

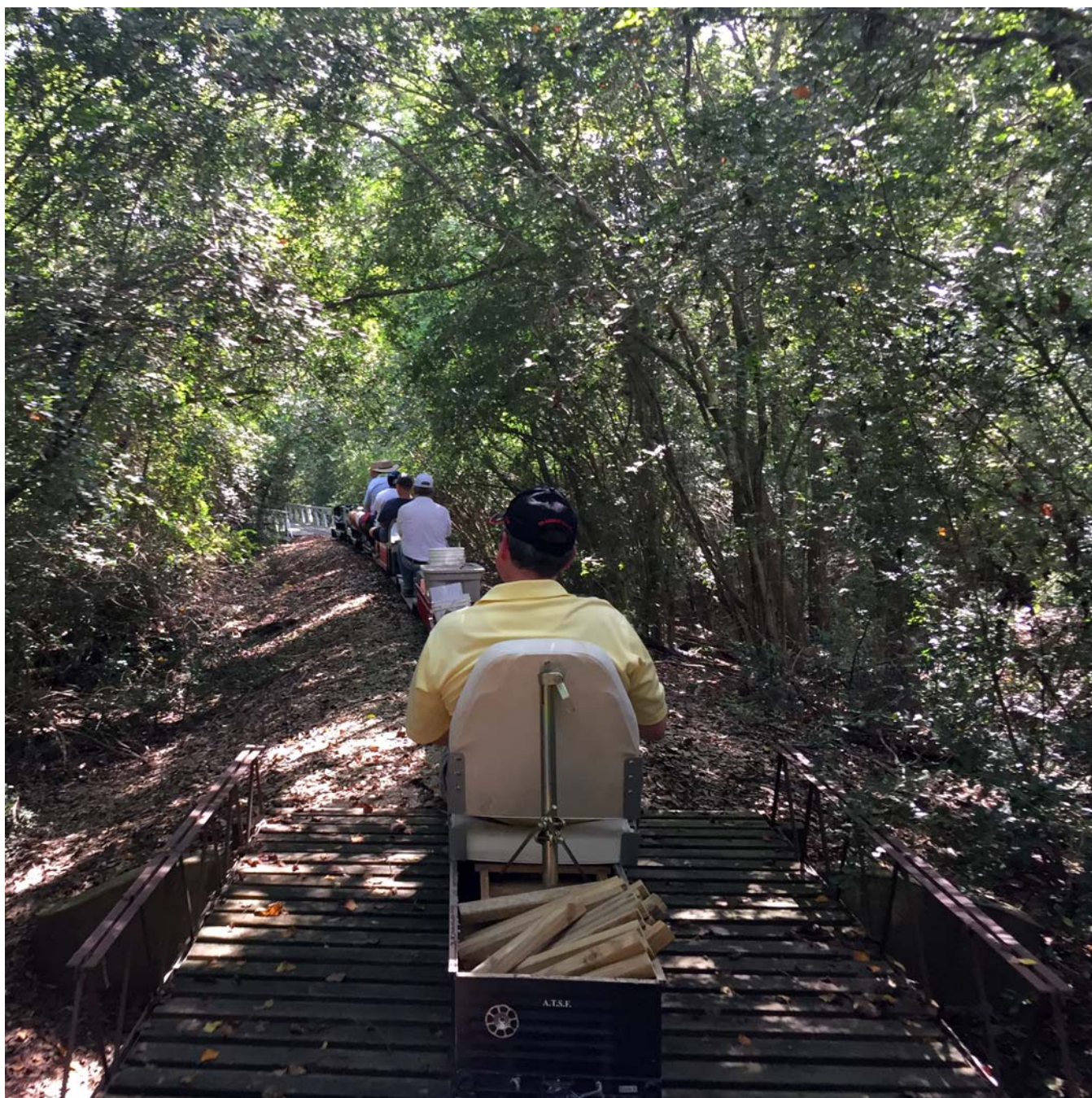


News from Houston N'Crowd



# THE ORDERBOARD

November/December 2016



## Consider the NMRA

*Page 6*

*Over the river and through the woods at Zube Park during an NMRA event.  
Photo by Dejan Suskavcevic*



