

TOWPATH TRACKS

December, 2024

Newsletter of the Whitewater Valley Railroad
Connersville, Indiana USA



BEHIND THE SCENES



Front elevation of the castle. The taller part of the structure is built on a trailer. The clock tower is raised and lowered using a pulley system and cables. The lower walls extend the size of the castle on both sides. They are attached to the outside of the main castle for transportation.

The Polar Express train must make it to the North Pole before midnight so that Santa will still be there prior to starting on his rounds to deliver presents around the world. In 2023 we built a new castle which was assembled on a trailer. This allows us to store all of the various trees, lights and extension cords inside. The trailer is then towed to the North Pole a few weeks prior to the first train. In this photo essay we'll take a look behind the castle to see what goes into creating the magic. Photo: Zach Frey

When it's time to transport the castle, a system of cables and pulleys is used to lower the clock tower inside the structure where it will remain until the next season.





The generator shed is behind the lower walls. The generator on the left is the main source of power, the other one is for backup. We used to use multiple generators but the elimination of the inflatable decorations and the switch to LED lights allows us to use one generator. The breaker box is located on the back wall and the roof keeps rain and snow off the equipment. The generator is started by the crew of the van that brings Santa to the pole. This year we added a new feature: a remote shut off button. When the train is moving north toward Connersville and has passed the castle, the train crew can push a remote device which shuts down the generator.



Santa and the elves are waiting inside the front door to be called out to the train. There's a light switch to turn on spot lights that illuminate the doors just before they go outside and walk to the train. Santa walks, but the elves have been known to do a few cartwheels.

As the train makes its way north to return to Connersville, the van that delivered Santa stops at several crossings to flag traffic. The van then waits at Grand Central station to bring Santa back to South Conn to wait for the departure of the next train.



Soon the operating season will be over, and we'll begin preparations for the 2025 season. Happy Holidays and thank you for your support.



Polar Express is Underway

The last Polar Express trains will be Saturday December, 21. Ticket sales were slow compared to last year, but picked up in time to sell out four of the six weekends. Over the three days of Thanksgiving weekend, we had 3,600 passengers between the Polar trains and the Santa Express runs. Over 40 volunteers are needed for each train. This includes not only the on-board staff, but also people to sell merchandise, direct parking, and operate the North Pole.

This does not include the volunteer hours that go into preparing for the event and managing the process. Those tasks include setting up the North Pole, working with vendors for merchandise, cookies and hot chocolate, and managing the volunteer schedule to ensure each train is staffed. Also, during this time, work on equipment and track continues using even more volunteer time.

Facility Maintenance

by: *Brian Dershem*

An outside vendor installed the double doors in the new building between the east bay and the storage area. Nathan Hess and I removed unneeded cold air returns, electrical conduits, plumbing and miscellaneous items from the storage area of the new building in preparation for upcoming masonry work.

We entered into an arrangement with an outside contractor to dismantle and remove the portable building on the new property. The agreement includes removing other scrap metal from around the building and burnable refuse. Work is to be completed within 30 days.

Pending tasks at the new building include light cleaning, interior painting, caulking windows, exterior sheet metal replacement, interior removal of several sheets of metal/pegboard and minor plumbing work. If you are able/willing to assist with any of these tasks please contact me.

brian.dershem@whitewatervallyrr.org

Track Update

by: *Nic McCoy*

The track at Nulltown, milepost 64, has received 37 new ties as well as tamping to level the joints and track. This will reduce the rocking motion of the cars as they pass over this section of track. Other areas of the railroad have received spot repairs as identified during the weekly inspection runs. One of the more common items during an inspection run has been clearing downed tree limbs from the track.

Mechanical work continues on the track equipment. Specifically, the crew is working on refurbishing the rail gear on the excavator.

We purchased some 80-foot pieces of 115-pound rail from Steel Dynamics in Columbia City, IN. This rail will be used to rebuild crossings. With 80-foot rails there will not be a rail joint in the crossing itself. This cuts down on future maintenance. The next crossing on the list to be rebuilt is the driveway for Irving Materials just south of Connersville.

VOLUNTEERS WHO HELPED:

Jon Gipson	Steve McCann	Tony Schwering
Ed Hollowell	John Richter	Robby Weller
Gary Johnston	Andy Schwering	Travis Weller

Special Needs Train Follow Up

In September we ran a special train to accommodate children and adults who need to avoid crowds and noises or have other special needs. The article about that trip in the Towpath resulted in this response from long-time member Gene Gardner.

Dear Fellow WVRR Members,

It has been at least 20 years since my wife Mary Kay Gardner and I were volunteers riding the rails about every other weekend. Over the last few years, we have observed the increasingly professional nature of the organization. It is great to see the progress and the pride members have in doing things well. We were especially impressed

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with the stories in the last newsletter, and in particular the article about the "Special Needs Train".

Mary Kay says, "I remember well doing my best to calm down a young man who was terrified of the train noise and passenger commotion. Just as some progress was being made at soothing him, something else would happen to scare him again. More soft words brought some calm, and then the Engineer would blow the whistle for a crossing and set him off again."

The concept of having a "Special Needs Train" is a wonderful idea. The details of how it was handled sound perfect. I'm sure the individuals benefiting from this and their families very much appreciate this care the WVRR put into this. We are proud of the management and volunteers of the organization for their thoughtfulness and compassion. Well done.

Warm Regards to you all,

Mary Kay and Gene Gardner



We have an endowment fund at the Fayette Community Foundation in Connersville. Each year, based on investment income, a payout is available. In recent years we have reinvested the payout money. A healthy endowment fund provides future financial security.

Contributing to our endowment fund is an excellent way to protect the railroad's financial future. For more information use this contact information:

Fayette Community Foundation
765-827-9966
givetofcf.com
Whitewater Valley Railroad Heritage Fund



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The Whitewater Valley Railroad is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit operating railroad museum dedicated to preserving an historic branch line railroad, the restoration of railroad equipment, and the conduct of educational railroad programs.