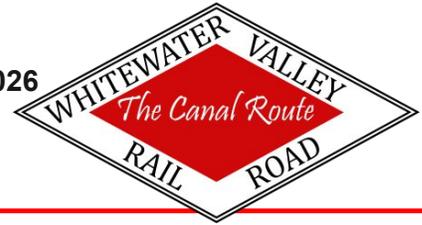


# TOWPATH TRACKS

Newsletter of the Whitewater Valley Railroad  
Connersville, Indiana USA

February 2026



**2026**

Training Class: through March 28  
 Director Elections: March 27  
 Easter Bunny Express: April 4  
 Rules Test & Luncheon: April 11  
 Scouts Merit Badge: April 25 & 26  
 Season Opens: May 1

## 2026 Calendar

There's plenty of activity at the railroad to get things ready for the 2026 season which begins on Friday May 1 when the Whitewater Limited departs Grand Central for a round trip to Metamora. This year we have 15 people registered to take the training class which runs each Saturday from February 21 to March 28. After successfully completing the training, the participants will be student brakemen and can begin taking student trips under the supervision of an experienced crew.

Some participants take the class for the experience and don't take the operating crew pathway. Some volunteer in other areas. For several years we have experienced some crew shortages, but in 2025 we only had to cancel a few shuttle train runs. The incoming students this year will put us in an even better position.



### MERIT BADGE

There are few locations that can meet all of the requirements for the Railroading Merit Badge



At the March member meeting we will elect four board of directors positions. The member meetings, held on the fourth Friday of each month (except November and December), are a good opportunity to discuss topics related to the railroad, get updates on plans and activities, and get answers to questions.

The first revenue train on the railroad this year will be the Easter Bunny Express on April 4th. The train boards at Grand Central and then proceeds south to the campground where the passengers get off the train so they can collect eggs in the bunny patch. Charlene, the railroad's office manager, reports that 2,000 of the total 10,000 plastic eggs are filled with candy. Four trips will be operated and, since Easter is early, we're hoping for some warm weather for the event.

The annual operating and on-track safety rules test will take place on April 11. FRA regulations require that we conduct an annual training session for all operating crew positions. The training will be followed by a luncheon.

The scouts are coming the weekend of April 25 and 26. On Saturday the train will pick them up at the campground and bring them to South Conn. Throughout the day they'll rotate through various stations to learn about various aspects of railroading so they can pass the test for the railroading merit badge. On Sunday, they'll ride the train on a round trip to Metamora. This year we expect 350 attendees from the Hoosier Trails Council, Bloomington, IN.

Then, the next weekend, we begin the 2026 season. In addition to the Valley Flyer and Metamora Local, we'll be operating themed trains which include Wild West, Cinderaila, Pizza Train, Civil War Special, Fireworks Shuttle, Pumpkinliner and Ghost Train. And then, after a one weekend pause, the Polar Express trips will begin.

# Director Election

The next Board of Directors election will be held March 27, 2026 at the membership meeting at 7:00 p.m. at South Conn. There are four board members up for reelection:

John Sprinkle  
Tom Nitza  
Travis Weller  
Rob Rogers



If you would like to run for the board, you must nominate yourself (and only yourself) by contacting:

Greg Borgwald  
(937) 479-1926  
wvrr25@woh.rr.com  
***The deadline for nominations is  
midnight March 20, 2026.***

To vote, you must be present at the meeting and be a member who has been in good standing, for at least 25 days prior to the election, and be at least 18 years of age.

- Neither absentee nor proxy ballots shall be permitted.
- Your annual dues must be paid by March 2, 2026.

Please consider participating in this important event and help guide the future of the organization.

An agricultural exhibit car will visit Franklin County in the near future. The Big Four is providing the train free of charge to Purdue University which will run on the Big Four lines in Indiana. The points in this section which will be visited by the train are Connersville, Nulltown, Laurel, Metamora, Brookville, Cedar Grove, New Trenton and Harrison. The Brookville Democrat, January 25, 1912

## 2026 Dues

If you have not done so, please renew your dues for 2026. The cost is \$30, or \$200 for a lifetime membership.

