne Keates, at 11:00 a.m. in the Museum auditorium, followed by book signings in the lobby through the end of the day.

Beth Anne Keates has had a life-long interest in rail transportation. A dedicated volunteer for the West Chester Railroad, she also annually marches as Betsy Ross, leading the parade as the Regent of the Lansdowne Chapter, Daughters of American Revolution in Lansdowne, Pennsylvania. Beth Anne is the co-author, with Kenneth Springirth, of "Viewing SEPTA's Rail Heritage," "The Stourbridge Lion To The Stourbridge Line," "Union Pacific Railroad Heritage," "Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Heritage" and "Viewing Norfolk Southern Railroad."



- **Curator's Corner Presentation**, "The Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania At 50," by Dodie Robbins, Museum curator, at 1:30 p.m. in the Museum auditorium



- **Kids railroad heritage craft** activity table, all day, in Rolling Stock Hall.

- **Pennsylvania Railroad truck**, owned by Ken Briers, all day, in Rolling Stock Hall.



Non-NMRA Event



OPEN HOUSE September 20 & 21, 2025

This is the weekend to visit 30 plus model railroads at no cost!

The way it works for those that have not been to this event is -

Show up Saturday 9 AM-5 PM or Sunday 12 AM-5 PM,

take advantage of our SALE,

Pick up a tour book, and be on your way.

The booklet contains brief descriptions of the railroads, and directions to the layouts.

Some are at clubs, most are home layouts. N, HO, O (2 and 3 Rail), and G scale.

Some have been in Model Railroader, Railroad Model Craftsmen, and other national publications. Closest layout is 2 minutes away, furthest is about 70 minutes.

Come out meet new people that enjoy what you enjoy!

Remember it doesn't cost anything but your time, and maybe gas.



Mainline Hobby Supply, INC.

15066 Buchanan Trail East
Blue Ridge Summit, PA. 17214

717-794-2860

Train News



Amtrak has wrapped a pair of ACS-64 locomotives in Crayola-inspired “Creativity on the Go” schemes in a nod to the iconic crayon manufacturer.

ACS-64 No. 621 wears a violet blue livery that features eight crayon colors that Crayola recently brought out of retirement. No. 620 is wrapped in Crayola’s dandelion, a golden yellow shade.

The locomotives are part of a summer promotion: Kids ride free on the Auto Train and can take advantage of free admission to Crayola Experience locations.

Train News (continued)



Historic steam locomotive that once ran through West Virginia to be restored.

This information comes from a press release from RJD America LLC.

The C&O 614 is the last surviving Greenbrier type locomotive, and is scheduled to be restored back to operational status.(WVVA)

By Jake Fife

Published: Nov. 26, 2024 at 11:45 AM EST

CLIFTON FORGE, Va. (WVVA) - A group has announced the purchase of and plans to restore a historic steam locomotive that once ran through Summers, Raleigh and Fayette Counties.

RJD America LLC announced in a November press release that they have purchased Chesapeake & Ohio 614 steam locomotive and plan on restoring it back to operation. The locomotive and its auxiliary tender will be restored at the Strasburg Rail Road Mechanical Services shops.

In Strasburg, work will be done to make sure 614 and its tender meet operational and safety standards, as well as retain its historical authenticity. The Strasburg Rail Road shops are acclaimed for restoring historic rail equipment, and for its team of expert craftsmen and engineers.

Jason Johnson, General Manager and Communications Director for RJD America, said they are honored to take on this project.

“Reviving 614 goes beyond restoring machinery; it’s about reigniting the magic of steam railroading for today’s and tomorrow’s enthusiasts.” Johnson said. “We are privileged to become its caretakers.”

Train News (continued)



The company said once the restoration is done, it will run wherever its new owners decide is appropriate, and according to the 614 website, no specific plans have been announced but the likely outcome is that 614 will be used for excursions and appear at special rail events.

According to the 614 website, restoration will take about 2 years from when the restoration starts and the project is being funded privately.

The Chesapeake & Ohio 614 was built by Lima Locomotive Works in 1948, and is a J-3a 'Greenbrier' class 4-8-4 locomotive, and was built to pull passenger trains and freight trains. The locomotive was designed to handle the mountains in Virginia and West Virginia, and pulled the C&O's most famous passenger trains such as the 'Fast Flying Virginian' and the 'George Washington.'

Pulling these passenger trains took the 614 to places like Washington D.C., Richmond, and included stops in Hinton, Prince, Thurmond, and Charleston on its way to Cincinnati.

