

# THE WINNEBAGOLAND WHISTLE

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE WINNEBAGOLAND DIVISION  
MIDWEST REGION – NATIONAL MODEL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 53, ISSUE No. 4

WINTER 2020-21

*A friend of mine quit his job as a reporter and left town by railway. It was an ex-press train.*

## COVER PHOTO:

*W'SOR's bi-weekly train to Plymouth, WI works the yard in the twilight of 2020.*

*Photo courtesy Philip Herman.*

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## Superintendent's Report

*By Phil Herman*

Happy New Year! That greeting has taken on greater meaning for many of us hoping 2021 starts out better than 2020 ended. I am usually an optimistic person but 2020 sure got me down at times. They say adversity is what builds character and without hard times how would we know when we were in times of health and happiness. With most of, the in-person gatherings being cancelled it has provided us with more time at home. Many of us tackled big home improvement projects or took on a modeling project maybe we were putting off until time allowed.

Well enough about life, time to talk about changes happening in our hobby and what is happening in the division. First, it is great to see all the content being shared online with what model railroaders are doing in their miniature world. I see many modelers posting pictures of projects and even one step better, are those who have put together instructional how-to videos describing how they accomplished their project. Judging by the prices I see in the hobby for new equipment and that the parts suppliers I have been in contact with are super busy, I would say the hobby has done very well, in 2020.

With all that activity there is still that need to have two-way communication with one another. The present restrictions have forced many of us to try new things. A few weeks ago, Chris Heili set up remote dispatching and operating on his layout, which allow others from their home computer to run his layout or operate trains through JMRI. Like Chris many of us have embraced the recent changes in how we communicate by taking part in virtual events.

Some of the Virtual Platforms being utilized:

*(Continued on page 2)*



## Superintendent's Report

*(Continued from page 1)*

- Facebook Live
- Facebook Rooms
- Freeteleconference
- Zoom
- Microsoft Teams

Many NMRA organized virtual events are taking place where presenters from around the world share their skills. Some run over a number of evenings or 12-hour period to facilitate someone from around the world taking part. So, it may be difficult to catch every clinic of interest but most of these events are available later, on YouTube. One observation I have made is older modelers have no problem participating in these forums. I am in my mid-fifties and in the few events I have taken part in the average age of presenters and participants are well over mid-50. It is good to see that these new technologies are not scaring away the older generation. This largest source of model with full-scale railroad related entertainment and information, has to be, on YouTube. A lot of new content is being added daily. Some of the videos are professionally done. There is something out there for everyone.

I also see a lot of local modelers getting together through Facebook rooms or live to chat while they work they can show off their current models. I joined a chat one evening only to be introduced to someone in Minnesota who had information on an Aluminum plant in Columbia Falls, Montana (closed in 2004) that I am modeling. What are the odds of that! Another active group is YouTube Model Builders for years has broadcasted on various nights of the week with specific topics scheduled. YouTube Model Builders I believe has a limited number of participants it can show live on screen with the presenter. A number of layout owners have started broadcasting different levels of virtual operating sessions. One I have been a part of was Dave Abeles's, Conrail Onondago Cutoff (available on YouTube). He operates with in-person conductors and virtual engineers. Dave will set up at one location on his layout and do a play by play narration of the action going by while he gives historical information related to his layout and interacts with the viewing audience. There is really a lot of great content available on-line the key is knowing where to look.

The NMRA Lone Star Region has included the WLD in two virtual meets one in December and another January 10, 2021. I hope some of you can take advantage of these in the future. Our division currently is looking into producing our own virtual meet. Stay tuned for more on this in the next few months. Also, let us know if you would be interested in

*(Continued on page 4)*

## View From the Cab

*Your Editor*

It's finally 2021! Unfortunately COVID is still at the forefront of everything despite the rollout of the first vaccines—note that both Arctic Run in Stevens Point and the Mad City Train Show were both cancelled months ago. (Also politics.)

Hopefully at some point a sense of normalcy will start reintroducing itself into society. Schools reopening, fans gradually infiltrating Lambeau during the playoffs, and the restart of train shows, including TTS. Yes, TTS 2021 is still on the calendar April 17 & 18 at the KI Convention Center downtown! We are receiving contracts from vendors and layouts grateful to get back into the circuit again, and we are happy to be the first major show in Wisconsin to be scheduled, even if it's with masks and hand sanitizer!