**By Mail:** send your payment to the Whitewater Valley Railroad, P. O. Box 406, Connersville, IN 47331

**By Phone:** Call the office to pay by credit card -- 765-825-2054

**In Person:** At Grand Central Station in Connersville (455 Market St.)

# Junior Membership Program

The railroad is developing a Junior Membership Program. There will be no cost for the participants, and it is open to ages 13 to the year of their 18th birthday. This is intended for children of members and non-members who want to participate in the shop, as a ticket agent, or on regular runs or other train activities. Once a junior member reaches the year of their 18th birthday, they are eligible to take the annual training class and become a student brakeman.

### *Activities will be split into three categories:*

**Allowed:** Being in the main room, kitchen, parking lot and restrooms at South Conn. Being outside, but not along the tracks.

**Allowed With Approval of Adult Member:** Being in all other rooms and areas around South Conn, visiting the shop, being on the train inside one car.

**Allowed Under Supervision of Adult Member:** Regular work in the shop, crossing between train cars, being in the yard, performing track work, and operating machinery.

All junior members must undertake a course to educate them on basic safety and rules of the railroad. This course will cover rules for the members, basic train signals, and other pertinent information. The junior member will then need to pass a basic test about the information.

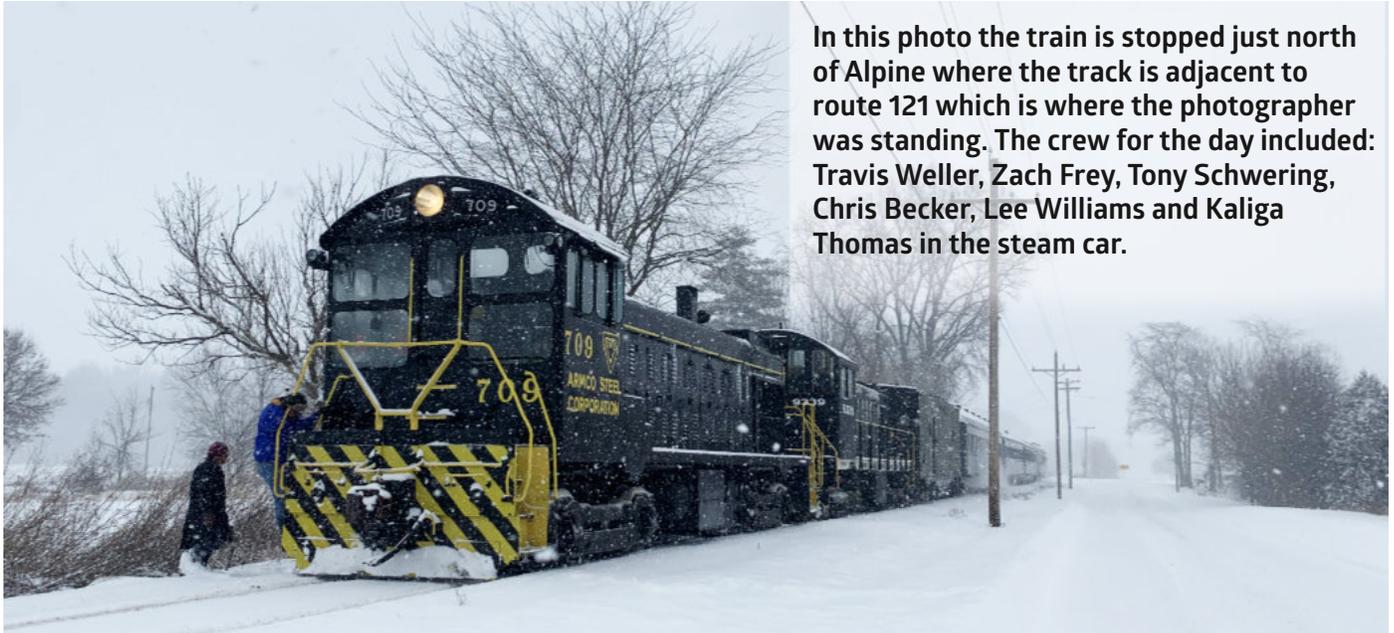
The purpose of this program is to formalize participation that has been taking place. We have had an increase in children of our members participating, as well as some who do not have a parent who is a member.

# New Employee

The railroad has a new employee, Stephanie Combs. Right now she's working Saturday only at Grand Central. Once trains start running, she'll work Saturday and Sunday, selling tickets and answering questions for the passengers and anyone who calls or comes to the station to inquire. In addition to those duties, she is helping to improve our social media footprint by increasing the quantity and quality of our posts.

