

A Look into the *Allegheny Western Lines*
"*AWL Lines West!*"
by *Chris O'Brien, ATC*

Before my senior year of college, some of my companions and I were looking for something new in model railroading. We wanted an outlet for maximum creative expression that would still allow us to run together. Finding a way to promote the hobby wouldn't hurt, either. We finally realized that a modular group would be the perfect solution!

With that, we started to research how to build modules. We chose to go with 2' x 4' NMRA style modules. Fellow conspirator Doug Baer is quite handy with carpentry and has a sizeable woodshop. He designed and built modules using poplar framing and a foam deck. They were light and very durable. The foam provided a handy basis for final construction.

We used Woodland Scenics foam roadbed with Peco Code 100 track. This has been a wonderful method as the foam roadbed and tack glue is fast and clean, and making changes isn't too difficult.

In the summer of 2001, I received two modules and started to design a Heinz Plant from prototype photos. Doug got four and started a medium sized yard with a junction. Fellow member Val Pistilli started working on an industrial switching area over three modules of his own. Doug also started looking into ideas for making some corners for an oval or square shaped setup. To make transportation easier, he chose to build compact 3' square corner modules.

In the fall of 2001, we set up our modules with a local modular group that we are friendly with, the Saint Alban's RR Club, or StARR. This gave us our first test with an experienced group. The layout was a hit and setup only took a third of the time as the other group—we were on to something!

Finally, in February 2003, we bit the bullet and committed to a Greenberg Train Show. The final corners and modules were constructed (some without any wiring) and we were on! That layout was 8' x 24'. There wasn't much scenery, but there was plenty of track, all controlled by Digitrax DCC. We ran a bunch of trains, many with sound, and had a lot of fun over the weekend. We did it again in December with a little more scenery done this time. In only our second full setup, from the time we opened the moving truck's door to full setup with trains running was only 90 minutes— with only three guys setting up!

Since then we have displayed at Greenberg Shows and the East Coast Hobby Show on several occasions. We have displayed with other groups several times, including the Harford County Modular group, Royersford Modular Model Railroaders and StARR. In all instances, we were able to setup a display based upon the NMRA standards. Preparing for a show, we draw out the entire layout with AutoCAD to ensure alignment

and accuracy. Our DCC Master, Val, then breaks up the layout into booster districts to limit the current draw on any one section of the layout. A printed map of the display is given to everyone and modules are added to the layout as they arrive.

All modules are positioned, clamped to adjacent modules and leveled prior to any track or electrical work. The connector tracks are added and the track power and Loconet buses are then joined. Working in a piecemeal arrangement, the layout grows in segments. While the days of a 90-minute setup are over, the efficiency of a few people to setup displays that have grown to over 2000 square feet is still quite remarkable.

The AWL crew now consists of eight members with over 25 modules, and many more on the way. The modules have reached their initial goal of successfully providing a contact with the public. It's amazing how many people walk up to us and ask, "Is this HO scale?" At the same time, we have people asking us about the Digitrax DCC, sound decoders and weathering techniques. The Allegheny Western Lines is spearheading a large HO-scale modular setup for the 2006 National Train Show. The NTS will run concurrently with the Independence Junction 2006 NMRA National Convention. Visit www.ij2006.org for more information. There are 6 groups looking to join us from places as near as New York, to Wisconsin and even one gentleman from Seattle! We hope to showcase many other scales, groups and styles of modeling to further educate and entertain the public during the first week of July 2006 in Philadelphia. The AWL crew looks forward to seeing you there!



Chris O'Brien, ATC is one of the founding members of AWL. He has two modules and is working on a two-module set, complete with operational swing bridge. He is also an eight-year member of Gatsme Lines and serves as the Operations Superintendent. AWL and Gatsme Lines will be on display and open for tours during IJ 2006.