

A Brief History of the Foxwood Village Model Railroad Club by Bill Austin #74

Our Model Railroad Club has been in existence since 2016. It all started after I retired and had the time to renew my interest in model railroading. I discovered several others here in Foxwood were also interested, so we formed the club that consisted of Artie VanRiper, Ron Stanza, Frank Windenauer, Bill Fortunato, Hadley Sloben, Bob Lodding, Joe Graham, Brenda and Bob Merjave and myself.

Our first project was adding a train (donated by Bob Lodding) running on a loop around the base of the Christmas tree in the clubhouse for the 2016 holiday season (see Figure 1). While it was a simple, classic addition to the clubhouse decorations, it was appreciated by everyone who saw it.

After that effort we decided to build a larger, more detailed display for the following holiday season. As a result, we built a 4 x 8 table-based layout that included tracks in a figure 8 pattern and several detailed scenes that were built by the members of the club. Figures 2 shows club members Frank Wildenauer, Bob Lodding, Brenda and Bob Merjave, and Ron Stanza. Figures 3 thru 6 show several scenes from the 2017 layout.

Following the 2017 season, we decided to add to the layout. The updated version added a 4 ft by 4 ft section to the original 4 ft by 8 ft table resulting in the current L shaped configuration. There were also many “behind the scenes” features added that improved the stability of the setup. The track layout was changed from the figure 8 to a dual loop of tracks to support the operation of two trains at the same time. Other additions included the expansion of the Foxwood Village diorama to include a scale model of the clubhouse, pool and bocce courts (developed by Frank Wildenauer). Frank also built the ski mountain. Also added was the “neon” Foxy’s Nightclub sign, street and building lighting, sound, and automated crossing lights (developed by Bill Austin). Bill also added the button to allow people to run the trains on demand.

Figure 7 shows the 2018 layout and the members of the club that contributed to it. They include Artie VanRiper, Frank Wildenauer, Rich Kelton, Bob Lodding, Bill Austin, Ron Stanza and Walt Strubel. Not shown is John Cacciola.

The basic layout didn’t visibly change much for the next two seasons (2019, 2020), partly because of the pandemic, but there were some significant improvements made under the hood. The track base was improved so that the trains ran more reliably, improvements were made to the electrical wiring and automation, and plexiglass panels were added to protect the layout from being accidentally nudged by onlookers. Figure 8 shows the layout and the club member Bill Austin, Walter Strubel, Artie VanRiper, John Cacciola, Frank Wildenauer, and Ron Stanza. Missing is Rich Kelton.

The primary modifications to the layout for the 2021 setup included a total redesign of the electrical system by Bill Austin that controls the layout including the addition of an interactive control panel to allow people to activate any one of the several different attractions on the layout. Other significant additions included an operating carousel and the Suffolk Theater. The Grumman Park was also redesigned to better represent the actual park on route 25. Additional audio tracks were added that include music for the carousel and soundtracks for the theater. The 2021 layout is shown in Figure 9 along with the club members Bill Austin, John Cacciola, Artie VanRiper, Bruno Sidor, Ron Stanza, Frank Wildenauer, and Walter Strubel. Not shown are Rich Kelton and Roger Barbaro. Figures 10 thru 13 show some random shots of the 2021 layout taken by Nick Colavito.

The 2022 season saw a redesign of the area where the mountain once stood. In its place we decided to render the east end of the north fork, primarily the Greenport area. This included Claudios, Preston's, the Reeve's building (all created by Frank Wildenauer), and other familiar settings. We also included the Soundview motel and a vineyard (also built by Frank), and the Orient Point Ferry (created by Bruno Sidor), the carousel and a farm scene. Figure 14 shows the 2022 layout along with Frank Wildenauer, Artie VanRiper, Bruno Sidor, Ron Stanza, John Cacciola, and Bill Austin. Club members who were missing include Rich Kelton and Roger Barbaro. Figures 15 thru 17 show various scenes of the new addition.

This year's layout (2023) includes a complete update to the Riverhead village section. This section represents Main Street (Rt. 25) in downtown Riverhead and includes several familiar restaurants (Cucina 25, Diggers, Dark Horse, Tweeds), the Suffolk Theater, the Chase Bank, and a beautifully detailed representation of the Aquarium (created by Frank Wildenauer). You'll also notice lights in the buildings randomly being turned on and off to simulate occupants moving from room to room and working traffic lights (developed by Bill Austin). Figure 18 shows the new layout in process and the current club members: Bill Austin, Ernie Merlino, Roger Barbaro, Artie VanRiper, Rich Kelton, Bruno Sidor and, John Cacciola. Not shown is Frank Wildenauer.

