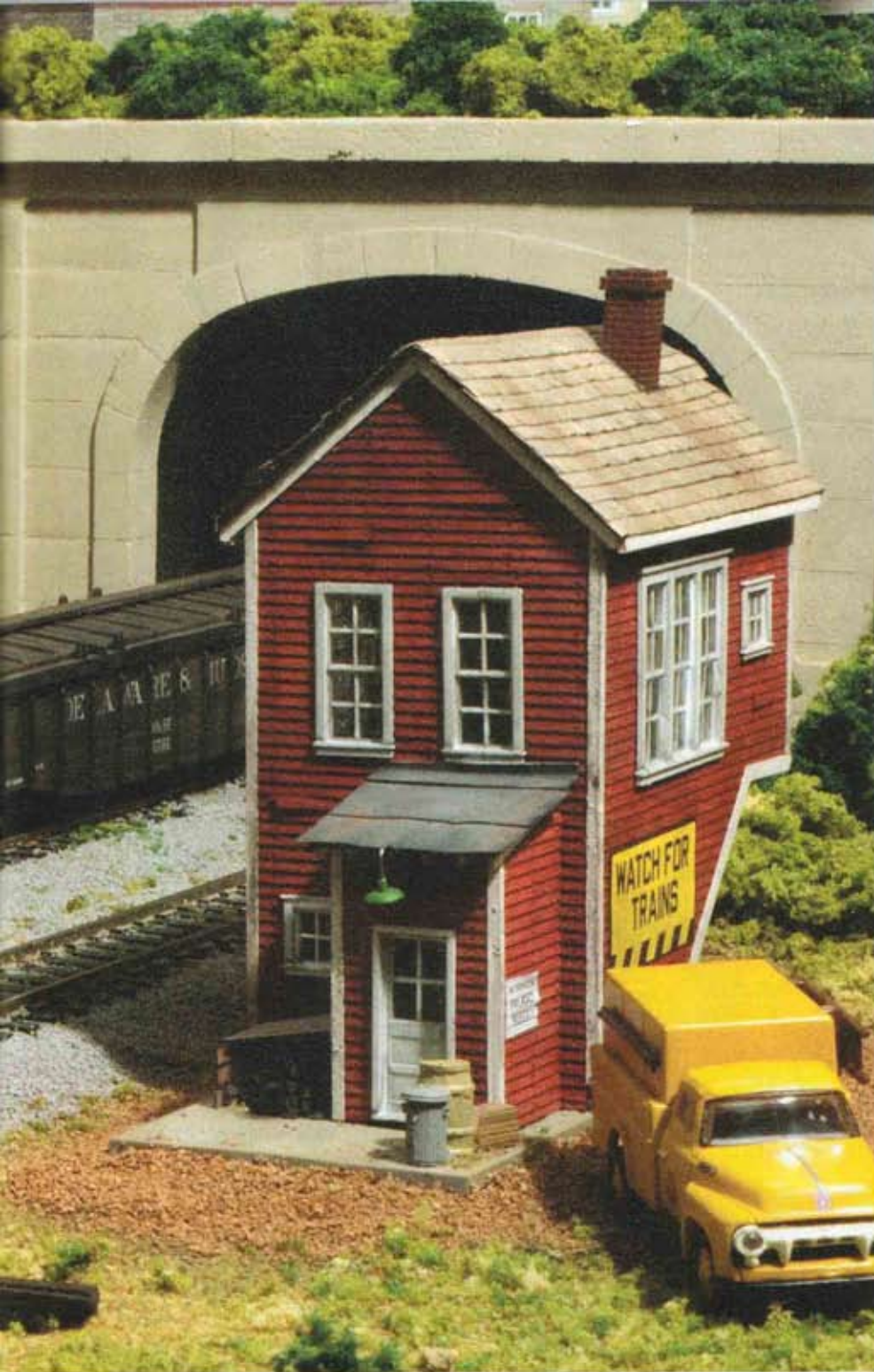




# A railroad in the family





1. Delaware & Hudson no. 708 heads past the tower into Hudsonville on Bob Seckler's HO scale Dutchess & Hudson Valley Division layout. The freelanced model railroad extends the D&H into New England's Taconic Mountains.

