

DANVILLE FLYER

A PUBLICATION OF THE DANVILLE JUNCTION CHAPTER, INC. NRHS

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The *DANVILLE FLYER* is published monthly by the **DANVILLE JUNCTION CHAPTER** of the **NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY** for its members and other interested persons.

The **DANVILLE JUNCTION CHAPTER, NRHS**, is a not-for-profit corporation organized to preserve the history of railroading in Eastern Illinois and Western Indiana and operates a museum located in the former Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad depot on East Benton Street in Rossville, Illinois. The museum is open weekends from Memorial Day to Labor Day and features many railroad displays plus a large operating HO model railroad.

Membership in the Chapter is open to anyone having an interest in any aspect of railroading. Dues per year are \$20.00 for Chapter membership in addition to \$37.00 for NRHS membership. Meetings are held on the third (3rd) Sunday of each month (except June, July, August and December) at the Jocko's Depot Restaurant, Gilbert Street (Illinois Route 1) and Williams Street, next to CSX, in Danville, IL with lunch beginning at 1:00 PM Central Time followed by meeting and program.

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Cooke Business Products, Inc.

John Cooke Sr., Honorary Member

Visit our Chapter WWW Home Page On-Line - <http://www.prairienet.org/djc-nrhs/>



In early January Union Pacific #5118 comes off the St. Louis line at Findlay Junction, Illinois - photo by Rick Schroder

Coming Events

April 19, 2009

Danville, IL - Monthly Chapter Meeting at Jocko's Depot Restaurant, 1:00 PM

May 2, 2009

Annual Chapter rail trip to Chicago area - check out plans on page 4 of this issue. Let Allen Cooke know if you plan to attend. Also, will need car-pools for riders.

April 18, 2009

Danville, IL - Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad Historical Society annual meeting, Danville Area Community College, 10 AM to 9 PM, display tables, tour from 1-4 PM, dinner at Jocko's at 5:30 and annual meeting starting at 7:00 PM.

Apr 18-19, 2009

Decatur - Decatur Train Fair 2009. Decatur Civic Center. Sponsored by the Decatur Mt. Zion & Southern Model Railroad Club. Sat 10-5, Sun 10-4. Admission \$4

May 3, 2009

Wheaton - Great Midwest Train, Toy & Hobby Show. DuPage County Fairgrounds. County Farm Road and Manchester. 9:30-3

Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be held Sunday, April 19 at Jocko's Depot Restaurant, Williams and Gilbert Street, beginning at 1:00 PM.

The Urbana Train Show is over for another year and we made \$275, most on popcorn. The machine is fully paid for and thus this is around 95% profit (have to buy oil, corn and bags). We want to thank all that showed up at Urbana to help plus buy from dealers. The show was a little smaller this year since the group could not use the large portion of the mall. In addition, the local newspaper did not run the article for publicity. With other newspapers, WCIA-TV and WHMS radio doing their part we still had a good crowd. Each year, for more years than they want to count, Larry Prosser and John High have set up a layout. Over the years they have had many helpers and from photos they, like all of us, have gained more gray hair. This year was their last setup for display and the portable layout will be dismantled. John is looking toward building a layout at home and Larry is discussing building a switching layout.

As noted in the last issue Allen Cooke has set up a trip to Chicago to ride Metra trains. The date is Saturday, May 2, and schedule is listed on page 4. If departing from Danville you need to be to Cooke's 15 minutes prior to the departure time listed. If you want to meet at Rossville let Allen know and they can stop on the way north.

The last spring operating session was held on April 4. In May we need to get the museum ready for summer opening. Bob G. wants to get the skirting changed on the layout and thus we need to plan a work session to get this done. The rest of the building will need cleaning and the outside needs trash picked up. A date will be set at the April meeting.

The DVD program this month will be the last days of the Duluth, Missabe and Iron Range Railroad. Member Al Hintz is a DM&IR fan and is in the process of starting a model railroad patterned after the DM&IR. He has furnished this DVD for us to see.

Danville Chapter, NRHS

Minutes - 3/15/9

Vice President Sherrill opened the meeting .

The secretary's report was approved . The Treasurer's report showed \$2005.07 in the checking account and \$4735.56 in a CD.