# "GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

*by Samuel Townsel II, President*

## The holidays are here: Are you in the spirit?

I can honestly say that the holidays sneaked up on me this year, so much so, that I forgot to put in my vacation days! Other than the obvious reasons, I get excited about the holiday season. By this time, the San Jacinto Model Railroad Club Layout Tour is in full swing. It is a great way for modelers to strut their stuff while giving inspiration to those who might not have started yet or whose layouts are in their infancy. Even if your layout is nearly completed, go out and see what the Houston model railroading scene has to offer!

In addition, at least if you are like me, you have some serious vacation coming up. Take some time to tackle that modeling project you have been putting off or making some real progress on your layout. If you are not building a layout on your own, we have plenty of projects at the club's layout for you to take on while you have the time.

Speaking of that, this time of year is the busiest for Papa Ben's Train Place. Let's show our appreciation to Allyn by making sure that we are in the layout room, running trains on Saturday and Sunday during the holiday season. Bring your own train, but if you don't have one, there are some great trains available to run on the layout.

Lastly, I would like to personally thank all of the club members for their support over the past year. We were able to handle some significant issues that came

up all while keeping the spirit of fellowship for the hobby. Congratulations to all new and returning officers! There are still some things to iron out but I am confident that we will have another great year. I look forward to seeing each of you at our holiday party and combat gift exchange! Special thanks to our gracious hosts Eddie and Cheryl for opening their home to us. See below for more details and make plans to join the fun with your N'Crowd friends!

*Samuel*

### You're invited to the Houston N'Crowd's 2016 Holiday Party and Combat Gift Exchange!

This year's hosts are Eddie and Cheryl Aycock. The fun starts at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 17, at the Aycock house, 8119 Town Creek Dr., Houston.

Main course, dessert and soft drinks provided. If you have a special holiday side dish to share, please bring it. BYOB if you want something special to drink. Remember to bring your gift for the Combat Gift Exchange: Rails and non-rails are invited to play!

To RSVP, call 281-463-2623 or email [efaycock@aol.com](mailto:efaycock@aol.com). See the flyer distributed with this issue of *The Orderboard* for more information. See you there!

### Houston N'Crowd 2016 Officers and Volunteers

President ..... Samuel Townsel II  
Vice President ..... Harvey Stalarow  
Secretary ..... James C. Senneff, Jr.  
Treasurer ..... Eddie Aycock  
Board Member (2016) ..... Al Hague

Board Member (2017) ..... Richard Bartlett  
Board Member (2018) ..... Joe Kingsberry  
Layout Master ..... Al Hague  
Editor & Webmaster ..... Tom Marsh



**N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:**  
November 16 / December 21 / January 18 / February 15

**N'Crowd Operating Sessions:** First Sunday of even-numbered months. Watch your email for information.

Most activities take place at Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd. Our monthly membership meetings start at 7 p.m. and are open to all. Operating sessions take place at various locations.

# N'Crowd members helps boost Amtrak ridership to record levels

Amtrak carried a record 31.3 million passengers in the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2016, an almost 400,000-passenger increase in ridership compared to FY 2015. This is the sixth consecutive year the national passenger railroad has carried more than 30 million customers.

Contributing to the increased ridership were the N'Crowd members who rode Amtrak's *Sunset Limited* on April 9, 2016, from Lake Charles, La. to Houston in conjunction with an NRHS event.

Amtrak set an unaudited ticket revenue record of \$2.14 billion in FY 2016, a \$12 million increase over FY 2015. The company covered 94 percent of its operating costs with ticket sales and other revenues, up from 92 percent the year before. Unaudited total revenue was a record \$3.2 billion for FY 2016. With the increased revenue, Amtrak reported an unaudited operating loss of \$227 million, a reduction of \$78 million over last year, and the lowest operating loss since 1973. Amtrak was also able to make a net reduction in long-term debt of \$71.4 million.

