



## Toe River Model Railroaders find a home.

Submitted by Mike Smith

Several years ago a former Land O' Sky member, Tom Hullett, organized a small group of model railroaders from Yancey and Mitchell counties. The organization was casual. There were no dues. The group grew and diminished over the years but continued to meet regularly. In 2006 the group was granted space on the second floor of a retail coop in Bakersville. The organization adopted the name of Toe River Model Railroaders, and a dues schedule was established. With the few dollars collected the group embarked on building a simple layout that would accommodate N, HO and O27 trains. The layout was built in modules that are very similar to the Land Of Sky Terminal Railway modules, but the layout was a simple great oval for each of the 3 scales. The Toe River Model Railroaders enjoyed these digs for about a year and a half. Then the coop was sold, and the new owner asked us to leave the premises. The materials and models collected were stored in a shed belonging to one of the members.



In 2007 there was talk that the CSX railroad was considering the donation of the depot in Spruce Pine to the town. A task force was formed within the town government to determine how the depot would be used and supported. Five members of the Toe River Model Railroaders, including Joe Norris and Mike Smith, both current members of the Western North Carolina Model Railroaders, made a presentation to the Town of Spruce Pine task force to make the Spruce Pine depot into a model railroad museum. We had hopes of modeling ourselves after the Hendersonville depot/model railroad. Alas, it was not to be. CSX officials indicated that the depot was housing operating and administrative personnel, and that these people needed a building of the same size as the depot to house them so they could continue to work. The building was to be supplied by the Town of Spruce Pine. A counter-proposal to share the depot did not fly, so the town abandoned the idea, and the Toe River Model Railroaders continued to be homeless.

Ray Bernhardt, one of the group's earliest members, wanted another place for the Toe River Model Railroaders to have a layout, so he began to call around. Ray spoke to a number of people, one of whom was Dr. Daniel Barron, Director of the Avery-Mitchell-Yancey Regional Library System. Dr. Barron worked with officials of the Town of Spruce Pine, and in the summer of 2008 a space in the basement of the Mitchell County Public Library in Spruce Pine was made available to the Toe River Model Railroaders.

The space is approximately 23 feet by 25 feet, and includes adjacent rooms that will support storage and a workshop. A long term lease is being prepared by the Town of Spruce Pine so that the investment the Toe River Model Railroaders make in the layout will be protected. A layout design is under way, and there is lively discussion about the scope of the plan. The agreed upon idea is to model segments of the Clinchfield Railroad. Still under discussion is the extent, or size of the model. A current proposal has the layout running from Erwin, Tn. to Spartanburg, SC, like the Carolina Clinchfield and Ohio when it was chartered in 1908, with features to include the Erwin Yards, Spruce Pine, the famous Loops down the face of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Marion and the Bostic Yards and on to Spartanburg. However, there is discussion about ending the layout at Marion. The plan will also include some of the feeder railroads, both standard and narrow gauge, that helped to develop the mountain counties by carrying lumber, minerals and produce to markets outside the mountains.

Current active members of the Toe River Model Railroaders are Eddie "HoHo" Horhorouney of Pensacola, President, Warren Harding of the Ledger Community, VP and Treasurer, Ray Bernhardt, a seasonal member with a summer home in Spruce Pine, Phil Price of Spruce Pine, and Mike Smith of Burnsville. If anyone is interested in more information, or in joining this fledgling group, please contact Warren Harding by phone at 828-688-1922 or by [email](#).