TTS will be smaller because of the choice of venue. Initially the 2020 show was scheduled for the KICC because Shopko Hall was torn down. This year the new Resch Expo would be ready for us, but in part due to a political-rally-abbreviated show in 2019 and the cancelled show in 2020, we just couldn't afford it. We'd like to return there eventually but we'll have to see where we wind up after this year.

As for your Division, we have successfully participated in a couple of multi-division virtual meets so far this winter... all members have been sent invitations (if you didn't get one or both please drop me a line to let me know). As well, the spring meet is still scheduled for April 10th in Neenah; stand by for more information to come on that! We'd like to think that this newsletter is a proxy to keep everyone connected, but more in-person events in the Division this year will help reduce those feelings of isolation we've all be experiencing.

Speaking of which, I know some of you have been hosting things like mini-op sessions on your own pikes, or continuing to go to local clubs just to shoot the breeze and highball a few loops. Send me your feel-good stories and photos and I'll include them in a future issue. We've all handled the pandemic in our own ways and I think positive stories from our community could go a long way until we're all out of this mess.

Meanwhile, keep on Trainin'! — Todd  
[tbushmaker@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tbushmaker@sbcglobal.net)

## Walthers acquires Chooch

*From the BIZTimes*

Milwaukee-based Wm. K. Walthers, Inc. has acquired all assets of Washington-based Chooch Enterprises Inc., the model train distributor and manufacturer announced Friday.



Founded in 1979, Chooch Enterprises is a supplier of model railroad resin scenery products, freight car kits, fine detail parts and flexible wall products.

"We feel this product line has found a great home with us here at Walthers," Stacey Walthers Naffah, president of Walthers, said in a statement. "We appreciate and value the creativity of Mike O'Connell and the Chooch product line. As a significant distributor of the Chooch line, Walthers is uniquely poised to take on ownership of the portfolio and put the energy of the Walthers brand behind it, bringing these exceptional products forward."

Chooch Enterprises became the first company in the model railroading industry to offer polyurethane resin scenery and white metal products and has expanded its product offering to include adhesives, paints and flexible wall mount products. The acquisition follows the retirement of Chooch's owner and founder, Mike O'Connell.

"After 46 years in the business, I want to thank you all for your support," O'Connell said in a statement. "It's been a wonderful time for me. Imagine having a dream come true; making a living creating products for our great hobby! Now I hope to have time to REALLY work on my layout!"

Walthers will purchase all assets of Chooch Enterprises including all tooling and inventory of the Chooch resin-cast scenery and flexible scenery detail product portfolio. Walthers will continue to market and sell product under the Chooch name.

"We like having products to help modelers build a great layout, and we see this as a way to continue to do that," Walthers Naffah said.



Established in 1932, Wm. K. Walthers, Inc. distributes model trains, accessories, and related items from more than 200 manufacturers, and also manufactures its own exclusive items for its WalthersProto, WalthersMainline, WalthersTrainline, Cornerstone, SceneMaster, Walthers Controls, and WalthersTrack lines.

## Caboose runs out of Steam

*By Thomas Gounley, BusinessDen (Denver)*

The reboot of the world's largest model train shop has derailed. Caboose, which earned that recognition from the Guinness Book of World Records in 2014, has given up its brick-and-mortar presence nearly four years after downsizing in a move from Denver to Lakewood.



Kevin Ruble, who bought the business in late 2016 and later converted it to an employee-owned company, said Caboose has moved out of the building it leased at 10800 W. Alameda Ave. The business itself will continue operating, he said, although it hasn't been decided what form that will take.

"We're focused on getting that done," Ruble said in late December of moving out. "After the first of the year we're going to assess that next step. That likely means that we'll continue online."

Caboose, which was previously named Caboose Hobbies, has deep roots in Denver. The store opened downtown in 1938. It moved to the South Broadway corridor in the 1980s, where it had 18,600 square feet of floor space open to the public, according to Guinness.

Not many similar businesses can claim such a legacy, Ruble said. "That's as long as almost any business in the train enthusiast community has been around," he said.

The business' previous owner, Duane Miller, closed it in September 2016. Ruble arranged to buy it shortly after that. He needed a new location, and wanted a freestanding building where he could install a caboose out front. He opened in Lakewood in February 2017 in a notably smaller space — about 6,800 square feet. "When we reopened we had 200 people standing outside the front door," Ruble said.

But while it may have had a fan base, the business had deep challenges, according to Ruble. "The previous business had failed," he said. "They had lost a significant amount of money over the previous five years ... We weren't saving it as much as we were doing the best to resurrect it."