To boost ridership, Amtrak added cars to high-demand or sold-out trains. Amtrak also improved on-time performance and customer satisfaction scores, and offered new services such as allowing pets and bikes on trains.

Ridership on long-distance trains increased from 4.49 million to 4.66 million passengers. However, the *Sunset Limited* and *Texas Eagle*

**Amtrak Long-Distance Ridership**

Train	2016	2015
Empire Builder	454,625	438,376
Coast Starlight	453,131	455,845
California Zephyr	417,322	375,342
Lake Shore Limited	387,853	356,898
Palmetto	380,815	208,645
Southwest Chief	364,748	367,267
Silver Star	364,271	383,347
Silver Meteor	339,407	346,097
Texas Eagle	306,321	317,282
Crescent	268,344	281,777
City of New Orleans	248,960	255,458
Auto Train	238,448	271,622
Capitol Limited	228,444	226,240
Cardinal	104,831	103,633
Sunset Limited	98,079	100,713

recorded declines in passenger counts. The *Texas Eagle* dropped out of Amtrak's top-ten trains in terms of ridership, while the *Sunset Limited*, saddled with a tri-weekly schedule, continued as the weakest link in the system.



Amtrak Train No. 1, the westbound *Sunset Limited*, arrives at Lake Charles, La., to pick up N'Crowd members and other passengers on April 9, 2016. Photo by Tom Marsh



# CV musings *by Hugh Boyd*

After quite a period of naivety and confusion, at last I'm getting a better idea how DCC configuration variables work and I've found how to employ the decoder speed matching features to get my locomotives to run at the same speed. I've also discovered how to automatically dim a locomotive headlight when the locomotive is stationary.

Speed matching is where CV 66 and CV 95 come into play. If CV 66 is set below 128 the locomotive will run slower in the forward direction; above 128 (255 max) faster in the forward direction. CV 95 works the same way for the reverse direction.

I have a TrainSpeed sensor that indicates locomotive speed in scale miles per hour. I run my locomotives through the sensor at throttle setting 30 and then tinker with the CV setting until I'm at my layout's standard scale speed of 64 mph. It usually takes multiple attempts before I'm satisfied with my tinkering.

After the locomotive runs for a while, it warms up and goes faster and my initial setting is usually too high, so I have to go back to reset the CV value to slow my locomotive to 64 mph.

I'm a lot happier now that I've found how to get my locomotives to run at the same speed. Now I can consist almost any combination of locomotives in the knowledge that they will all run at the same speed. And I'm getting

good mileage from my TrainSpeed module too.

I've also worked on headlight dimming. CV 49 and CV 61 control the headlight LED. For locomotives equipped with TCS decoders, I set the CV 49 value at 8 and the CV 61 value at 17 for headlight auto-dimming. This results in the locomotive's headlight dimming as the locomotive comes to a stop, in accordance with certain requirements of prototype railroads' Rule 17 [see page 5]. Other settings are available to operate the locomotive's Mars lights and other fancy effects.

In order to make changes to my configuration variable settings, I place the locomotive on a short programming track that is wired to the third and fifth outlets on my Digitrax DSC100 booster's 7-pin connector. I have a Digitrax DT400R throttle directly connected to the booster, too. I set this throttle to the PG mode to make the CV settings. I also have a DT402R throttle connected through a UR92 Universal Receiver for normal layout running of my trains. This arrangement allows me to quickly switch my locomotives from the running track to the programming track and back again as I do my CV tinkering.

This is starting to be fun again. If N'Crowd members have pairs of locomotive with TCS decoders that have mismatched speeds, I would be happy to attempt to improve the speed inequality.



*Newly-acquired Kato SD70ACe UP 8512 sits on Hugh Boyd's programming track awaiting setting of CV values for speed matching and headlight auto-dimming. Photo by Hugh Boyd.*

# Rule 17, Santa Fe style *by Tom Marsh*

Under the General Code of Operating Rules employed by many railroads to ensure safe operations, Rule 17 governed the use of locomotive headlights. While most model railroaders still refer to Rule 17, headlights are covered in modern prototype rule books under Rules 5.9.1 to 5.9.4.