This modeler credits wife and kids with helping detail his freelanced HO scale D&H layout

By Lou Sassi • Photos by the author

**B**ob Seckler got interested in model trains early in life. But as an adult, his model railroading ambitions were twice cramped by his expanding family. Now, though, his wife and kids are making up for it by helping him build and scenic his HO scale Delaware & Hudson layout.

Bob's father, Arthur Jr., set up Lionel trains at Christmas for Bob and his two brothers, Arthur III and James. One year, the Seckler boys got some HO equipment, and Bob was hooked.

Bob tinkered with HO trains on and off for about 25 years, then after he married, he started a layout. However, this first attempt got only as far as benchwork and a small amount of scenery before their growing family necessitated a move to a larger home.

When he and wife Christine were looking over home plans, he made her a deal she couldn't refuse. As Bob puts it: "She could have any style house she wanted, as long as I got the entire basement for my dream layout." They built their home, and Bob started his second layout in the fall of 2001.

Subsequent visits from the stork prevented Bob from taking over the entire basement, though. Bob plans to reclaim the rest of the space when the kids move out on their own. But until then, he's gained the help of what he refers to as "the Seckler Model Railroad Design & Construction Co." — his wife and kids.

### Defining the space

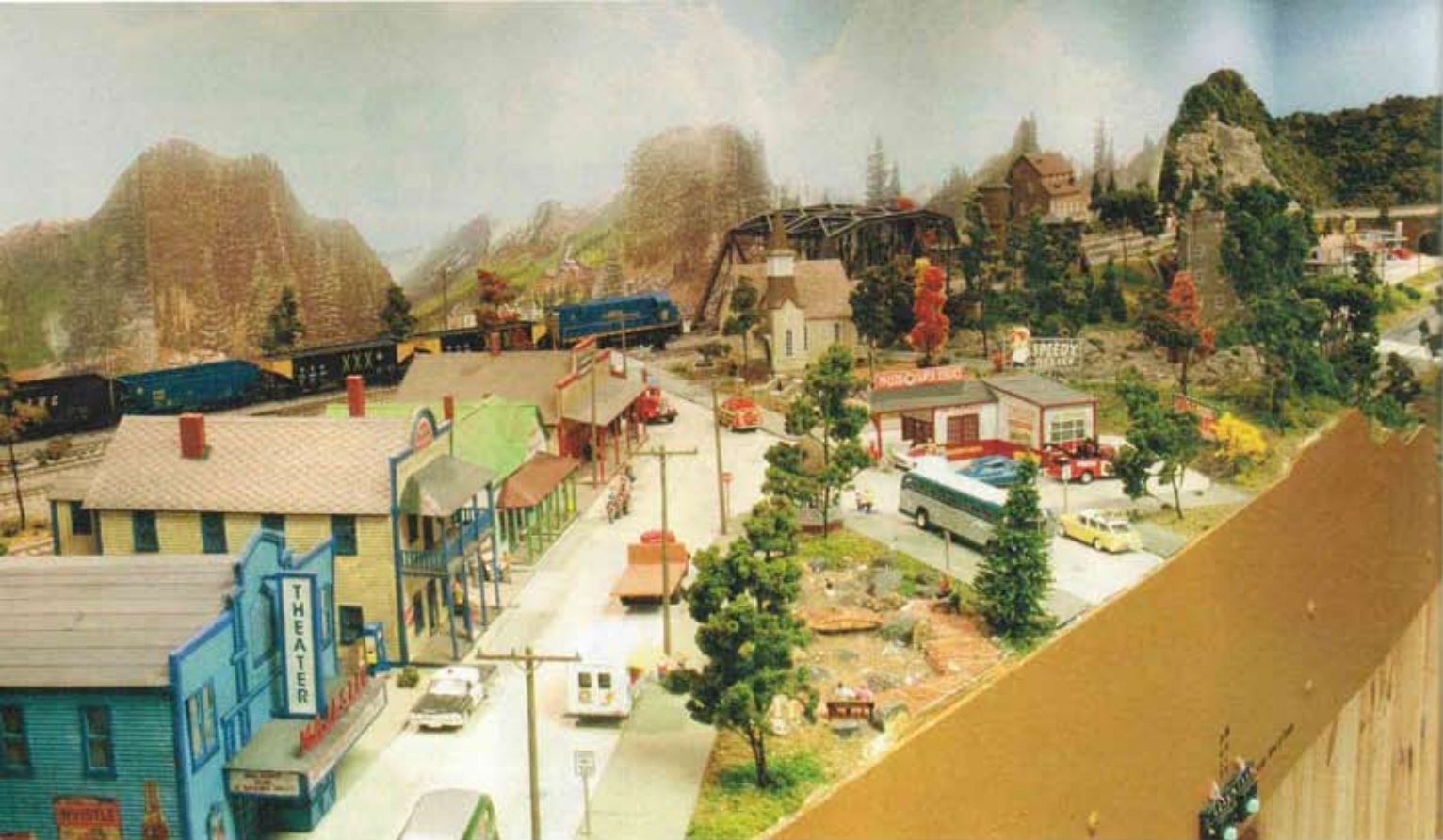
But before there was a layout to design and construct, Bob had to prepare the layout room. Being a general contractor, he opted to do all the work himself. He began by framing out the walls with metal studs. He then sheathed the walls with 2" thick extruded-foam insulation, which he covered with 1/2" dry-wall that he taped and painted. He then installed acoustic ceiling tiles and independently wired incandescent and fluorescent lighting.

