

Portola Railroad Days 2004

Special report from "Hot Box" the Museum housecat.

I know what your thinking, why am I writing this report? Well, truth be told, I've been writing for some time. Most of you know me as a lazy cat and infrequent mouser. But I used to write for Feline Monthly. I was a ghostwriter for the letters column of National Lampoon magazine and if you look real hard at the credits on the last Leslie Neilson movie.... well, I don't want to blow my own horn. Just don't forget to feed me every morning.

This was the 22nd annual Railroad Days. It is hard to believe that Portola and the museum have been doing this for 22 years now. In the past, there were a couple of years when it seemed like the event was dying out. But the city has really pushed to get this event back up to speed and the last two years have seen a renewed interest on the part of the local community to really spruce up the event.

I was very impressed by this year's Railroad Days. Usually on Railroad Days, I get up early, grab a bite to eat and find a nice quiet spot to hide for the rest of the day. But the museum has really undergone a makeover and there are fewer and fewer places around the museum for a cat to hide anymore.

The buildings and grounds are been cleaned up considerably. There is fresh paint on the walls and doors, new signs, new walkways, the shop has been cleaned up and most of the corners where I used to hide, which had not been swept in ten years, have been cleaned out. So it was really exciting to see the eyes of visitors who had not come to the museum for a few years, light up when they came over to see what was new.

Speaking of new things, several people worked diligently to put together a new photo prop in the engine house. The prop has a cartoon of an engineer and a conductor with the faces cut out and visitors can stick their heads in the holes and have their pictures taken. It was a big hit over the weekend with lots of children posing for pictures. Andy Graham spearheaded the effort by producing the artwork on a transparency, which was projected onto a 4 by 6 sheet of plywood. John Walker, Jay Sarno, Brittany K, Cheri Stedge, Heidi Miller and several others pitched in to finish the painting so it would be ready for the weekend.

There was a nice art display in the engine house with nine nicely framed images of Western Pacific artwork. Some of these were produced by the WP's public relations department back in the 1940's while others were expanded, digital images of some of the famed California Zephyr advertising. There was also a nice color photo of the WP 805A coming around the balloon track at night under a starry sky, which helped to tie all the old images in with our efforts to preserve the past.

Bill Strahle from Operation Lifesaver had a very popular booth, which the kids and adults really enjoyed. Frank Beavers was selling surplus items from the archives and was doing a thriving business. Vicki Epling, Alicia Labrecque and Tim Carter manned the beer booth while Brittany K, Heidi Miller, Cheri Stedge and Debra Epling sold snacks, sodas and train ride tickets. Debbie's Dogs sold great tasting hot dogs for lunch.

We had three model train layouts on display this year. Gary VanTreese and family set up their live steam layout on the

loading dock while the Donner Pass Gandy Dancers ran HO scale inside the building. My favorite was the Truckee Meadows N scale layout because in the evenings after everyone went to bed I could sneak up on the layout, turn on the trains and chase the little cars around the layout. Wow, that was fun!

Hank Stiles, Sara Eidman, Rod and Gail McClure, Steve Habeck, Norman Holmes, John Walker and Frank Brehm roamed around the museum offering assistance where needed. Don Keller swept sidewalks and Ken Roller dressed up to play the part of the classic railroad hobo. A new volunteer for us this year was Wayne Williams from the California State Railroad Museum who came up to help monitor the UP 105 Business car. Wayne enjoyed himself so much that he pitched in and swept out the Silver Hostel. Thanks Wayne, it was great having you here. Roger and Rochelle Burdick watched over the parking lot, helping people find parking spaces, which Norman Holmes had marked off with some gypsum earlier in the week. Russ Johnson and Mark Granados worked on the layout in the gift shop. The guys completed several repairs and servicing of cars and engines and managed to keep the old layout running most of the weekend for the enjoyment of the visitors.

Andy Graham also used his artistic talents to put together an impressive new fundraising display for the Silver Hostel. The display shows the original floor plan of the car, photos in service and a thermometer showing how much more money we need to raise to replace the window frames and install the new glass. The display seems to be working well as donations are picking up for the restoration of this car. I'm trying to help by taking my afternoon naps next to the sign hoping that whenever people come over to pet me they will read the sign and make a donation. Good idea Andy!

Kerry Cochran, Sam Herschbein, Don Nelson, Lew Barnard, Pat Watkins, Frank Villante, Loren Ross, Charlie Spikes, Spencer Walker, Terry Decottiginies, Rick Edwards, Jack Palmer, Dave Epling and Ed Powell capably staffed our passenger trains.

Speaking of Ed Powell, the crew gathered together to present Ed with the Silver Glad Hand Award! This award is presented every year to a museum volunteer in appreciation for their contribution to our continuing success. Ed has been a valuable volunteer for many years here at the museum. You will usually find Ed under a locomotive or deep inside an engine compartment. Ed also helps out with all kinds of electrical repairs around the museum. The great thing about Ed is that he is not afraid to get dirty and he never complains about anything. And he doesn't give a wit about museum politics. Even when there is an evening Board of Directors meeting on a Saturday night, Ed and me will just sit out in the engine house and watch a video.

Another popular hit this year was setting up the big TV from the volunteer break room up in the engine house and showing WP videos. This went over very well and there is talk of renting a big screen next year. The gift shop was busy with John Walker, Linda Knudson, Julie Anderson, Janice Stiles and Cheri Stedge working behind the counter.

Rod McClure and Steve Habeck (both UP employees) made arrangements for the UP to loan us a couple of big locomotives for display over the weekend. This year we had UP6936 parked behind our very own UP6946 creating, in effect "Bi-Centennials" (Sorry about that, it's cat humor). The 6936 had a

rash of small problems, which our capable mechanics set out to fix. A radiator water pipe was leaking badly, the number boards were held in with duct tape, the classification lights didn't work and seven brake shoes needed replacing. Hank Stiles, Rick Edwards, Alan Hirasawa, Ed Powell, Rod and Steve, Frank Brehm and Howard Hanson did a great job of making sound repairs and the locomotive is now better than when it arrived. UP5800, a two year old AC equipped GE was also a big hit. Jason Krois did a good job of power washing both units so they would look good on display.

Overall, the event ran very smoothly and everyone seemed to have a great time. This event is growing again and I've overheard the museum staff talking about the possibility of doing a lot of new things next year. Hopefully, there will be speeder and handcar rides, a track laying demonstration or contest, some antique cars, farm equipment and maybe even some logging equipment on display. So if you didn't make it up this year, make plans to be here next year. Mark your calendar now as next years Railroad Days will be August 26th – 28th 2005.

<Insert paw print here>

Operating Dept. and RRDays 2004

By Kerry Cochran

It's a never-ending challenge during Portola Railroad Days to get crew members lined up for each day during Railroad Days, But not this year.

We were fortunate to have several members on hand to give us a hand this year.

Here is just a few of the members present, Don Nelson, Tom Andrews, Lew Barnard, Rick Edwards, Dave Epling, Jack Palmer, Frank Villante, Spencer Walker, Pat Watkins, Terry Decottignies, Norm Holmes, Matt Parker, Charlie Spikes, Loren Ross.



Here is Vicky Epling hard at work in the shop.



Student Brakeman Pat Watkins gets pointers from Rick Edwards and Spencer Walker look on.



Yard Master Steve Habeck helps keep things running.



Engineer Don Nelson at the controls of the WP 707

Thank you, Thank you, Thank you,

Without all the crew it would have been difficult to keep the trains running all day for all the visitors.