614 was retired in 1952, and was restored for the first time in 1976.

Being the only surviving locomotive of its type, it was preserved and pulled excursion trains before being retired again. The 614 was also proposed to be the locomotive to pull the Greenbrier Resort Presidential train, a project that never ended up happening.

The 614 was housed in Clifton Forge, Virginia where it was prepped for the move to Strasburg, PA. RJD America LLC specializes in restoring and operating historic locomotives, and the company said their goals are to educate and inspire future generations about the role of railroads in shaping American history.

You can read the full [press release here](#).

You can visit the [614 website here](#).

To learn more about the history of 614, [click here](#).

Modeler's Showcase

A recurring feature of our division meets is Modeler's Showcase. Here, modelers can show models that are under construction, in the design phase, or totally complete. The idea is to provide benefit to both the modeler and the audience. As the division AP Chair, it gives me an opportunity to make suggestions for enhancement or quietly push the modeler to consider having the model judged for a merit award as a step toward an achievement certificate. While not everyone aspires to become an MMR, we all want to improve our modeling skills. That is the purpose of Modeler's Showcase.

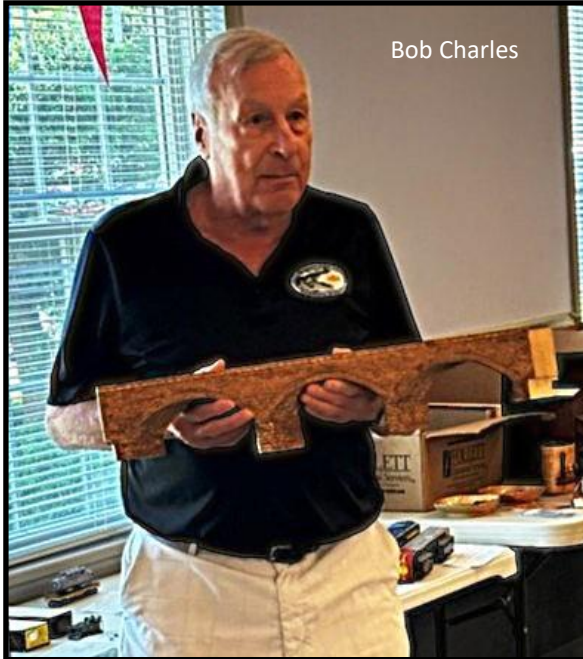
This month we had a particularly interesting group of models. Alan Mende led off with his scratchbuilt brass CNJ 4-4-0 camelback under construction. Dave Smith showed his N scale blast furnace under construction and his unique method of using drawings to create a 3D mockup. Bob Charles showed a skewed stone arch bridge by the late Bob Beecher that won the Craftsman Magazine award for Innovation in 1996. Jim Mattern displayed a kitbashed Westerfield kit for a Cornwall RR ore car; Kevin Macomber showed and discussed a scratchbuilt O scale house that is a finalist for the PA Museum. Jim Cabie discussed construction of his beautiful Randolph RR station while Phil Peters brought a really complex scratchbuild of Elwell's Bar in N scale. Rich Wurst showed a creative flat car load that he scratchbuilt totally from imagination. Robert Schildt closed out the showcase with kitbashed Lionel conversions in both O standard and O 42" narrow gauge, the latter using a Flyer mechanism.

It is my belief that a number of these models could possibly have earned merit awards and I would urge the modelers consider bringing them for judging at a future division meet for judging. Altogether, it was another very creative modeler's showcase, providing many ideas for attendees. You may want to consider bringing your model to the next showcase.

Bob Charles, MMR, photos by Jerry Lachle, MMR



Modelers' Showcase (continued)