Below the benchwork Bob built cabinets to store his modeling tools and materials, along with the kids' toys. The cabinets are 12" deep and support the front of the layout; Bob uses the space behind them for layout wiring. The cabinet doors also allow access to hidden tracks. Most recently, Bob has installed carpet tiles.

### Picking a prototype

Having lived in the Northeast all his life, Bob chose to model that area. His





2. This long view of the layout shows the town of Beekman Falls. Bob cut the sky from Walthers Instant Horizon backdrops, glued them to the blue-painted walls surrounding the layout, and airbrushed clouds in the sky.



3. An Alco RS-11 pulls a through freight past H.J. Zane Mercantile, a craftsman structure kit Bob originally built for his first layout, but never installed there.

Dutchess & Hudson Valley Division of the Delaware & Hudson is a fictitious extension of the D&H into the Taconic Mountain Range in northeastern New York, western Massachusetts, and western Connecticut. It features mostly D&H equipment and motive power, with just a touch of Boston & Maine, Lehigh Valley, and New York Central.

All of Bob's locomotives are equipped with Digital Command Control (DCC), and most have sound. He says all future locomotive acquisitions will have both DCC and sound. He's fitted all his cars with Kadee magnetic knuckle couplers and metal wheelsets.

Bob began construction by painting the wallboard behind the benchwork sky

## ▶▶ The layout at a glance

**Name:** Dutchess & Hudson Valley Division of the Delaware & Hudson  
**Scale:** HO (1:87.1)  
**Size:** 27 x 30 feet  
**Prototype:** Delaware & Hudson  
**Locale:** Taconic Mountains of New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut  
**Era:** early 1950s to early 1970s  
**Style:** walk-in  
**Mainline run:** 192 feet  
**Minimum radius:** 24"  
**Minimum turnout:** no. 4  
**Maximum grade:** 2 percent  
**Benchwork:** L girder  
**Height:** 44" to 54"  
**Roadbed:** cork  
**Track:** Atlas code 100 flextrack with Atlas and Peco turnouts  
**Scenery:** plaster cloth over cardboard webbing and extruded-foam insulation board  
**Backdrop:** drywall  
**Control:** NCE Digital Command Control

blue. This became the layout's backdrop. He glued Walthers Instant Horizons backgrounds to it after trimming off the paper sky. He then used stencils to airbrush clouds onto the wallboard.





