



## View from the Cab

by Zana Ireland, President

The current industry buzz is definitely all about the *World's Greatest Hobby On Tour* shows. I can't remember this much excitement in our industry in a long time. The manufacturers that exhibited were happy. The retailers that sold merchandise were happy. The attendees were happy. I thought they said you could never please everyone! I think Dave Swanson, the show promoter, has proven them wrong!

Plain and simple, this is the kind of show we need for the model railroad industry. *WGH on Tour* is a mix of entertainment, excitement and education about the hobby. This show has something for everyone, from the consumer with a budding interest in model railroading through the old timer who's been in the hobby for years. And don't forget the kids! They were wide-eyed with wonder at the cool trains they saw at these shows.

These shows have made it clear that the public IS interested in model trains and that as an industry we CAN put on very successful shows. This type of show is our big chance to bring in new hobbyists (a.k.a., customers). It's our opportunity to show the general public what a great hobby model railroading really is for the entire family. Yes, there were lots of strollers there and that means that not only fathers and sons attended the show but they brought along moms, sisters and the little ones as well. Model railroading is a family hobby

and *WGH on Tour* demonstrated this to everyone.

I am particularly excited to see that the show is promoted in ways that were successful in getting the public to come to experience model railroading. It is also important that the show was presented in four different areas of the country. I salute the show management for doing the extra work needed to move the show to different locations and for taking the risk of trying different venues. This gave exhibitors the ability to show the hobby to a large number of people in areas of the country that many of us had not visited in years.

I know it's hard work to exhibit at consumer shows, but what better way is there to communicate directly with our end-users than face to face? Hands-on demos and the ability to see and touch the products that we sell are powerful motivators to get new people into the hobby. If your company has not participated in a *WGH On Tour* show, I encourage you to do so at your next opportunity.

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### Report on *WGH On Tour* shows:

During December, January and February, the World's Greatest Hobby campaign sponsored four *On Tour* shows. The events were in Edison, N. J.; St. Louis; Long Beach, California; and Denver. Each of these consumer-oriented shows drew huge crowds, pleasing both exhibitors and the attendees.

Edison show attendance was 19,000, St. Louis was 33,000, Long Beach drew about 25,000, with Denver ending the season with an attendance of over 29,000.

The interesting statistic in the numbers report is that 50-60% of people attending these shows said they'd never attended a model railroad show before. *WGH On Tour* seems to have found a way to reach potential customers in an exciting and appealing way. However, preliminary financial results indicate that show promotional and operational costs exceeded the gate at three of the four shows. On the other hand, some have pointed out the intrinsic value of introducing large numbers of people to the hobby.

Fred Hill, MRIA member and NRHSA Treasurer, exhibited at the Long Beach show. Said Hill, "There were more baby buggies than I have seen at a consumer hobby show – ever. It was refreshing to see so many young families enjoying the show."

He went on: "I had a booth representing HOBBY411.com, a group of Southern California hobby shops promoting their individual stores. We passed out maps and flyers for Southern California hobby shops, and offered a basic net \$22.00 train set for \$25.00 – we wanted every child to have an opportunity to go home with a train set. We sold all we had, 76 sets, and could have sold more.

"As a retailer, I was a skeptic. I did not believe there would be a large group that had never been in a hobby store. Was I wrong!! The majority of the people we interviewed had not been in a store. They are looking forward to visiting one of the stores. We passed out 3,000 flyers. Local hobby shops were busy over the weekend and we are continuing to see interest generated by the show.

"I interviewed about 35% of the 'sellers' (most were too busy to talk) and all were extremely satisfied with the attendance and the sales they were making. The show closed at 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, and as I left the building at 5:30, they were still selling!"

John Cladino, owner of Aztec Manufacturing, said he attended the Long Beach show, and wanted to attend the WGH show on following weekend in Denver. However, he was totally out of inventory after Long Beach and wasn't able to rebuild inventory in time for Denver. He said he'll not make that mistake next year.

MRIA Trustee Larry Hodson (Sundance Pins) attend-



*WGH On Tour show photo by Larry Hodson.*

ed the Denver show. His comments: "The show was an outstanding success. Over 29,000 people attended the two-day show. Sixty-seven model railroad manufacturers and retailers exhibited, with 145 10-x10-foot booth equivalents. Twenty-four MRIA members were there. There were 21 modular railroads, clubs and exhibits, including the Walt Disney Railroad Story, Operation Lifesaver, etc. I will have to echo Fred Hill's comments from the show the previous weekend. It was outstanding! I haven't seen so many happy exhibitors and sheer numbers of people since the National Train Show in Valley Forge!

"We were busy all day for both days. The Saturday schedule of 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. was a bit grueling, but that will be 'corrected' in future *WGH on Tour* shows.

"I heard many positive comments from the exhibitors. Everyone was pleased with all the new faces that came out to see model railroading for the first time. In addition, I heard many great comments from the public.

"So, there you have it. This was one of the best shows I've ever been to!"

Added MRIA Trustee Bud Reece (Bachmann Trains) about the Denver show: "This was the first WGH show that I had been able to attend, personally. This was one of the best shows I have ever attended. We need to promote this show to other manufacturers.

"This was an eye opener. I intend to increase the number of booths at the next *WGH On Tour* show. You couldn't even move around inside our booth because of the number of people."

After the success of these four events, the *On Tour* shows will run repeat next year. If you're a MRIA member, plan to exhibit (members receive a 10% discount on their booth rental). It'll benefit you, WGH, and the hobby industry. You'll do your part to make many new hobbyists happy they found out about model railroading. 🇺🇸