Ruble had previously run an actual railroad — Marquette Rail, operating 126 miles of track in Michigan. He founded the company in 2005 and sold it in 2012 for a reported \$40 million, which he said was 40 times what had been originally invested in the company.

Ruble changed the name of the model train shop from Caboose Hobbies to Caboose after buying it "because of what I felt was a stigma, and particularly among professional rail-

*(Continued on page 7)*



## Norman “Chic” Hartert

*As printed in the Oconto County Reporter*

Norman L. “Chic” Hartert, 86, of Oconto, WI, passed away peacefully on Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2020, after a battle with Covid-19. He was born July 31, 1934 in Oconto to Walter and Florence (Rugg) Hartert and spent early years in Ishpeming, MI before moving to Oconto. He was active in baseball and had a brief career in the minor leagues. He married Marilyn J. Nicklaus on November 3, 1956. He worked for Cruiser’s (Cruiser Yachts), became a truck driver with REA Express Agency and other trucking companies. In 1973 he moved from Milwaukee back to Oconto where he and Marilyn ran Hartert Northside Beverage for years.

Chic was an avid bowler, participating in many tournaments. Later he turned to golf which he continued enjoying until he became ill with the Coronavirus. He loved to set up a table for jigsaw puzzles that he worked on for hours. He was also a big fan of the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team, even writing down scores in his journal. Chic’s real passion was model railroading. He started building model railroads while in Milwaukee and later took over the entire building after the bottling/liquor store closed. He



eventually turned to modeling buildings and other railroad structures instead of operating trains on his layouts. He became an expert in making trees for the layouts which he sold and gave clinics for tree building to other modelers at the many train shows he went to.

He is survived by his wife of 64 years Marilyn; son David (Roberta) Hartert, daughters Diane (Nathan) Maynard, and Desiree (Steven) Rohde; eight grandchildren, Amanda (Zachary) Johnson, Nicholas (Brooke) Rohde, Rachel (Chris) Stelmar, Andrew Maynard, Ryan Rohde, Alex (Patricia) Hartert, Samantha Rohde, and Luke Hartert; and eleven great grandchildren, Joseiha, Malachi, Abel, Elizabeth, Thaddeus, Thomas, Cecilia, Dante, Maximiliano, Nicolas, and Leonardo; and nephews, great nephews and nieces. Chic was preceded in death by his brother Robert (Mary) Hartert, and parents Walter

and Florence Hartert.

We would like to thank the wonderful care given to Norman “Chic” from the doctors, nurses and staff at Bellin Hospital in Green Bay during his fight with Covid-19.

## Superintendent’s Report

*(Continued from page 2)*

participating or would like to help in putting an event on. Currently, our **WLD Spring Meet** is scheduled for **April 10**. Stay tuned to see if it is Virtual or in person.

Speaking of those who have made accomplishments in the hobby during 2020. I would like to congratulate Emory Luebke in receiving his AP Structures certificate. Marv Preussler has sent all Emory’s paperwork to the National AP for his Master Model Railroader status. Not only does it take a significant amount of modeling and service in the hobby to qualify. A lot goes into just putting all the paperwork together to obtain the certificates. Emory is a wonderful person to learn from, humble and a great asset for all modelers in this area.

Until we meet again, “proceed on signal indication, Phil out.”