The specific language of Rule 17 varied somewhat from railroad to railroad and over time. The version of Rule 17 reprinted here is from *The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway System, Rules, Operating Department, Revised, 1953*. Designated "Form 2625 Standard", this particular copy was issued to J. W. Lancaster, assistant signalman. The railroad states on the inside front cover that the book is the property of the railroad and is loaned to the employee "who hereby agrees to return it to the proper officer when called for, or upon leaving the service; or pay for same." Mr. Lancaster does not appear to have consulted this copy often, given the pristine condition of the book; this is probably explained by the fact that as a signalman, train operations fell outside his duties.

General Notices at the front of the book spell out the purpose. General Notice (a) states: "Safety is of the first importance in the discharge of duty." General Notice (b) states: "Obedience to the rules is essential to safety."

Rule 17 appears under the "Train Signals" section of the Santa Fe rulebook and states:

**17.** The headlight will be displayed to the front of every train by day and night. It must be extinguished when a train turns out to meet another train and has stopped clear of main track.

In case of headlight failure enroute at night, and repairs cannot be made promptly, a white light must be placed on the front or leading end of train. Train must proceed at restricted speed while head end is passing through stations and over street and highway crossings. Whistle must be sounded frequently and bell rung continuously. The dispatcher must be notified at first opportunity.

It must be dimmed -

- while standing at stations where yard engines are employed;
- at meeting points by a train on the main track after switch has been lined for opposing train to enter siding;
- while standing to meet a train at a junction or at end of two or more tracks.



*Rules cover just about every aspect of train operations, including the use of headlights. Santa Fe EMD F7A No. 260C, built in 1951, leads its train through Sealy, Texas, in August 1977. Photo by Howard Laker*

On two or more tracks, it may be dimmed when approaching a train in the opposite direction.

When headlight is displayed at meeting point, except within automatic block system limits or where Rule 261 is in effect, opposing train must proceed prepared to stop short of train, obstruction or switch not properly lined, until main track is known to be clear.

On engines equipped with gyrating lights, the white beam will be displayed by night in addition to the headlight. When a train is stopped suddenly, by day or night, the red beam must be immediately displayed and trains on adjacent tracks observing red beam will stop and not proceed until it is known that their track is clear.

Display of red beam does not relieve employees from complying with Rules 99 and 102.

**Warning:-** Employees should not look directly into the red beam.

**17(A).** When an engine is running backward a white light must be displayed by night on the rear of the tender or unit.



# Opinion: Join the NMRA

by Tom Marsh

A discussion at the November N'Crowd membership meeting about insurance for the club brought up the point that 100% NMRA clubs received the benefit of free and/or low-cost insurance coverage for certain events, club layouts and equipment. The talk about the NMRA expanded somewhat beyond insurance, and now I want to take this opportunity to remind everyone of the benefits of NMRA membership.

In the interest of full disclosure, I have been an NMRA member since 1983.

Direct benefits of NMRA membership include the monthly NMRA Magazine; participation in local, regional and national events, such as the upcoming Lone Star Region convention in Houston June 7-10, 2017; access to various NMRA resources, including the NMRA Online Archives, which includes over 10,000 prototype photographs, equipment plans,

drawings and more, and the Kalmbach Memorial Library, which is being combined with the library at the California State Railroad Museum, providing access to that collection as well; discounted collection insurance; the Achievement Program, which recognizes your modeling talents; online how-to clinics and more.

However, in my view, the NMRA's most important role is its work in developing Standards and Recommended Practices. In addition to providing guidelines to modelers to ensure their model railroads operate smoothly, these standards are what allow locomotives, cars, power systems, DCC equipment and other items produced by different manufacturers to function together as an integrated whole.