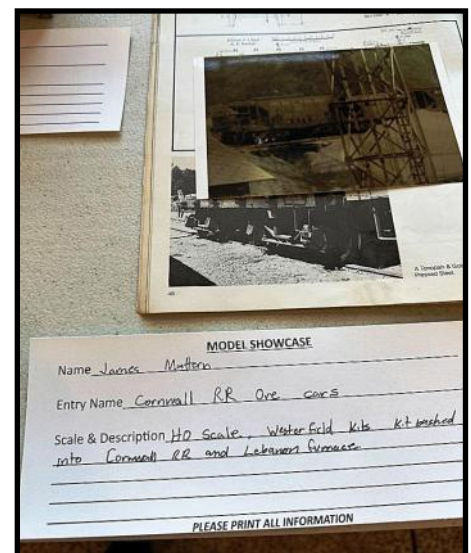
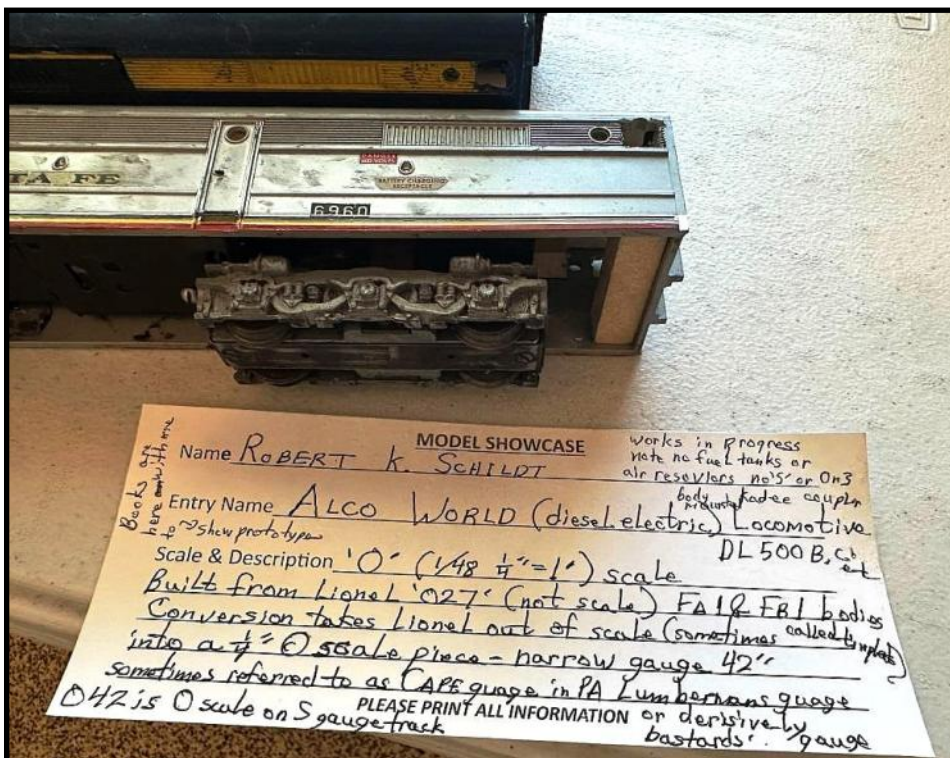
Modelers' Showcase (continued)



Robert Schildt



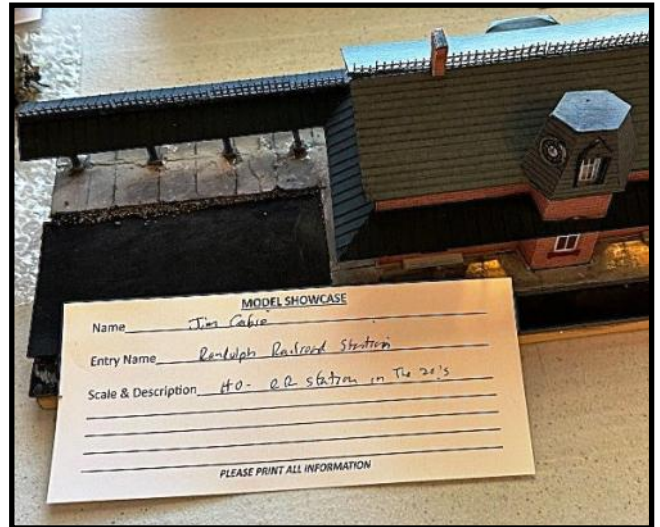
Jim Mattern



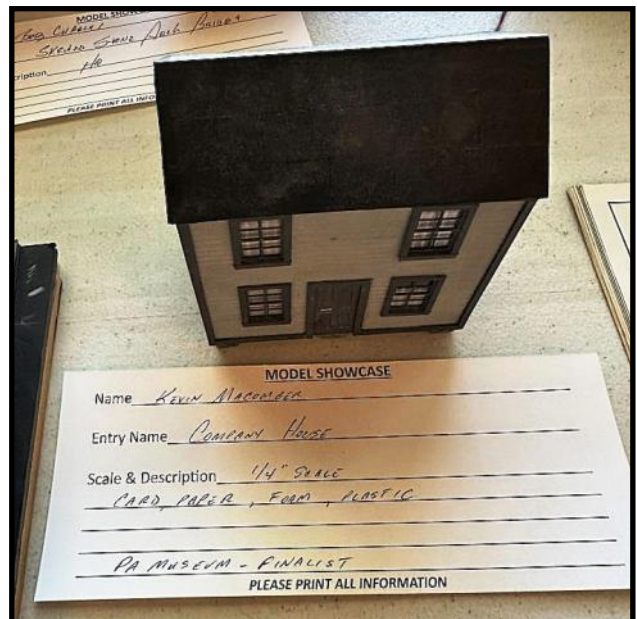
Modelers' Showcase (continued)