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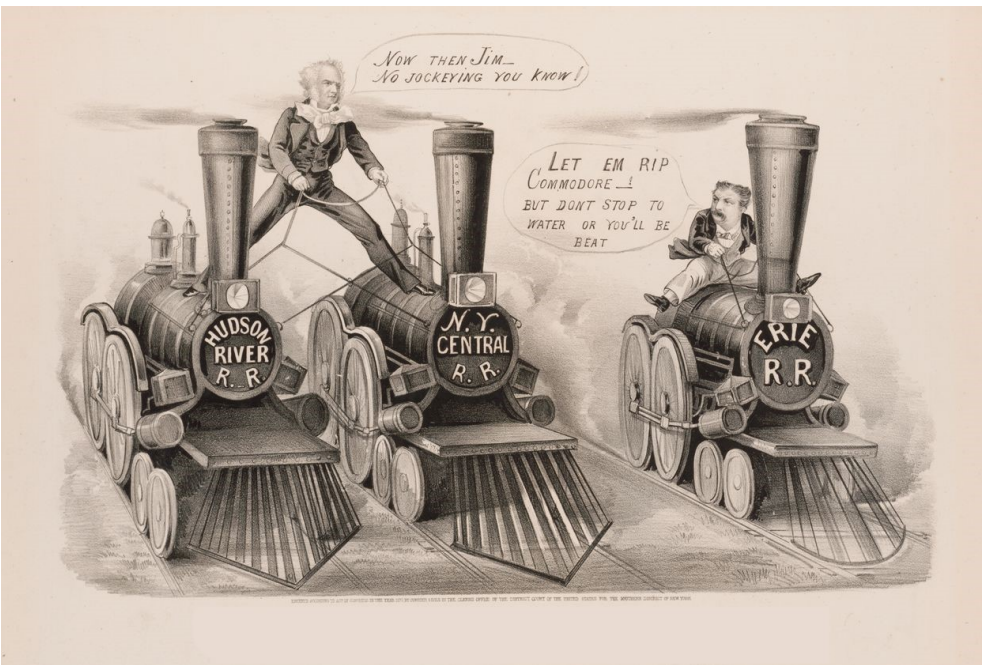
# How the Railroad Tracks Led to the Internet Age

By Kenneth Pringle, *Barron's*

## What Mark Zuckerberg and Cornelius Vanderbilt Have In Common

The railroad titans built America, and they deserved every penny they got for it, according to Clarence W. Barron.

The founder and editor of this magazine forcefully countered those who thought that salaries of railroad presidents were too high and that something ought to be done about it. The railroad president, Barron wrote in 1923, “is the guiding force to whom keeping tens of thousands of spike drivers at work is only a detail. The transportation system of the country is the product of the brains and initiative of such as he.”



The early railroads were the internet of their day, connecting people and commerce, compressing time and space. Starting in the 19th century, they turned America’s disparate regions into a connected whole and, in the process, created vast fortunes. As a result, railroads were a central topic in early issues of *Barron's*.

Railroads had been generating controversy since the days of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Edward Harriman, and J.P. Morgan. It was the first industry to draw government antitrust scrutiny, setting up the long struggle of free competition versus the public good. A recent House Judiciary Committee report on the market dominance of the FAANGs—Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, and Alphabet’s Google—decried that these companies “have become the kinds of monopolies we last saw in the era of oil barons and railroad tycoons.”

Love them or hate them, the railroads created a template that other nascent industries followed. Telegraph and telephone, automobile and airplane, radio and television, and now the internet—each of these technologies, in its own way, made us ever more tightly connected. Industries that

sprang up around these new technological products generated enormous wealth and great power for some. And all of them eventually felt the hand of government regulation.

But first the railroad had to come through.

Railroads dominated the economy in the 19th century as no industry would again; they practically were the industrial economy for decades. Charles Dow’s first stock index, in 1884, contained nine railroads and just two industrial stocks. The FAANGs, which make up about 17% of the S&P 500 index, can’t compare with the sheer size and dominance of the 19th century railroads.

In its early years, *Barron's* produced article after article on the Norfolk & Western, Northern Pacific, Missouri Kansas & Texas, Rock Island, Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe, and more. The magazine spoke of Morgan, Harriman, and their ilk, all by then dead, with reverence. At one point, *Barron's* lamented that the current crop of American capitalists “seem puny figures beside the speculative kings of the last century.”

That group did transform the country. In 1805, it took the Lewis and Clark Expedition more than a year to travel from Illinois to the Pacific Ocean. In 1869, when the first transcontinental railroad linked up, the trip from New York to San Francisco was reduced to six days.

Tracks soon ran in every direction. Railroad towns like Cheyenne, Wyo.; North Platte, Neb.; and Billings, Mont., popped up along the tracks as hamlets like Omaha and Denver grew into cities.

Everywhere, forests and prairies were converted to farmland as Americans pulled up stakes and moved westward, and thousands of immigrants who laid the rails settled down and helped change what it meant to be an American.

“The railroad industry’s influence would penetrate every corner of American life,” writes Michael Hiltzik in *Iron Empires: Robber Barons, Railroads, and the Making of America*. The railroads would come to dominate business, politics, and home life, while creating the financial machine known as Wall Street, which was fueled by railroad bonds.