NMRA Standards and Recommended Practices are reviewed and updated regularly, and new standards are developed as the need develops. One of the



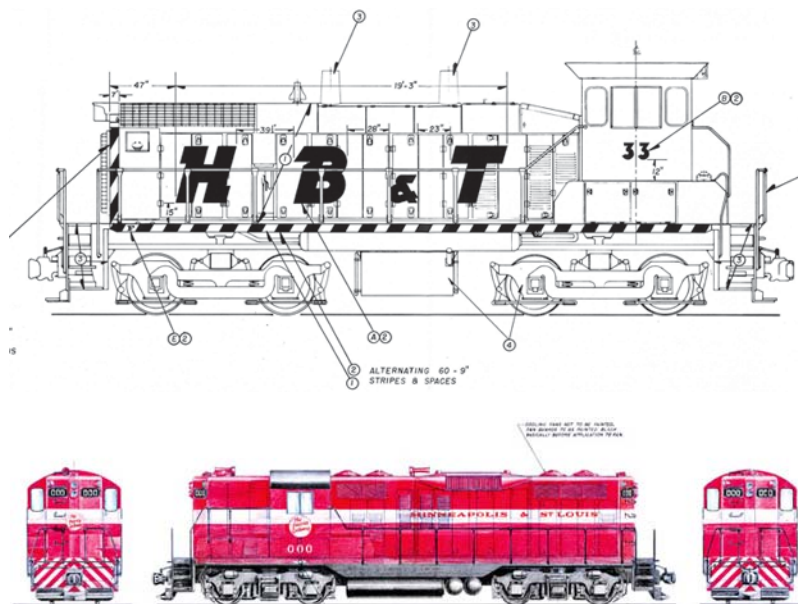
Harris and surrounding counties are part of NMRA Lone Star Region Division 8, the Texas Gulf Division. Thanks in large part to the efforts of the N'Crowd's own Ray Byer, Division 8 members participate in a variety of activities, including clinics and social events. Photo above left by Dejan Suskavcevic, others by Tom Marsh.



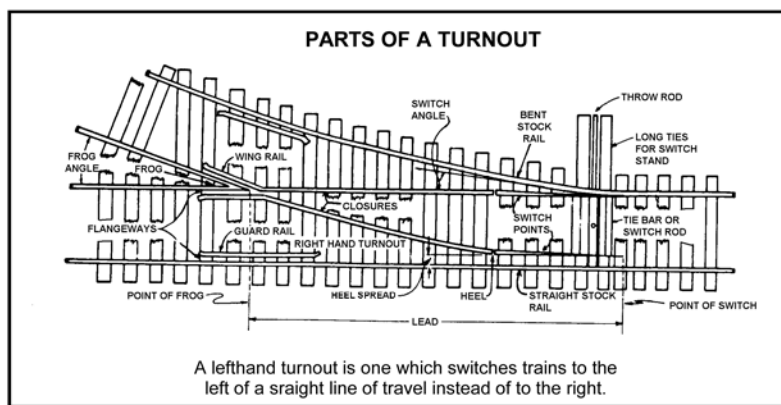
projects underway at present is development of standards for Layout Command Control or LCC. As described by the NMRA, LCC is “an operating system protocol which will work hand-in-hand with DCC” to power and operate non-motive power-related functions on a layout, such as signaling, turnout routing and lighting effects. The purpose is to segregate the operation of motive power from that of other functions to decrease the load in the throttle bus. The standard will enable manufacturers to sell compatible items that can be powered and controlled by one LCC setup.

Whether or not you participate in the social aspects of NMRA membership, whether or not you opt to take the magazine subscription as part of your membership, and whether or not you want to take advantage of the various online and other resources provided by the NMRA, every model railroader benefits from the organization’s efforts to develop standards and recommended practices that encourage compatibility across manufacturers’ product lines. In my view, this alone would be worth the cost of an NMRA membership, but I get a lot more from my membership than just being able to run Kato and Atlas locomotives together.

