



Charles Ro Supply Company

"America's Largest Lionel Dealer Celebrates 43 Years"

CHARLES RO SUPPLY COMPANY is celebrating its 40th anniversary. "What and who is Charles Ro Supply Company?", you may ask. Charles Ro Supply Company is a family-run business which is the largest Lionel dealer in the world.

Charles Ro, Sr. did not start out in the hobby thinking it would grow into a successful business - it was a diversion from his beauty shop business which consisted of four salons and sixty hairdressers. As a collector of Pre-War and Postwar Lionel, Charles began selling used trains from one of his four hair stylist storefronts located in Everett, Massachusetts. Beginning in 1972 with one showcase of trains in the hair stylist store, Charles began buying new trains directly from Lionel and started to sell mail-order. Telephone orders were taken from a single phone hanging on a wall, handwritten, packed, and weighed on a bathroom scale.



Everett - where it all began (1972-79). Charles Ro's original sign is proudly displayed on the current building keeping a little bit of nostalgia.

In 1975, the first official Charles Ro Supply Company price list was printed for the Christmas season and mailed to thousands of customers. It consisted of 2 pages

and listed all of the Lionel items available at that time. This was a time that you could purchase a Lionel GP-7 engine for \$29.50, and rolling stock was available for \$3.00. Eventually the trains took over the hair stylist shop and the Everett location was totally trains.



Fater & Son - the early days.

By 1980, the business had expanded and Charles had written Lionel's first million dollar order - that's a lot of trains considering locomotives were around fifty dollars. Charles Ro, Jr., a CPA, joined the company to help his father manage the rapidly expanding business. The business had outgrown the Everett location and moved into an old A&P supermarket location at 347A Pleasant Street in Malden, a town next to Everett. Toll-free 800 telephone lines were added and the price list expanded to 12 pages advertising all the different manufacturers.

Throughout the early 80's, the business grew by leaps and bounds. Charles Ro Supply was shipping items world-wide and the mail order business flourished. In the mid 80's, Lionel decided to move its production to Mexico and did not produce any model trains for nine months so Charles Ro turned to selling German-made trains to help fill the demand for model trains. These German-made trains were larger than Lionel and were suitable for outdoor use, but most were of European prototype. Realizing that these outdoor trains



Malden - A&P Supermarket becomes train store (1979 - 89)

were becoming popular in the United States, Charles and his son decided to form a second train company, Charles Ro Manufacturing Company (USA Trains), to manufacture American prototype "garden sized" trains. In December of 1987, the first six boxcars were introduced into the marketplace and were very successful. By this time, Lionel was back producing its complete product line and both businesses, Charles Ro Supply Co. and USA Trains, were expanding.

In 1989, both companies moved into a newly built facility at 662 Cross Street in Malden. The new, one block long building had three floors and over 50,000 square feet to provide retail and mail order operations for Charles Ro Supply Company and manufacturing for USA Trains.

The new facility allowed



Retail Store - All gauges from N Scale to G Gauge on sale



The present Charles Ro facility spans 50,000 sq. feet to provide retail store and mail order operations for Charles Ro Supply and manufacturing for USA Trains

Charles Ro Supply Company to once again expand by providing a larger retail store, a 16 foot by 32 foot operating layout with 6 trains running in two gauges, and more efficient mail-order processing. By this time the sales from a single Lionel locomotive exceeded \$1,000,000 in revenues as compared to the first million dollar order of the late 70's for the entire product line (you can guess which locomotive generated that much revenue, but Charles will never tell). In 2011 Readers Digest Canada listed Charles Ro Supply Co. as one of the top 10 Coolest Toy Stores in the world - listed with stores such as FAO Schwartz (NY), Disney Store (London), Barbie Store (Buenos Aires). Charles Ro Supply Co. is truly a renowned destination to visit.



Warehouse - extensive inventory on hand to fill orders daily



Operating layout - enjoyed by thousands of visitors every year

On the manufacturing side of the business, USA Trains continued to expand and the decision was made in 1995 to manufacture locomotives in order to meet the needs of the expanding market. The first locomotive produced was the NW-2 diesel switcher. It was very popular so USA Trains continued to manufacture additional locomotives. The GP 7/9 was produced in 1998 and won the Model Railroader Reader's Choice Award for that year. The world had now recognized USA Trains as a leader in the manufacture of Large Scale trains.



Charles Ro Jr. accepts the Reader's Choice Award for the GP7/9 - 1998 Best Locomotive

The "Ultimate Series" rolling stock line was introduced in 1999 as highly detailed 1:29 scale models. This line won four Reader's Choice Awards. A line of 1:29 scale die-cast locomotives was introduced in 2001 named the "Prestige Series." The first locomotive in this line was the J1e Hudson. It won the Reader's Choice Award for 2003. Two additional locomotives were

later introduced into the line - the GGI and the world's largest die-cast locomotive ever made - the 1:29 scale Big Boy. The complete product line now consists of hundreds of products as shown in the company's 144 page catalogue - quite an accomplishment in 25 years.

Never did Charles Ro realize that his train collecting hobby of his youth would grow and mature into the business it has developed into now. Trains run in the retail store for the enjoyment of Charles and his customers. Many hours of enjoyment are provided to model train enthusiasts all over the world through mail order sales. The Thomas-the-Tank-Train section of the retail store is for the budding train hobbists of the future that visit daily. There is even an operating train, with sound, on the charlesro.com web site.

Charles loves his trains, and he loves his work. But as we all know, working with trains is not like working at all. He looks forward to the next milestone, the Golden 50th year anniversary.



Charles Ro Sr. and Jr. with operating layout

Charles Ro Supply Company

662 CROSS STREET, MALDEN, MA 02148 www.charlesro.com



*Readers Digest Canada
Features Charles Ro Supply
in Top 10 Coolest Toy Stores
in the World.*

Reader's
Digest 

10 Coolest Toy Stores in the World

Toying around with kid-friendly travel ideas? Create your own toy story with these exciting destinations ideal for kids of all ages.

By Jackie Middleton for readersdigest.ca



8. Charles Ro Supply Company - Malden, Massachusetts, United States

All aboard! America's largest train store boasts 5,000 square feet of locomotive joy. Selling everything and anything train related, the family-run Charles Ro Supply Company in Massachusetts has been on track in the model train business for over 35 years. The world's

largest Lionel train seller, Charles Ro also stocks products by American Flyer, Bridgewater, USA Trains and Thomas the Tank Engine. If you're searching for a hard to find train set, locomotive, box car, or classic re-issue, Charles Ro Supply Company can help either in person or online. They ship worldwide too. *(Photo courtesy of Charles Ro Supply Company)*

Top 10 Coolest Toy Stores in the World.

1. Toys "R" Us - New York City, United States
2. Hamleys - London, England
3. FAO Schwarz - New York City, United States
4. The Hospital de Bonecas (The Doll Hospital) - Lisbon, Portugal
5. The LEGO Store - New York City, United States
6. LARK Toys - Kellogg, Minnesota, United States
7. Barbie Store - Buenos Aires, Argentina
8. **Charles Ro Supply Company - Malden, Massachusetts, States**
9. American Girl Place, Chicago, United States
10. Disney Store - London, England