## Dutchess & Hudson Valley RR.

Division of the Delaware & Hudson

HO scale (1:87.1)

Layout size: 27 x 30 feet

Scale of plan: 1" = 1'-0", 24" grid

Numbered arrows indicate photo locations

Illustration by Rick Johnson and Roen Kelly

Find more plans online in the  
ModelRailroader.com Track Plan Database.

The benchwork is L-girder with plywood ribbon roadbed on risers, which allowed Bob to vary track elevations easily. The track is Atlas code 100 flex-track with Peco and Atlas no. 4 turnouts. Bob is gradually replacing these turnouts with no. 6 or larger sizes for realism. Turnouts accessible from the aisle are operated with Caboose Industries ground throws. Others are lined by Peco switch machines operated from fascia-mounted switches.

### Natural and commercial scenery

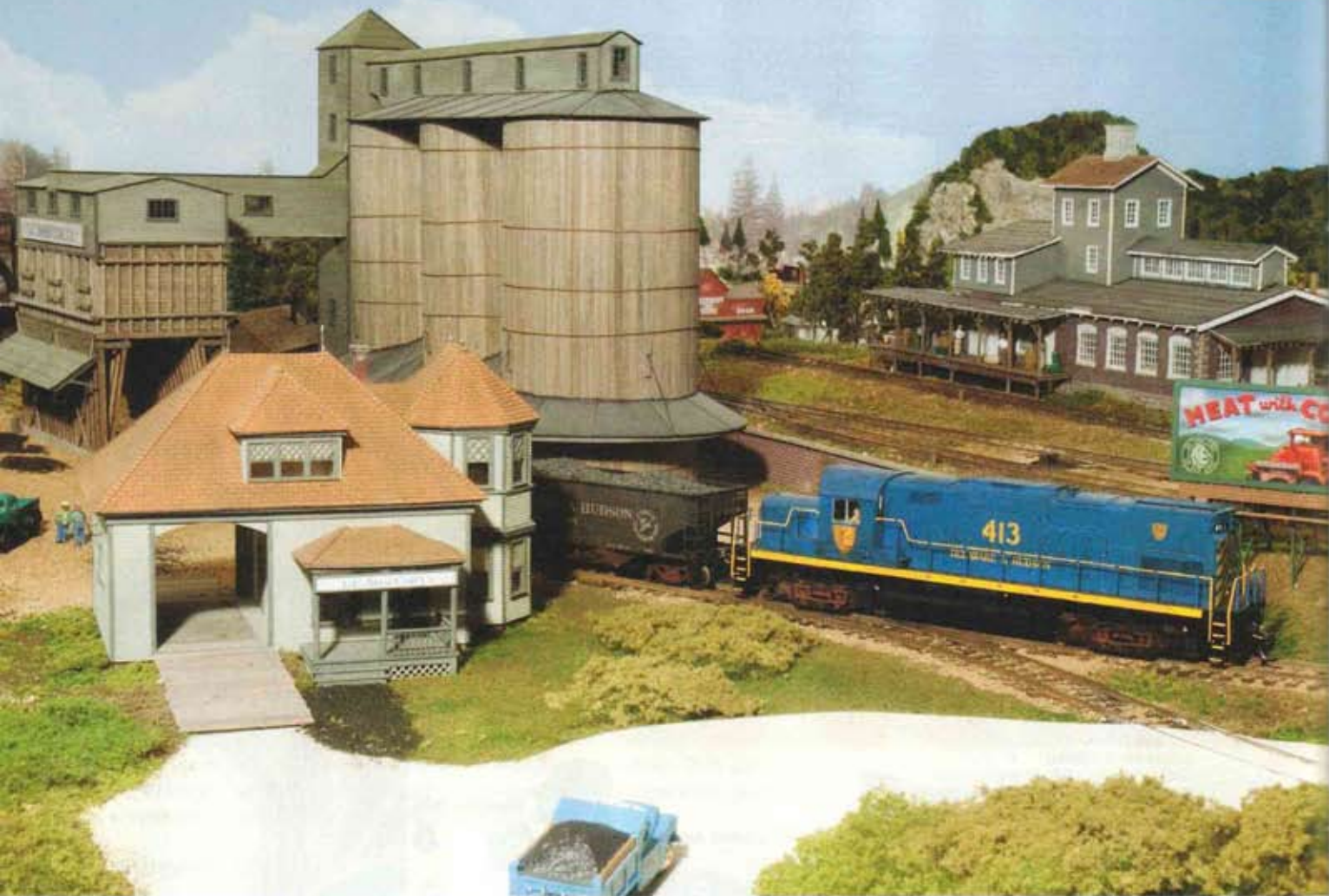
The scenic base is either two layers of plaster cloth over cardboard webbing, or carved foam insulation board covered with plaster cloth or Sculptamold. In either case, Bob brush-paints the ground with earth tone household latex paint before adding ground cover.