Old Business

The Urbana Train show will be March 28 & 29. Popcorn will be sold.

New Business

The spring trip was moved to May 2nd. Rides on the Rock Island and Milwaukee West lines of Metra are planned.

J.D. Cooke talked about some short line railroads he had ridden in Florida.

The meeting was adjourned at 1359.

Mary Kay Bruns tells of life growing up in rail depot

At the club meeting on January 18, Mary Kay Bruns of Danville talked about growing up in a Milwaukee Road depot in Wisconsin. She also brought artifacts from the period and video from 8mm home movies.

The depot was in South Wayne, Wis., 47 miles from Janesville on the branch line between Janesville and Mineral Point. Her father was the agent at the station and the family lived upstairs at the depot. During WWII, her mother became the agent while her father was in service. Mary Kay lived in the depot 1944-57.

During this time period there was a daily passenger train on the branch that made the round trip from Janesville to Mineral Point and return. A local freight also worked the route. For a while Mary Kay rode the passenger train 19 miles west to Darlington for her piano lessons, returning on the eastbound train.



The President's Corner

Sorry that I missed my column last month. The time just got away from me, and when Rick asked about it I had no topic in mind. So to start this month, I wanted to follow up on the Chapter business that I brought up in my last column.

For those that haven't attended the last two meetings, we did get the flat screen TV/DVD combo and it has worked very well so far. This expenditure did cut into the donations received this year, and as indicated I will defer my compensation for the DCC equipment as long as it takes to build up funds again. I do recognize that members who contributed to the DCC fund actually want some ownership stake in the system, and when I take my \$1K cut that will be a reality.

I have not done much on the website issue, and quite frankly this is how it may die. I just don't see the need or have the motivation to work on a new host. Any cost above \$35 per year is an increase for this service, and while cheap hosting is available, there's no point in putting up a website that hasn't seen updates in a long time. A stale site is often worse than a dead site. Even if we don't have a site, the e-mail address will still work and perhaps we can just link to it off the C&EI HS site. The two organizations are somewhat overlapped as it is, and this would just be another aspect of the symbiosis.

This leads to the second half topic, which is technology and our hobby. As most of you reading this know, I'm the resident "geek" in the club. Things like DCC, computers, radios, telephones and signals, of course, are what keep me interested. It was DCC that got me back into the model hobby. And I think Rick's layout benefited from this as well, since I've spent more time on his basement floor in recent months that I would care to tally!

It does please me to help those not so inclined with the tech aspects of the hobby, but at times I wonder if some things are worth it. Several people receive benefit from my ATCS Monitor setup because I can serve the data out to others. However, a recent attempt to re-activate the audio stream for Danville railroad scanner traffic did not receive much interest, and since the computer was really too old and slow for the task, I shut the whole thing down. It's like that with the Chapter website as well. Everyone can say they want it, but in reality it's not as popular as we might think.

As time moves on I can only hope that some younger members will pick up on the geek stuff and then I'll have some peers to discuss things with. I've never put a train video up on YouTube, but there's all kinds of stuff there if you know where to look. I view technology as a means to an end, just like slide film and radio scanners were to earlier generations of fans. Don't be afraid of it, but also know your limitations. There are some people who will never have a computer, and that's probably best for everyone!

Doug

The depot was a couple blocks from the center of town, next to several industries that were served by the railroad. The depot had an office, waiting room, and freight area. The upstairs apartment had a bedroom, kitchen, parlor and an area that served as the children's bedroom. Originally there was an outhouse, although indoor plumbing was later added.

The movies portrayed everyday events that occurred at the depot. The platform and surrounding areas served as play areas for the children. The piano was housed in the waiting room, which was not well used by passengers.

A lot of effort was spent by Mary Kay in preparing the presentation. The effort was greatly appreciated and the program was greatly enjoyed by attendees.

CSXT commemorates first Genset in Illinois

Next week, CSX Transportation will unveil the first Genset locomotive to be based in Illinois. The Class I will conduct a ceremony March 17 at the LaSalle Street Metra Station in Chicago to commemorate the "green" locomotive event.