Jim Cubie



Kevin
Macomber



Phil Peters



CHOO CHOO BARN FOUNDATION



*Sparking Creativity
and Lifelong Learning*

Our Programs

At the Choo Choo Barn Foundation, we offer a variety of programs designed to introduce children to the world of model trains while teaching practical skills like track planning, electrical wiring, and scenery building.

- 1. Reading for Rails** Our Reading for Rails program encourages children to embrace reading while rewarding their efforts with a free pass to visit the Choo Choo Barn Layout. This school-based initiative promotes literacy and inspires curiosity, giving students the chance to see their favorite stories come to life through model trains.
- 2. Classroom Visits** We bring the joy of model trains directly to schools! Through interactive classroom presentations, we showcase unique animations from our layouts and inspire students to think creatively about design, engineering, and problem-solving.
- 3. The Mobile Experience** Our Mobile Experience is a traveling O-scale train layout that visits community events, parades, and fairs. It captivates children of all ages and allows them to experience the magic of model trains up close. It's more than just a display – it's a hands-on opportunity for children to engage with our hobby in an exciting way.
- 4. Workshops and Youth Learning Space (Coming Soon)** We are working to build a dedicated youth learning space where children can come together, build train layouts, and learn new skills. Our workshops will focus on everything from

track design to electrical wiring, helping kids gain confidence in using tools and thinking critically – all while having fun!

Why Model Trains?

In today's world of screens and digital entertainment, children are seeking activities that provide deeper engagement and tangible learning experiences. Model trains offer an unparalleled opportunity for hands-on learning in a fun and creative environment.

With model trains, children can:

- Learn engineering basics through track planning and layout design
- Develop technical skills like electrical wiring and problem-solving
- Cultivate creativity through scenery building and model crafting
- Experience teamwork and collaboration when working with friends



Get Involved!

The Choo Choo Barn Foundation's success depends on the generous support of individuals like you. Whether through donations, volunteer work, or sharing your time and talents, you can help us inspire the next generation of creators, builders, and thinkers.

How You Can Help:

- **Donate:** Every contribution helps us expand our programs and reach more children. Your donation will go directly toward creating new educational opportunities and resources for kids.
- **Volunteer:** Join us at events, help run workshops, or assist with program development. Whether you're a model train enthusiast or just someone who loves working with kids, your time can make a big impact!
- **Sponsor a Program:** Partner with us by sponsoring a classroom visit, a Mobile Experience event, or a youth workshop. Your sponsorship helps us deliver hands-on, creative learning opportunities to more children.

Building the Future, One Train at a Time

At the Choo Choo Barn Foundation, we're dedicated to building a brighter future by connecting children to a rewarding hobby that fosters creativity, critical thinking, and a love for learning. With your help, we can continue to make a lasting impact in the lives of children across our community.



Welcome to the Choo Choo Barn Foundation!

At the Choo Choo Barn Foundation, we believe in the power of hands-on learning, creativity, and imagination. Our mission is to inspire today's youth to explore the fascinating world of model trains while developing valuable life skills that go beyond the tracks.

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to reducing screen time and providing children with meaningful, interactive experiences that encourage problem-solving, design, and technical skills. Whether it's through our educational programs, mobile exhibits, or community events, the Choo Choo Barn Foundation strives to foster creativity and a lifelong passion for learning.

Our Mission

Our mission is to inspire and engage youth through the hobby of model trains, fostering creativity, problem-solving, and hands-on skills. By partnering with schools and communities, we aim to reduce screen time and provide children with meaningful, educational experiences that build valuable life skills and spark a lifelong passion for learning and discovery.

CHOO CHOO BARN FOUNDATION

Helping Youth Get On Track

226 Gap Road
Strasburg, PA 17579
Phone: 717-687-7911

— Website —

www.ChooChooBarnFoundation.com



— Email —

info@ChooChooBarnFoundation.com

Join Us in Making a Difference!

Together, let's inspire the next generation of builders, creators, and innovators—one train at a time!