Bob uses a variety of materials for ground cover, depending on the type of terrain. For grassy areas, he puts down a single layer of Woodland Scenics Earth

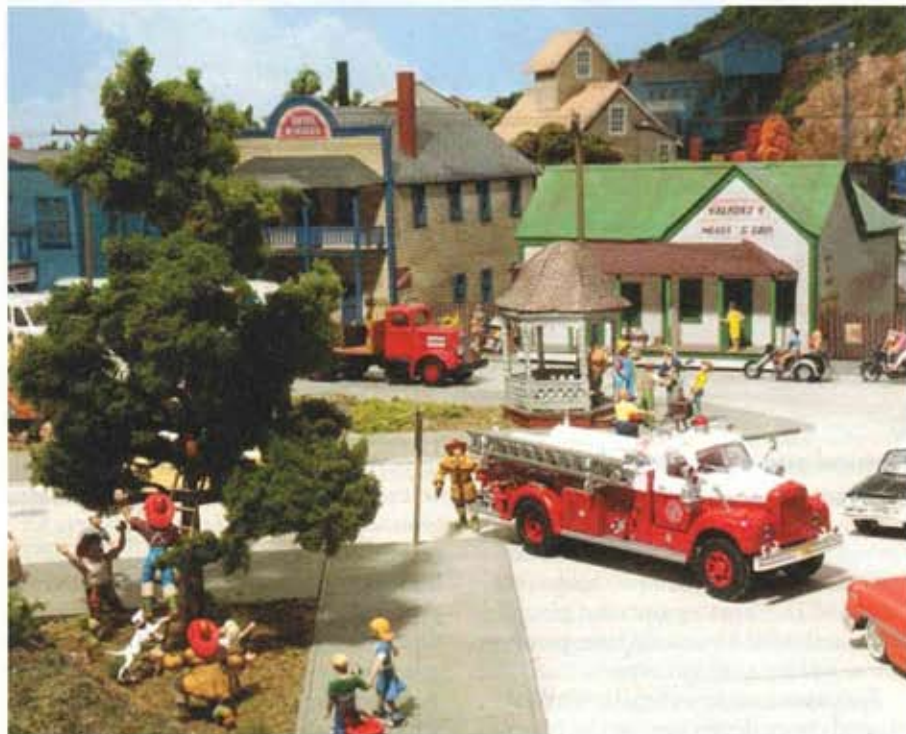
Blend fine turf, after which he builds up several layers and shades of fine to coarse ground foam. For bare soil, Bob opts for real dirt harvested from a ball field near his house, over which he spreads fine ground foam to represent weeds. He then brushes on an India ink wash to add shadows and definition.