CSXT will be the first railroad to base Gensets in Illinois. The locomotives can reduce nitrous oxide and particulate matter emissions by 80 percent, and carbon dioxide emissions by up to 50 percent, and cut fuel usage compared with a conventional switcher, the Class I said in an announcement. The railroad plans to use five GenSets in various Illinois operations this year.

CSX Corp. Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer Michael Ward; CSXT Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Tony Ingram; Chicago Department of Transportation Commissioner Thomas Byrne; and city of Riverdale Mayor Zenovia Evans will speak at the ceremony and discuss rail's environmental benefits.

Progressive Railroading 3-12-09

Metrolink Engineer let railfan operate train

The Metrolink engineer involved in the Sept. 12, 2008 Chatsworth, Calif., train crash had earlier allowed a teenaged railfan access to the locomotive cab, overseeing him as the railfan piloted the train, and planned to do so again the day of the accident, which killed 25 and injured 130, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

NTSB Tuesday provided a transcript of text messages to and from operator Robert Sanchez, who was killed as his train ran a red signal and collided with a Union Pacific freight train. The messages reveal that Sanchez had allowed one text-message correspondent to ride in the locomotive cab a few days before the incident.

Officials said Sanchez sent and received 57 text messages while on duty that day, including one sent by him 22 seconds before his train collided with the UP consist. NTSB said there was no sign of mechanical error involving the Metrolink train.

Railway Age 3-4-09

CN trains to hit the track on EJ&E line

Canadian National Railway is expected to roll out its first trains on the EJ&E line March 10, according to local newspapers. The *Times of Northwest Indiana* reports the first pair of trains is expected to run between Mundelein, north of Chicago, to Matteson, south of Chicago. CN says two more pairs will be added to that route in the next several weeks.

Last month, Canadian National acquired the principal lines of EJ&E Railway, including 198 miles of main line tracks running from Waukegan, Ill., to Gary. CN expects freight traffic on the rail line to more than triple in some portions of the EJ&E, including those in Griffith, Gary,

Schererville and Dyer.

Railroad Chief Executive Officer E. Hunter Harrison sent a letter to the Griffith, Ind., Town Council dated March 9. He said the large increase in train traffic on the EJ&E outlined in CN's operations plan would likely not take place this year due to the declining economy.

Via Railway Age 3-10-09

STB blesses NS/Pan Am Railways 'Patriot Corridor' joint venture

Yesterday, the Surface Transportation Board announced it approved the joint control and ownership of Pan Am Southern by Norfolk Southern Railway, Pan Am Railways, and Pan Am subsidiaries the Boston and Maine Corp. and Springfield Terminal Railway Co.

The board — which imposed labor-protection and environmental conditions on the deal — determined that the “end-to-end” transaction and related operational agreements would produce “substantial transportation benefits” to the New England region.

“The transaction will not result in a substantial lessening of competition, the creation of a monopoly, or a restraint of trade in freight surface transportation in any region of the United States,” STB officials said in their decision, adding that an upgraded east-west mainline route would significantly increase competition.

PAS will operate about 437 miles of track, including an east-west Patriot Corridor between points in New York and Massachusetts, and a north-south section between Vermont and Connecticut. NS plans to invest \$87.5 million in PAS for infrastructure upgrades to improve traffic flows and expand capacity.

In May 2008, NS and PAR announced plans to form joint venture Pan Am Southern and establish the Patriot Corri-

dor, a 155-mile high-speed freight-rail route between Mechanicville and Ayer, Mass. The corridor will include 281 miles of PAR's secondary and branch lines, including trackage rights, in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont.

Via Progressive Railroading 3-11-09

Michigan Steam Festival

(March 24, 2009 - Owosso, MI) The “World's Most Famous Steam Locomotive” will travel from its home in Portland, OR 2500 miles to Owosso, MI for America's Largest Celebration of Railroading in July. Southern Pacific steam locomotive no. 4449 known as the “Daylight” will appear at Train Festival 2009 in Owosso, MI July 23-26. The massive undertaking to organize this train is being jointly coordinated by The Steam Railroading Institute of Owosso, MI, The Friends of the 4449 of Portland, OR and The Friends of the 261 of Minneapolis, MN.

