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PEOPLE

Finding Model Citizens for Your Railroad

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What type of individual would you hire for your railroad? Probably it would be someone who gives a hard day's work for honest pay. It would also be someone with experience and an exemplary work ethic. How about a model citizen to round out that ideal worker's qualifications? Well, my latest find was the "Model Citizens TM" produced by Supply Line of Baltimore.

I found the Supply Line website at www.slmonline.com while browsing some of my favorite Large Scale websites. The photos of the people on the website impressed me, so I decided to order a few to see how they looked in person. The order form they sent with my people showed the complete set available.





There are 24 figures obtainable in 1/24 or 1/22.5. The figures are about six scale feet tall in 1/24 and five foot eight inches tall in 1/22.5. There are two figures available in 1/20.3 and three figures in O Scale. They come seated and standing in the 1/22.5 and 1/24 scale and standing only in the 1/20.3 scale. Most of the figures come unpainted only, but Supply Line offers a few of them primed. I ordered all of mine unpainted and unprimed. They are beautifully made and came in individual plastic bags for protection.

I ordered two of the 1/20.3 figures. When they arrived, I received two Ted's and one Bill.



I also ordered three of the 1/24 or 1/22.5 figures.



Norman and Barney were in great shape, but Charlie came missing a hand. After I contacted Ken at Supply Line, he sent me a new Charlie and a free Ned to make up for the inconvenience. I repaired the first Charlie with a hand from my part's bin.

Experimenting with primers earlier in my figure painting, I had settled on using flat black as the primer.





The flat black primer leaves a very thin black line between the colors when I paint the figures and that makes the clothing seem more realistic.

All of the Supply Line figures are molded in urethane and they have developed features and excellent detail. The poses look realistic and the variety of individuals is excellent. In 1/24 scale, Barney and Norman make up my engine crew and Charlie and Charlie (with the repaired hand) make great brakemen. Barney and Norman are both wearing bib overalls and Norman has on gloves. Barney is wearing a hat, and Norman is holding his. I painted both of the Charlies bald-headed, but with different hairlines and clothing colors.



They all will be gainfully employed in the engine servicing area that is located at the back of my outdoor railroad.



The 1/20.3 figures of Bill, Ted and Ned are appealing with their strong features and clothing.



Bill, with bib overalls and a cap, is an engineer.



Ned looks like he just left the pool hall to see who is arriving on the evening train. He is wearing an open neck shirt under his suit and vest.



Ted, a teller from the bank, is taking a well-earned break on the way home. He is wearing a suit with a vest but has removed his tie for comfort after a long day on his feet.



All three are standing on the platform after the sun has set for the day.



All of these figures from Supply Line had almost no casting lines and required only the minimum in preparation for painting. I used a hobby knife to remove a small bit of flash and washed the figures in dish detergent before priming them. First, I primed all of them with Krylon Flat Black from a spray can. Next I painted the figures with acrylic paints, which takes the most time. Finally, I sprayed them with Dullcote to set the paints and provide protection.

After I finished painting the "Model Citizens™" and in preparation for this article, I contacted Ken Sheehan, Supply Line's owner, to learn a little about the company.



Ken and his wife Liz Kahn started the company back in 1985. (They actually thought up the name, "Model Citizens" back in 1974.) Before Supply Line, they were in the business of architectural models. Ken said that he has always been in model railroading and finally convinced Liz to begin sculpting the figures for the line of railroad people they sell today. Liz uses real people as her models for the line of figures.



Some of the models are friends and some, like Mike were modeled after people the Sheehans meet in their neighborhood.

Supply Line currently has 30 separate people in their Model Citizens line. They have their business in the basement of their home and do most of the work themselves. They have an extensive line of cast buildings and building components in HO and O scale. <http://slmonline.com> Most of their business comes from the buildings and components.

About half of their current business comes from the Internet. They use PayPal as a way of taking orders from the net. About half of their business comes from England and Europe.

Ken says that they really have no research and development program at Supply Line. If they decide they want to do something, they just do it. New projects include a set of three 1/2 scale figures. These are aimed at the dollhouse hobby. He hopes to have them on the market soon. Ken isn't sure how they will sell, but he and Liz decided they wanted to make some people in that scale.

I asked Ken about expanding the 1/20.3 line beyond the two figures they currently offer. He said that the 1/20.3 line is a slow seller. The best sellers are the 1/22.5 people, reflecting the large sales in England and Europe where many modelers use LGB products. Although Supply Line offers several women figures, Ken says that they don't sell well either. Apparently, Large Scale hobbyists want men for their rolling stock and railroad service facilities and are less interested in having people in their towns.

Ken would really like to add to their O scale line of people, but he explained that they are not profitable. He is hoping to add some old time people to his line of figures, because he believes there is an expanding interest in the 1800's era.



This reflects Ken's view that their customers' buying habits are pretty diverse. Ken says that the market is really segmented with multiple scales, narrow and standard gauge and multiple time periods. This diversity makes the market for any single offering pretty small. He said, "If you are selling \$1500 locomotives you can afford to have only a few hundred buyers. When you are selling \$8.00 figures you need more than a few hundred sales to live off the business."



Quality is an important issue for Ken. He says that they use pressure casting to prevent the air bubbles found in some figures on the market today. After casting, each figure is hand cleaned and bagged for shipping. The rejection rate is about 5% and the rejects are thrown away. The figures with blemishes are put in a box until someone asks for them for painting practice or for parts. Sometimes people want figures with just the top half for use in passenger cars.

The Model Citizens make a great addition to the growing number of people living on my outdoor railroad. That is because: 1. They are well-done figures and there are enough of them to provide a wider variety of people for the railroad. 2. They are an excellent buy and are easy to prepare for painting and to paint. 3. They look great on the railroad. I have received many positive comments about their realistic look.







So, do you see anyone you would want to hire to work on your Railroad? If so, contact Supply Line and have them send you some "Model Citizens TM".

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