Bob makes rocks by casting plaster in molds or hand-carving them on the layout. He colors them with Woodland Scenics acrylic pigments, thinned 8-to-1





4. Engine no. 413 delivers the daily shipment of coal to L.C. Sassi Coal Co. Bob named it for his friend Lou Sassi, for whom the structure was originally built.



5. Bob enjoys building close-up action scenes, an interest shared by his wife, Christine. Here, a fire crew works to rescue a cat stuck in a tree.

with water and brushed on, working from the lighter to darker colors.

Most of Bob's trees are from Lil Joe's Scenery Products in Pittsfield, Mass. Others are Woodland Scenics fine leaf foliage. Bob has also started to make his own trees from spirea twigs, following the instructions given by the "Tree Group" in a series of *Model Railroader* articles in the '90s. [See "Trees are models too" in the May, July, September, and November 1995 issues. – Ed.]

### Crafting structures and scenes

Bob enjoys building structures, especially the well designed craftsman kits available today. Bob has built kits by most of the major craftsman manufacturers – American Model Builders, Bar Mills, Downtown Deco, Fine Scale Min-

### Now on ModelRailroader.com

The photo of H.J. Zane Mercantile on page 40 is this month's computer wallpaper. Download this and other desktop photos from our Web site, [www.ModelRailroader.com](http://www.ModelRailroader.com).



atures, FOS Limited, Model Tech Studios, and South River Model Works, among others.

Bob also likes to superdetail scenes. He strives to capture the viewer's attention and have each scene tell a story. For example, a motorcycle cop hides behind a billboard, waiting for an unsuspecting speeder; an ice cream truck serves children at a local park; a fireman rescues a cat from a tree; and the catch of the day hangs from a jib crane in the wharf area.

Building that scene at Katherine's Bay (named for Bob's daughter) gave Bob a great deal of satisfaction. This was one of the first parts of the layout he finished, and it turned out just as he envisioned.

Though all of Bob's structures have special meaning to him, he does have a few favorites. One of them is the H. J. Zane Mercantile, built from a kit by Micro-Scale Models ([micro-scalemodels.com](http://micro-scalemodels.com)). Seen in photo 3 on page 40, H.J. Zane was the first craftsman structure kit that Bob built for his first layout, though it was never installed there. Another favorite is a tall steel viaduct, scratchbuilt from Micro Engineering piers and modified Atlas trusses, that spans the marsh over Robert's Pass, named for Bob's oldest son.