Train Festival 2009 is America's Largest Celebration of Railroading and will include 8 steam locomotives under steam, vintage and modern diesel/electric locomotives, various train rides, huge model train layouts, miniature train rides, art exhibit, locomotive cab tours, railroad vendors and much more. This family event is being held as a fund raiser to keep operating Pere Marquette steam locomotive no. 1225. This locomotive owned by the Steam Railroading Institute of Owosso, MI is due for Federal Railroad Administration re-certification in 2010. This locomotive is best known as the steam locomotive portrayed in the animated movie “The Polar Express”.

The Southern Pacific Daylight no. 4449 will travel across country on an Amtrak sponsored trip hauling thousands of passengers on this rare excursion. The locomotive and train will travel through many cities along the way including Spokane, Fargo, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Chicago,

DANVILLE JUNCTION CHAPTER

SPRING TRAIN TRIP

May 2, 2009

SCHEDULE

STATION	LEAVE	STATION	ARRIVE
Cooke Business Products	7:00 AM	MANTENO (McDonalds)	9:15 AM
MANTENO (McDonalds)	9:25 AM	OAKFOREST	10:15 AM
OAKFOREST (Metra Station)	10:55 AM	CHICAGO(LASALLE)	11:48 AM
CHICAGO(UNION)	12:30 PM	BENSENVILLE(**)	1:03 PM
BENSENVILLE	1:03 PM	ELGIN	1:43 PM
ELGIN	1:55 PM	BENSENVILLE	2:31 PM
BENSENVILLE	2:31 PM	CHICAGO(UNION)	3:09 PM
CHICAGO(LASALLE)	4:30 PM	OAKFOREST	5:20 PM
OAKFOREST	5:30 PM	Cooke Business Products	8:00+ PM

(**) You can get off at Bensenville if you want to photograph trains and not ride to the end of the line. On the way back we will stop at Fuddruckers for dinner.

and Lansing. A special excursion will be operated on July 24 originating from TrainFestival 2009, tickets are available online. The locomotive will be on display during the event for visitors to photograph, visit with the crew as well as explore the cab.

Southern Pacific no. 4449 was built in 1941 as a GS-4 “Northern” type locomotive. A 4-8-4 wheel arrangement, she is 110’ long, 10’ wide and 16’ tall. The locomotive and tender weighs 433 tons, and it operates with a boiler pressure of 300 psi. Her eight 80” diameter drivers and unique booster truck can apply 5,500 horsepower to the rails and exceed 100 mph.

The only remaining operable “streamlined” steam locomotive of the Art Deco era, No. 4449 pulled the famous Southern Pacific first class “Daylight” passenger trains between Los Angeles and San Francisco over the scenic Coast Route and then on to Portland until 1955. Retired to static display at Oaks Park in 1958, most thought SP 4449 would never run again.

In 1974, she was selected to pull the American Freedom Train throughout the United States, and was subsequently rebuilt. Southern Pacific no. 4449 ran for three years to the delight of over 30 million people. She is arguably one of the most beautiful locomotives ever built — and kept that way by the all-volunteer Friends of SP 4449!

More information and tickets are available online at www.trainfestival2009.com or by calling (989) 725-9464.

INRD rail line to new mine

Indiana Rail Road recently signed an agreement with Peabody Energy to construct a 5.2-mile industrial spur to serve Peabody’s new Bear Run Mine in Sullivan County, Ind. — the largest surface coal mine in the eastern United States, according to the 500-mile regional.

Construction is expected to start after the Surface Transportation Board (STB) issues a declaratory order on the project. INRD submitted filings to the STB in October 2008 and the railroad’s officials expect to complete the new line by early 2010.

Peabody plans to spend between \$350 million and \$400 million to develop the mine, which is expected to produce up to 8 million tons annually after 2010.

INRD will spend about \$17 million to build the spur, and an additional \$5 million during the next two years to improve infrastructure to accommodate increased traffic volumes generated by the mine.

“Peabody’s investment is one of the most significant industrial developments in Indiana in this decade, and the largest single new business opportunity ever awarded to The Indiana Rail Road,” said INRD President and Chief Executive Officer Tom Hoback in a prepared statement. “We project that it will increase our current coal transportation volumes by more than 30 percent

Via Progressive Railroading 3-20-09

Stimulus cash for Amtrak means jobs in Beech Grove

Beech Grove facility beefing up staff to handle train-car project

From Indianapolis Star

A \$1.3 billion federal investment in Amtrak will trickle down to the Beech Grove Amtrak maintenance facility, the White House announced Friday.

