

Jim Providenza wins 2009 Bill Jewett Award

BY BILL KAUFMAN

Jim Providenza has been around a long time. He says that he was involved in the meetings that grew into the LDSIG and the OPSIG in Northern California in the mid 1980s. But the Bill Jewett Award is not for longevity and he is this year's winner. It is for someone who exemplifies what Bill Jewett was and did.

Jim has been an evangelist for operations. After talking with Rick Kang, an actual dispatcher, about what trains really did, Jim and Rick wrote a seminal series of ten articles between 1992 and 1996 on "Realistic Operations." Out of the series, grew a clinic on operations that he gave at the NMRA national convention and the PCR and other regional conventions over the next ten years.

He built his own, well-known, layout the Santa Cruz Northern with an eye to giving people an opportunity to be introduced to operations. As he changes and modifies it he continues to explore and write about cutting edge issues. For a long time he explored Track Warrant operations. Jim still says, "Track Warrants are the prototype's gift to model railroad operators" due to their ease of use. Track Warrants were a bit anachronistic for a WP based railroad so, when his crews pretty much mastered

them, he changed over to Time Table and Train Order operations. Here he really emphasizes the human teamwork it took to make the railroad run.

Once that settled down and began running well, his mind turned to the various operators and agents that worked in all those stations. "What's an agent operator and do I really need one to run my layout?" began exploring the next step in operations. We've long had dispatchers but who is the guy on the other end of the phone and what does he do? How do the operators interact with the trains? How do Agents get cars to and from the shippers that have ordered them? There are now two Agent/Operators answering the phones and writing switch lists when the SCN runs.

He regularly runs the SIG meeting at the PCR convention. He has helped organize BayRails and other operations weekends. The SCN is open at the drop of a hat whether for organized activities like the Joint OPSIG/LDSIG meeting in January in Northern California or just a visiting fireman.

Let's you think that Jim is the perfect man, I would point out that he is quirky enough that some of us simultaneously admire him and shake our head. Like many of us he decided to venture into a second scale, garden railroading. The



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Maine two-foot railroads appealed and he began kit-bashing locomotives and cars in the NMRA's Proto 20.3 scale. Now while Proto 20.3 is a lovely scale, it is one of the more obscure. Not satisfied with this level of difficulty he decided that 2' meant 2' and the G-gauge track just would not do, so he is hand-laying properly gauged track. What set him down this road was Strong, Maine. So he has laid out the trackage for Strong in the backyard and intends to operate it exactly the way the prototype did.

On a personal note, if I hadn't been exposed to Jim, I would still be playing choo-choo on my Malcom Furlow-inspired short line. Jim led me to working up an operational scheme that worked. The evidence is strong that he has done that to many others, sharing of his time and expertise. A well deserved Bill Jewett Award goes to Jim Providenza!

WHO WAS BILL JEWETT? Bill Jewett was a long time OPSIG member and an avid operator, and especially a gracious and kind friend to anyone who showed an interest in trains and operations. He revived the OPSIG in 1997 and ran it for almost ten years, not only constantly promoting the organization and organizing sessions and events, but also editing and producing our journal, *The Dispatcher's Office*. Many of us who joined the group back then came to know Bill, and in fact joined up as a result of his infectious enthusiasm and

promotion of the art of model railroad operations. He was Mr. OPSIG for so many years. Bill passed away unexpectedly on January 1st of 2006. His train collection was sold and the proceeds were used, at the request of his family, to start the Bill Jewett Memorial Fund, which supports the Bill Jewett Award. The award is given annually to the individual who promotes and contributes the most to OPSIG, Inc., and its stated goals of promoting the art of prototype model railroad operations. —*Phil Monat*