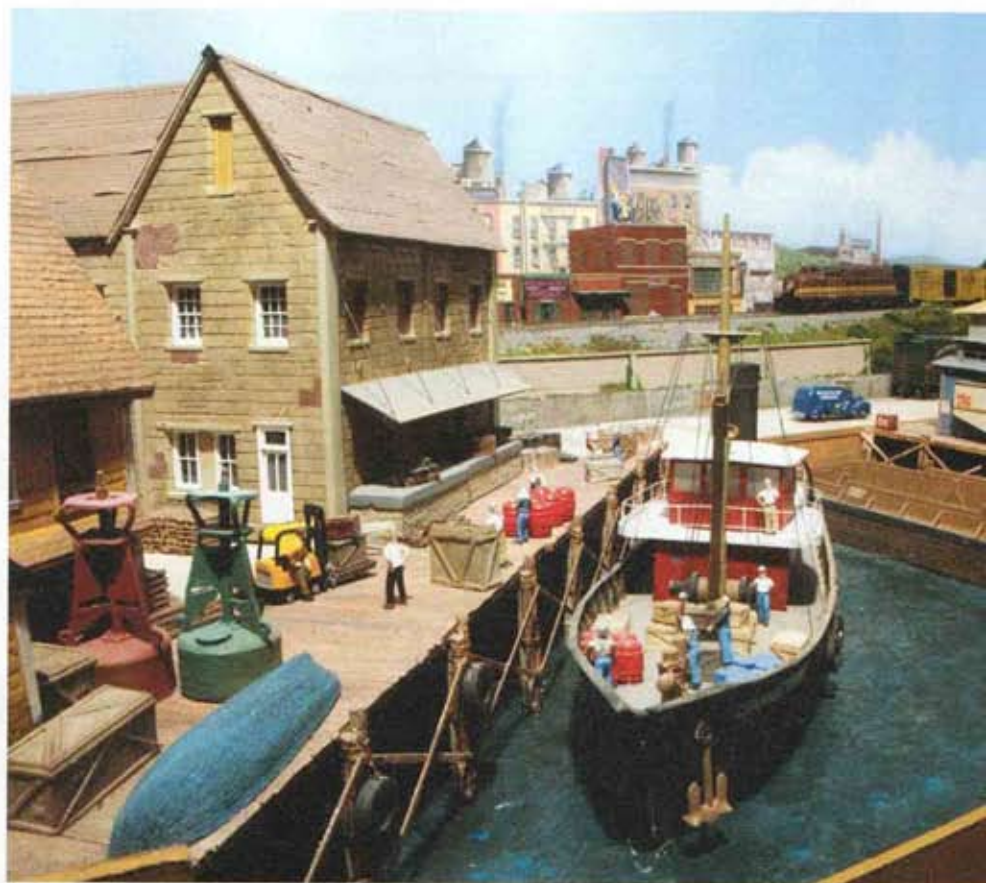
Recently, Bob has begun kitbashing structures and tried other techniques, such as adding interior details and baffles for interior lighting. He soon intends to tackle scratchbuilding because he's working on his National Model Railroad Association achievement award in that category and hopes to earn a Master Model Railroader certificate.

## Friends and family

Another of Bob's favorite pastimes is going to train shows, especially since this endeavor has become a family affair. His wife and daughter love to pick out figures of people and animals, while the boys search for vehicles with which to detail the layout. The family now makes the annual train show in Springfield, Mass., a regular getaway for the whole family so they can stock up and check out what's new in the hobby.

Working on the layout has also become a family affair. Christine and Katherine like to create scenes with figures. Christine helped Bob create a funeral scene in the cemetery, with a woman fainting. She also suggested that he add a nun coming out of St. Christopher's Chapel (named for his youngest son). Both sons love to plant trees.

A short time ago Bob, George Marshall, Steve Gallo, and Roger Cytron



**6.** The crew of the *Channel Fever* work boat prepares to tie up to the pier in Brothers Town, as a Boston & Maine BL2 works the interchange track in the background. This part of the layout, one of the first to be completed, features many superdetailed craftsman structure kits.

started a round-robin modeling group that meets once a week. Though they focus on construction now, Bob hopes to get into operation soon. He's been contemplating a simplified card system, and plans to use a timetable combining local freights and passenger movements.

Bob finds the feeling of accomplishment that comes with the completion of each project to be one of the best aspects of model railroading. "It's very rewarding to envision something in your mind and then have the ability and knowledge to see it through to a finished scene or structure," he says.

Bob also values the many friendships he's made with fellow modelers over the years. "I'd like to thank everyone who's helped me along the way, and I'll return the favor when the need arises," he says. But his most special thanks go to the members of the Seckler Model Railroad Design & Construction Co. [MR](#)

*Lou Sassi is a frequent contributor to Model Railroader. He lives in Willow Spring, N.C. His book, How to Build and Detail Model Railroad Scenes vol. 2, is available from Kalmbach Books.*



## Meet Bob Seckler

**Bob Seckler has been** interested in model trains ever since he was a young boy, when his father set up Lionel trains under the Christmas tree. Today he shares his passion for trains with his wife, Christine, daughter, Katherine, and sons Robert and Christopher. They live in Poughquag, N.Y., where Bob is a general contractor. In addition to model railroading, Bob enjoys antiquing and traveling the country in the family motor home.