The local facility, which employs about 500, will share \$82 million in federal stimulus projects with another facility in Delaware in order to fulfill an order to rebuild or repair 68 stored or damaged passenger train cars. The project could mean up to 125 new jobs for Amtrak here and in Delaware. In Beech Grove, the hiring has already begun.

A handful of machinists have been brought back, and others should be hired soon, said Mike Fisher, a 21-year employee who made the national spotlight last year by sharing his economic worries with the Obama campaign.

"I know they are already in the process of doing interviews and bringing a lot of people back to work, including many of my friends," Fisher said. "We had been told that possibly by the end of 2009, the Beech Grove facility could be gone without this."

Instead, this boost in business promises to keep workers busy for the next two or three years. U.S. Rep. Andre Carson, D-Indianapolis, joined Vice President Joe Biden for the announcement in Washington. Biden said the stimulus spending will double the size of Amtrak's capital spending.

"Over 28 million passengers ride Amtrak each year. That's about 500,000 passengers a week—or 80,000 a day," Biden said. "For too long, we haven't made the investments we needed to make Amtrak as safe, as reliable, as secure as it can be. That ends now."

Many of the damaged cars have been stored at the Beech Grove facility, but little work has been done because of a lack of funding. Once repaired, the cars will be used to alleviate congested portions of the system or to begin new services. Fisher said the news will change the mood in Beech Grove. "We've been down in the dumps, thinking the future is not bright at all," he said. "I know this stimulus money is only good for two or three years, but that gives us two or three years to get more work in here and hopefully keep going."

It was well known in the dispatchers office that Bill Nish was very superstitious of the number 13 and would never use it for the number of a train order, instead skipping to No. 14. He also would never change the calendar if the next day was going to be the 13th, leaving it for the day dispatcher to change.

Maybe he had a premonition or something of what was to come. Guess we will never know.

Via Brass Switchkey

Friday the 13th proves fatal for 3 Chicago Great Western employees

From Jim L. Rueber

Some people are superstitious of a black cat crossing their path, walking under a ladder, breaking a mirror or on a Friday the 13th they are almost afraid to get out of bed. Have you noticed that some hotels don't have a 13th floor?

Louis Smith, age 50, a CGW Extra Gang laborer working near Lincoln, Iowa, was hitching a ride on Train No 61 on Friday the 13th of June 1913, when it was involved in a head-on collision at the North edge of Marshalltown Iowa with the Northbound Local and Mr. Smith was crushed to death in the wreckage.

Eddie Nedreau, 25 years old, a CGW fireman, climbed up into the cab of Extra 601 East on Friday the 13th of March 1914 and was killed at Stanley Iowa when he jumped as the locomotive derailed and turnover and the tender fell on top of him.

50 years later to the day, Friday the 13th of March 1964, William T. "Bill" Nish, 34 year old CGW Train Dispatcher at Oelwein, Iowa, finished his 3rd trick assignment that morning and went home to start his 2 days off and decided to go outside and work on his boat. He was found dead in his driveway shortly after from an apparent heart attack.



Chicago and Eastern Illinois Historical Society Annual Meeting - DACC, Danville, IL April 18, 2009.

No admission, display and sale tables, tour of abandon C&EI lines around Danville from 1-4 PM, dinner at Jocko's Depot Restaurant, a local railroad theme restaurant and annual meeting starting at 7:00 PM

CN seeing benefits of EJ&E Railway acquisition

In just the past few weeks, Canadian National Railway Co. has cut costs by nearly 30% at Elgin Joliet & Eastern Railway Co. since its controversial acquisition of the freight rail bypass through Chicago's western suburbs closed Feb. 1, a top CN executive said Wednesday.

"We just have a whole different philosophy," starting with a budgeting process that starts from scratch rather than building on previous year's figures, said Keith Creel, CN's executive vice-president of operations, at a J. P. Morgan Chase & Co. transportation investors conference Wednesday.