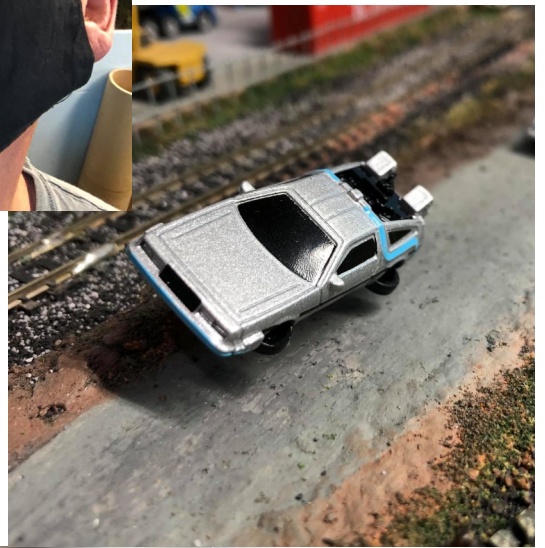
In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner declared the end of the American frontier, and it was the railroad that finished it off. Steel rails crossed every frontier, with mileage growing by leaps and bounds—from 30,000 miles of tracks in 1860 to 163,500 miles in 1890.

(Continued on page 7)



# Trackside Photos

Compiled by Paul Hillmer





## Caboose Closes Again

*(Continued from page 3)*

roaders.”

Those working on the rails often hide the fact that they're fascinated by trains, he said. “They'd have to wear a disguise to go into a place that had the word ‘hobbies’ above it,” Ruble said.

But the model train business has been tougher for Ruble than the short-line railroad business.

Ruble said his assumptions about the business' possibilities were based on the assumption that e-commerce could grow to 60 percent of sales. Instead, pre-pandemic, about 90 percent of sales were still made in-person in Lakewood.

Ruble said he invested \$200,000 trying to set up an e-commerce system that would work with Caboose's abnormally-large inventory, which includes many items that are hard to source elsewhere. That effort essentially failed, he said.

“The \$200,000 that was invested is a fraction of what I've invested total, and we're at a point with capital where we can't stick around six months to see what happens,” Ruble said, adding he is also selling his personal home.

The business' staff levels have also been based off the e-commerce modeling that never came to fruition. Staff were furloughed in November.

Caboose's retail store had been closed to the public since March 18. Ruble described the building as an old structure that “would require capital expenditures that would be significant” in order to be COVID-compliant, particularly when air-flow is suddenly a concern to the average customer.

Despite the fact that online sales have historically been lack-luster, now is the natural time to leave the physical store behind, Ruble said. And, in a twist, systems offered by outside e-commerce providers have advanced to the point that the business can now use them.

Beyond focusing on online sales, Ruble said the future of Caboose could involve private-label products or doing some of its own manufacturing. But no decisions have been made.

“At the end of the month, I'll take a breather of some period of time — it might be a week, it might be six months,” he said in late December.

Ruble said the overall goal is to “continue to cultivate that community of, as we say sometimes derisively ‘foamers’ — people who just foam at the mouth when they start talking about trains.”

## Railroads Portend the Internet?

*(Continued from page 5)*

By the time Turner declared the frontier dead, the golden age of railroads was drawing to a close. Route mileage peaked at 254,000 in 1916 and has been declining ever since.

The Dow Jones Railroad Average peaked in 1913 and wouldn't regain that level again until 1926. Even so, Barron's noted that the recovery was based not on growth but on “increased operating efficiency... consolidation and railroad labor peace.” In other words, the industry had matured.

By the 1930s, the automobile had cut into railroad dominance, though it was construction of the Interstate Highway System and growth of affordable air travel in the 1950s and '60s that finally all but broke the industry. When a rash of railroads, led by Penn Central in 1970, declared bankruptcy, the government stepped in.

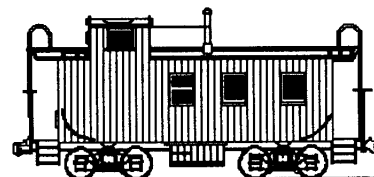
In 1971, America's long-distance passenger lines were combined into federally funded Amtrak; a few years later, the government created Conrail by consolidating freight lines in the Northeast. By the late '80s, Conrail's operations had improved so much that it sold stock in an initial public offering. A decade later, CSX and Norfolk Southern acquired Conrail and split the assets. The railroads entered a competitive new phase.

Railroads were now vying on a level field with trucking and airfreight, all based on shipping containers that move seamlessly from ship to rail to truck to plane. More than ever, efficiency became the byword, led by E. Hunter Harrison.

