

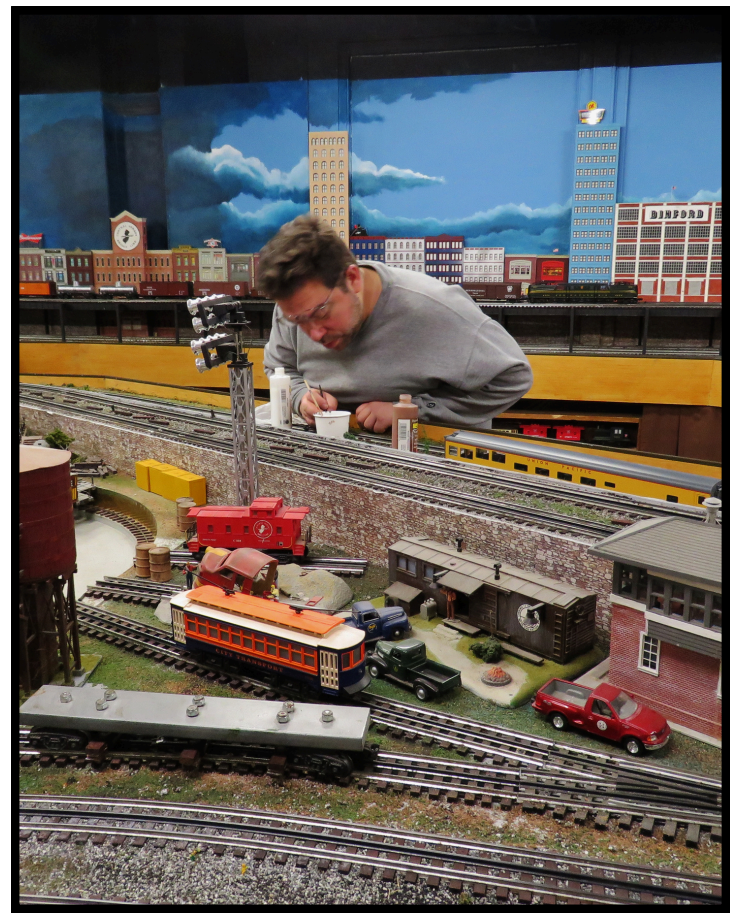
Ocean County Model Railroaders

By Pat Johnson

The sound of model trains clicking along tracks is unmistakable—it easily brings back childhood memories of time spent in parents' basements. Away from supervision, children of the 50s and 60s bent over model buildings, intensely gluing plastic parts together, snapping tracks into snaking rivers of rail, and with a spirit of creativity, built their own worlds.

It's this nostalgia that brings the members of the Ocean County Society of Model Railroaders together. The OCSMR was formed in 1987 by a group of HO scale model railroad enthusiasts. Its mission is “promoting the best and most fun hobby in the world—model trains,” said President Ted Bertiger.

The Society has been chugging along for 38 years—five founding members started the club in a former Amoco Gas Station on Route 88 in Lakewood and then moved to the basement of the All Saints Episcopal Church where they stayed for 24 years. In 2016 they moved to their current location at the invitation of Lakewood Mayor Ray Coles and Committeeman Menashe Miller. The group began the painstaking process of renovating the basement rooms in the former Newman School in Lakewood Park. The Lakewood Historical Society's Sheldon Wolpin Historical Museum is located on the two floors above them. Today the OCSMR has completely refurbished two large rooms—one for the tiny HO scale trains and another for O-gauge model railroads plus tracks for America Flyer S gauge.



Artist John Tedesco paints tiny barrels on O gauge layout.
Photo Credit: Pat Johnson

On a recent Saturday, Bertiger and his O-gauge gang were gathered around their layout. John Tedesco was hunched over a siding, painting the iron rims on a group of tiny barrels. Tedesco is the artist who painted the landscape of low autumn-clothed mountains that frame the miniature towns. Authenticity of the layout is paramount. “It’s never fully completed,” he said.

Bud Phillips has been a member since 1990 and helped construct the setups during each move. Phillips and Bertiger were the architects of the present O-gauge layout that includes four distinct railroad tracks and resembles the New York/Long Island Railroad of the 1950s. “We taught people how to lay track,” said Phillips.

Many of the O-scale buildings are automatons. Phillips pushed the buttons that energized a car dealership, gas station and car wash. Tiny cars moved in and out of a showroom, drove to the pumps and swooshed in and out of the car wash. “Kids really love to make these work,” said Phillips. And some of the town buildings are dedicated to past members such as the ‘Lackomoney Tavern.’

Children also enjoy making the horns and whistles of the engines sound, said Phillips. “They ask me, ‘Can you crash them?’ I say, ‘Sure, how big is your parents’ checkbook?’”

Members are given access to the large rail setup and bring their own trains to run on the rails. The setup accommodates traditional transformers, newer remote control or Wi Fi connections. Both replica steam and diesel trains run side by side. Phillips said OCSMR members usually pack their trains in old suitcases. Phillips estimates that he owns over a thousand individual train cars and around a hundred engines. “I bought some of them for my two sons when they were children. I told them they could run them but not play with them!”

A HO setup in the second basement room is in the process of recreating the local shore railroad lines that ran through such stations as Matawan, Aberdeen, South Amboy, Belmar and Long Branch. Everything is done to scale and very intricate. Bertiger said the club is hoping to enlist more members who gravitate to the smaller HO scale.

Besides work on the model railroads, the group also refurbishes donated train sets and equipment in their engine room and then sells them at various events to



Top: Ted Bertiger and Bud Phillips with layout of O gauge.

Photo credit: Pat Johnson.

Below: Model Trains. Photo Credit: OCSMR.

raise funds. The group also travels and sets up demonstration railroads—On May 18 from 9 a.m. to 2p.m. they will be at the Brick Elks Lodge, 2491 Hooper Avenue in Brick. Go to the website OCSMR.com to view their events and to request their presence.

The OCSMR welcomes visitors to view the model trains. Hours are Tuesday and Friday nights from 6:30 to 10 p.m. and by appointment. Supervised children are welcome. The basement is chairlift accessible.

Model layout with alien ship.

Photo Credit: Pat Johnson.