But the acquisition's real payoff will come when the economy recovers and CN will be able to route even more traffic around Chicago to avoid downtown bottlenecks, Mr. Creel said.

"The power of this acquisition is strategic," he said. "It's an opportunity to increase speed, increase velocity and take costs out. Long term, that's where the whole opportunity is."

West suburban officials have been vociferously expressing concerns about the projected growth in rail traffic, which started rolling through their communities on Tuesday.

"They've been very quick to rev up, but they're showing an utter disregard for families in these communities along the EJ&E," said Karen Darch, village president of Barrington, one of the suburbs that the EJ&E intersects. She said CN ran two additional freight trains yesterday and has told her it plans to add four more trains a day within two weeks, more than doubling the previous traffic level.

Mr. Creel made clear that the EJ&E is key to CN's pursuit of longer trains and faster average speeds to improve the efficiency of its rail lines throughout the central U.S. and Canada.

"It gives us an interstate, so to speak, around Chicago. You jump on the inter-

state on the north side of the city," he said, and instead of it taking up to a day-and-a-half to get through the city, "in four to five hours, we're on the south side of the city. Today it's a powerful force; when the economy comes back, it will be key for us."

That's an apt analogy for critics, too, Ms. Darch said. "It's like having a single-lane road through your town and somebody turns it into a superhighway. That's why the opposition is so strong, because we do see they're turning this into a superhighway. The only real winner here is CN."

Editor: Lets see, who was in the area first, the subdivisions or the railroad.

Rail News

The UP railroad continues to butt heads with the US Dept. of Homeland Security about drugs found in railcars traveling across the border from Mexico. Lawsuits for \$37 million in civil fines against the UP have been filed by the US Dept. of Justice last week. However, the UP first filed a lawsuit against DHS in July 2008 in federal court in Nebraska, seeking the court's determination that the federal government unlawfully applied statutes relative to the smuggling of illegal narcotics from Mexico in trains. The UP further noted that the government and not the UP takes initial control over railcars entering the US plus the government even penalizes the rail company after the railroad finds drugs that Customs missed in their inspections. Talk about a bum rap.

WHITEROCK, B.C. - BNSF Railway plans to bill landowners for a slide that covered its line here last week, saying the landowners took actions that led to the slide, White Rock's Peace Arch News has reported. The slide deposited 14-foot trees on BNSF's Seattle-Vancouver, B.C., route, closing it for two hours. Four years ago, a White Rock landscaper removed 33 mature trees from BNSF-owned land on behalf of a developer who sought better views from the homes on the development. The landscaper had no permit to

remove the trees, and local residents are confident the tree removal led to the slide. "The situation is being investigated ... and BNSF is planning on taking action, as this was rather costly due to the shut-down of the line," said BNSF spokesman Gus Melonas. "We are going after them; we will be submitting a bill."

TRACKS AHEAD will be featured on WILL-DT, Channel 12, on Sundays at 5:00 PM. We do not know if this is a new series or a repeat of previous programs. Check it out.

Theft of railroad solar panels could have caused train accident

PULGA Calif. — Eight solar panels and 16 large batteries used to store gathered energy were taken Thursday from a Union Pacific Railroad facility in the Feather River Canyon. The removal of two complete solar arrays caused a temporary but potentially disastrous interruption in the communication and control system of the railroad, said Butte County sheriff's Sgt. Tony Borgman.

Railroad officials were able to isolate the problem quickly, he said. The loss of equipment is estimated at \$20,000. Officials believe the theft occurred early in the morning, and involved multiple suspects. It's also believed that thieves researched the caper, likely making multiple trips to the remote area to develop a plan.

The incident is the second solar panel theft reported this week to authorities. On Monday, operators of the nonprofit Chico Community Observatory in upper Bidwell Park said three panels were stolen over the weekend from an array that supplies all of its electricity. In February, nearly four dozen solar panels were stolen from the roof of Little Chico Creek school. A suspect was arrested in the case, and several of the panels were recovered. Authorities think an all-terrain vehicle was used in the Union Pacific burglary Thursday.

Anyone who may have seen a vehicle towing an ATV or a trailer Thursday in the area of Camp Creek and Pulga roads, off Highway 70, is asked to call the Butte County Sheriff at 538-7321.