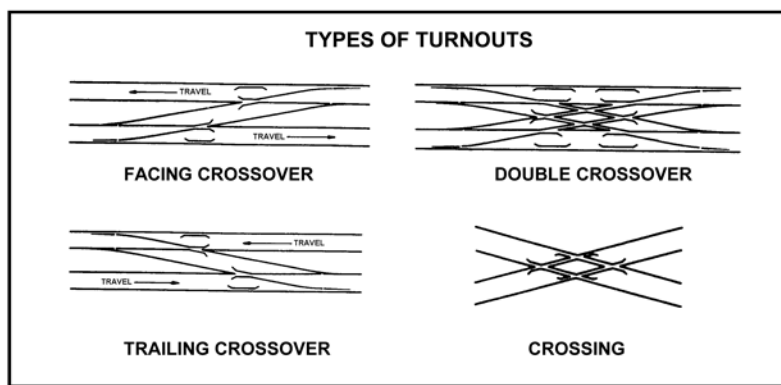
I encourage you to visit <http://nmra.org/> and check out the benefits for yourself. You do not have to commit to a full year’s membership: NMRA offers a six-month “Rail Pass” trial membership for \$9.95. And if you sign up for this trial membership in early 2017, you will be able to participate in the June Lone Star Region meet in Houston. Give it a try!



*Resources available from the NMRA include painting and other equipment diagrams, model railroad and prototype data sheets, photographs and more, as illustrated by these examples.*



A lefthand turnout is one which switches trains to the left of a straight line of travel instead of to the right.





# LCL

*Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor*

**N'Crowd election results:** Congratulations (or condolences) to the newly-elected 2017 N'Crowd officers. Thank you for volunteering!

President: Samuel S. Townsel, II  
 Vice President: Dr. Richard Bartlett  
 Secretary: James Senneff, Jr.  
 Treasurer: Eddie Aycock  
 Board Member: Allan Melton

With Richard being elected VP, a special election will be scheduled to fill the remaining year of his board term.

**Newsletter change:** Beginning with this issue of *The Orderboard*, N'Crowd membership meeting notes will be published as a separate document from the newsletter. The newsletter and meeting notes PDF files will be distributed together in the same email.

**HMNS sponsors Texas' largest indoor model railroad:** "Trains Over Texas", the largest indoor model railroad in Texas, is on display at the Houston Museum of Natural Science, 5555 Hermann Park Dr. in the Museum District. The exhibit runs through Feb. 20, 2017.

The O scale model railroad was built for HMNS by TW TrainWorx, a Dallas-based firm that designs and builds custom model railroads and other model railroad-related items. The layout took nine months to build and three 53-foot long trailers for transport to Houston.

As described by HMNS, the 1,300-sq. ft. layout is about the size of a tennis court and features multiple trains that "visit important and unique places in the state's geology and physiography while preserving the holiday theme with Christmas trees and cars filled with presents."

Scenes on the layout include oil country salt domes, Texas coastal prairies and wetlands, and other features such as the Pecos River High Bridge, Enchanted Rock, Pedernales Falls, the Balcones Escarpment and Big Bend. Multiple trains running on the layout pass through representations of Galveston, Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin and San Antonio.

TW TrainWorx has posted numerous YouTube videos documenting construction of the layout. Search YouTube for "HMNS Trains Over Texas" to find the videos.

## HOUSTON N'CROWD 2016/2017 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

### 2016

#### November 16

N'Crowd Membership Meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place, 7 p.m.

#### December 10

NMRA LSR Div 8 Clinic, Bayland Park, Houston: Building Reefers

#### December 17

N'Crowd Annual Holiday Party and Combat Gift Exchange

#### December 21

N'Crowd Membership Meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place, 7 p.m.

### 2017

#### January 18

N'Crowd Membership Meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place, 7 p.m.

#### February 15

N'Crowd Membership Meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place, 7 p.m.

#### February 20

Greater Houston Train Show, Stafford Centre

#### March 15

N'Crowd Membership Meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place, 7 p.m.

## THE ORDERBOARD *from Houston N'Crowd*

### Tom Marsh, Editor

Published fairly regularly for members and friends of N'Crowd Model Railroad Society, Inc., Houston, Texas.

Send newsletter contributions to: tom@houstonNcrowd.org.

Please note: We reserve the right to edit submissions for clarity and length.

### Visit our Web site:

[www.houstonNcrowd.org](http://www.houstonNcrowd.org)

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