Starting at Canadian National Railway (CN), Harrison cut operating costs with what he called “precision scheduled railroading.” Hub-and-spoke routes were replaced by straight runs. Scheduled departures reduced the time that trains sat idle. Locomotives pulled longer trains. As head count shrank and trains moved more tonnage with less fuel, CN's operating costs fell from 75% of revenue to 61%. By the time Harrison stepped down as CN's CEO in 2009, its stock had risen sixfold.

That year, Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway purchased Burlington Northern Santa Fe—and Wall Street took notice of trains again.

Facebook, Apple, and the other FAANGs can only hope for a run like that. Not many industries get a second wind a century after their glory days.



## Team Track

### Division Officers

Phil Herman	Superintendent
Todd Bushmaker	Asst. Superintendent
Scott Payne	Paymaster
Vern Ehlke	Chief Clerk

### Board of Directors (terms thru 04/2021)

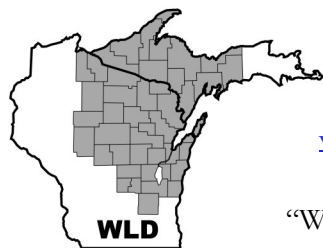
Division Officers (above) PLUS:

Wally Rogers	Joe Lallensack
Dave Nitsch	Dave Allen
Mary Eiden	Mike Eiden
Chris Heili	Rich Hopfensperger
Paul Mastalir	

### Committee Chairs

(Asst. Supt.)	Property Manager
Todd Bushmaker	Whistle
Marv Preussler	Achievement Program
Wally Rogers	Membership
Phil Herman	Clinics
(At-will, current meet)	Convention Chair
Paul Mastalir	Company Store
Scott Payne	Operating Sessions
David Allen	Model Contest
Joe Lallensack	Photo Contest
Vern Ehlke	Technology
Paul Hillmer	Social Media
Michael Eiden	Webmaster
Rich Hopfensperger	Hobby Shop/Model Club Liaison
Paul Mastalir / Mike O.	Scout Coordinators
(At-will Volunteers)	Financial Review

*Note that these positions need not be Directors; any member in the Division may chair or participate in these committees!*



[www.wld-nmra.com](http://www.wld-nmra.com)

Facebook:  
“WinnebagoLand Division  
NMRA”

## Timetable

Please note that these events are subject to the fluid COVID-19 situation. Check with each individual event.

<b>January 27</b> <b>7pm</b>	<b>WLD BOD meeting</b> <i>Virtual—Stay Tuned!</i>
<b>January 30-31</b> <b>Cancelled</b>	Arctic Run Model RR Show <i>Holiday Inn, Stevens Point</i>
<b>February 13-14</b> <b>Cancelled</b>	Mad City Train Show <i>Alliant Energy Center, Madison</i>
<b>April 10</b>	<b>WLD Spring Meet</b> <i>Best Western Bridgewood, Neenah</i> <i>(and/or Virtually—Stay Tuned!)</i>
<b>April 17-18</b>	Titletown Train Show <i>KI Convention Center, Green Bay</i>



## Division Merch

Check your closet and see if it is time for a new WinnebagoLand Division shirt. Available through the Division website store with a link to the shop for you to direct order.

Also available is a visor cap with the train curving around the edge! Nice additions to your list this year.

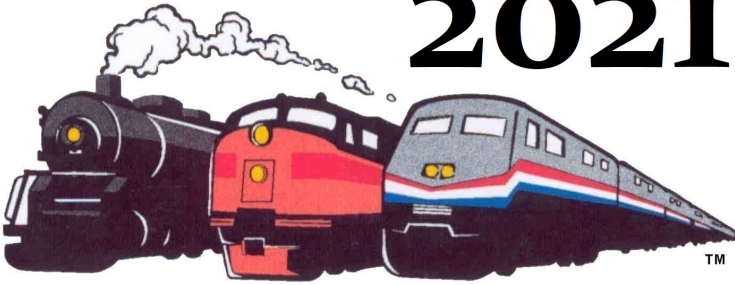


Just a few of the HO-scale WinnebagoLand boxcars left; let Paul Mastalir know how many and he will work out getting them to you. His phone is (715) 853-7274, or email him at [mastalir54166@yahoo.com](mailto:mastalir54166@yahoo.com).



TITLETOWN TRAIN SHOW™

2021



## NEW DATE AND VENUE!

April 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Saturday: 9 am - 5 pm

Sunday: 10 am - 4 pm

**KI Convention Center**

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