Editor: One thing about windmills - no one is going to steal one.

Grand Elk Railroad officially takes over operation of freight line Wednesday(4/1)

by Chris Wheelock | Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette

KALAMAZOO — The rumble of the locomotive diesel engines is distinctive and loud. At the far end of Botsford Yard on Mills Street, a small crew is working on one of 19 tracks that feed the rail yard.

Nine of them are out of service because they're in need of repair.

Starting Wednesday, a small start-up, freight-line railroad — the Grand Elk Railroad — will officially come to life. Grand Elk, which takes its name from the 123-mile route from Grand Rapids to Elkhart, Ind., has been running freight in a caretaker mode for rail giant Norfolk Southern for several weeks now.

It's what's known as a short line in railroad parlance — a Class III carrier by the federal government's definition, earning \$28 million or less in annual revenue.

General manager Rodney Gordon and his 54 employees have a lot of work ahead of them to make a nearly \$9 million investment pay off for parent company, Watco Transportation Services Inc., based in Pittsburg, Kan.

"It's going really well," Gordon said Friday from his office across from the train depot in downtown Kalamazoo. "The first week was a little shaky because the amount of work that was left here. ... We're getting better as we go."

The prospect of 58 jobs with the railroad brought 3,600 applicants when hiring started in mid-February. Grand Elk is a nonunion railroad. Gordon said it has only three more workers to bring on board — individuals who have already been selected — but it will do so during the next two weeks when things "calm down a bit."

Conductor Levi Stevenson, of Portage, relocated his family back here from Idaho after a year and a half to take one of the very first jobs offered.

The Portage native moved to Idaho to take a job with Watco.

"It's humbling, to be honest," Stevenson said, "especially in this economy. My wife's extremely happy. I like the stability that comes with it."

Stevenson said his wife, who's originally from Utah, is very close with his family here.

Grand Elk has an ambitious plan to replace 20,000 railroad ties on the track between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids by the end of August. Gordon said the condition of the track limits train speeds to 10 mph through that section until repairs are made. The goal is to make the repairs by summer's end so the speed can be increased through the section to 25 mph.

Grand Elk also needs to replace a bridge in Portage where the track runs through Celery Flats. The bridge's condition currently limits train weight to 273,000 pounds. The industry standard is 286,000 pounds.

Gordon wants to have the bridge work completed by October. Numerous road crossings also need attention, work that is being coordinated through the Michigan Department of Transportation and local municipalities.

Gordon says Grand Elk's business model is realistic, with the expectation that the economy will pick up in 2010. For now, the railroad has lowered its forecast for this year from 22,000 rail cars of freight to between 18,000 and 20,000 cars.

"We wouldn't have come to West Michigan if we thought it was going to be a long-haul recession," Gordon said. "With alternative energy coming, if you

want to haul windmills, the best way to haul them is on a train. If you want to find different ways to haul anything ... we know the train's the way to go."

Rail Projects

by Rick Schroeder

With my retirement, and now working for URS as a "temporary employee", I have not been involved in many of the projects that are still under way.

We have been assigned projects in Ohio by CSX as part of the government's stimulus package. The former B&O line has 8 overhead roadway bridges that were built by the B&O and are maintained by CSX. With funding from the federal and state stimulus packages the railroad will replace the bridges along with raising a W&LE bridge. This is part of the National Corridor that CSX has underway to increase clearances from Baltimore to Ohio. We have 3 months in which to prepare the projects for construction and are using our Akron office in coordination with the Decatur office to complete the work.

A project that I will manage is a rail study in Clay and Vigo County, Indiana. This involves 12 miles of line to the abandon Chinook Mine, located southwest of Brazil. The Indiana Rail Road owns 6 miles and 6 miles are on mine property. Out of service for over 10 years we will, as part of an overall project to determine feasibility of locating industry on the mine site, determine the cost to bring the line back up to standards for rail access. By the time you read this we should have completed our walking tour of the line.

The other project I still manage is the CREATE WA11 Dolton Interlocking project in Dolton. This project is on hold pending the CSX/NS agreement for the "bottle train" movement. This project will change track alignments and add cross-overs on CSX, IHB and the UP plus eliminate Dolton Tower.