Every member of the club contributes to the final product. Rich Kelton built several of the models, including the farmhouse and (coming this year) several of the boats on the river scene. John Cacciola is our artist who painted a lot of the small, detailed parts that add to the overall effects of the scenes. Roger Barbaro, Artie VanRiper, John and Rich added a lot of the landscaping and rock work that adds to the beauty of the layout. Ernie Merlino (a friend of mine and fellow retired electrical engineer) and I worked on all the wiring and under the hood electronics that make the layout come to life. Frank Wildenauer scratch-built a majority of the buildings, including the Foxwood Village Clubhouse, the Greenport buildings, and the Aquarium (coming this year). Bruno Sidor painstakingly scratch-built the orient point ferry and (new this year) the Riverhead train station and the horse farm, modeled after the one on the corner of Middle Road and Mill Road. Everyone in the club thoroughly enjoys creating the miniature world for everyone to appreciate. We particularly enjoy watching the reaction as our neighbors and their guests (especially the grand-kids) view the display. But above all, we enjoy getting together each week with each other to spend time having fun and learning some skills.

We are always looking for help. Anyone in Foxwood Village who has an interest, even if you don't have experience, is welcome to join us. We meet on Thursday mornings at 10 AM in the train room adjacent to the Bingo Hall. If, by chance, we are not there or if you prefer, contact me (Bill Austin) either by phone (631 669-4508) or email (dcnbill@optonline.net).

We look forward to continuing our efforts to improve the display in the coming years. If you have any suggestions regarding the train display, please let us know – we're always open to new ideas.



Figure 1. Our first display (2016)



Figure 2. The 2017 display and some of the crew



Figure 3. Foxwood Village Entry (2017)



Figure 4. Riverhead Traffic Circle (2017)



Figure 5. Ice Skating Pond (2017)



Figure 6. Beach, Farm, Big Duck, Vineyard (2017)



Figure 7. 2018 layout and crew



Figure 8. 2019 layout and crew



Figure 9. 2021 layout and crew

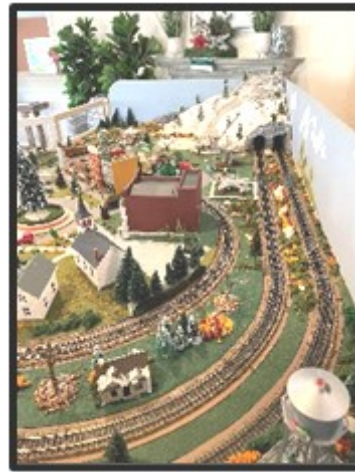


Figure 10. View of ski mountain (2021)



Figure 11. View of fun park (2021)

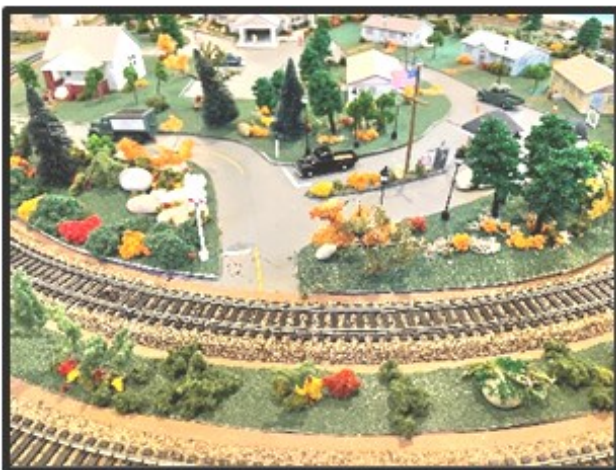


Figure 12. View of Foxwood Village entry (2021)



Figure 13. Overview of layout (2021)



Figure 14. 2022 layout and crew



Figure 15. Vineyard (2022)



Figure 16. Claudio's, Carousel, Pumpkin Farm (2022)



Figure 17. Orient Point Ferry (2022)



Figure 18. The 2023 layout (in process) and crew