They were, however, thrilled that one of the locomotives in use that day was former Milwaukee Road 532. Because it has a snow plow, it was used to clear the tracks for the following passenger train which included the steam heat car. Multiple stops were made for photo opportunities, including 532 breaking through the snow drifts at the road crossings.

This event was organized by member Keiwoon Kraus's company Retro Creations Photography.



In this photo the train is stopped just north of Alpine where the track is adjacent to route 121 which is where the photographer was standing. The crew for the day included: Travis Weller, Zach Frey, Tony Schwering, Chris Becker, Lee Williams and Kaliga Thomas in the steam car.



# Shop Update

The shop is back in action, and we have a full agenda for the year. Right now we're concentrating on locomotives, but we have worked on the steam car and EJ&E caboose since they were already in the shop. Later, we'll bring in coach 6 for some heavy repairs. The cars that are currently operating under an FRA (Federal Railroad Administration) waiver need to have a mechanical inspection and single car air brake test. The balance of our caboose fleet will be inspected and we'll be filing a waiver request with the FRA for those cars.

# Photo Charter

A photo charter was scheduled for Sunday January 25th. As it turned out, so was a major winter storm. Seven photographers were scheduled for the trip, but only two managed to make it. They were from Wisconsin and didn't think the foot of snow was significant.

Last year the FRA announced that they may change the waiver process which is required for any freight car over 50 years old. Currently we inspect the car, make necessary repairs and then send a formal waiver request to the FRA. The car cannot be operated until approval is granted,

*continued on next page*

which can take up to six months. The FRA is talking about dropping the approval process. For any freight car over 50 years old, once we've completed the required inspections and repairs, we could begin operating the car. We must keep paperwork on file to verify that we have completed the regulatory requirements. Then, after five years, the process begins again.

**709**

During the photo charter, #709 developed a knock in one of the cylinders. An examination revealed that two of the studs that hold the rocker assembly in place had broken, and the exhaust valves were not opening. Fortunately, ARMCO Steel sent along spare parts when they donated the locomotive. The rocker assembly was reassembled. An examination of all the cylinders has revealed that not all of the studs are the same length which affects how much thread engagement the nut has when it's tightened on the stud. We're currently considering having all new studs made to get the length correct and to ensure that they have maximum strength.

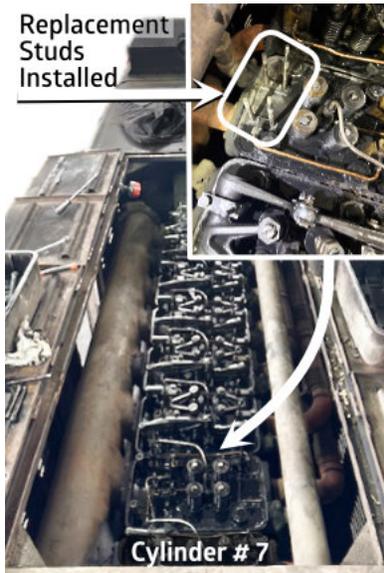


photo: Robby Weller

**EJ&E Caboose**

A single car air test revealed that the pressure leakage in the brake system is above the maximum allowed. Those leaks will be repaired. Both doors were not closing properly because they dragged on the thresholds. One fix we've employed on other cars is to remove the doors and trim off the bottom. Well, the hinges were welded to the car and the hinge pins were not removable. So, a lot of time was spent grinding, cutting and bending the thresholds to provide clearance. Both hand brakes were stiff to operate so those were lubricated.

**Steam Car**

- The brake beams have been adjusted to assure proper brake shoe wear
- Four brake shoes were replaced
- The brake cylinder piston travel has been adjusted
- The hand brakes have been lubricated for proper operation.

**SHOP VOLUNTEERS**

- Dave Bossart
- Carrick Dunn
- John Lord
- Justin Newhall
- Mike Scott
- Ryan Scott
- Tony Schwering
- Kaliga Thomas
- Travis Weller
- Robby Weller

Meeting Schedule	
<b>Board of Directors</b>	<i>(second Friday)</i>
Friday, March 13th @ 7:00 p.m.	
Friday, April 10th @ 7:00 p.m.	
<b>Member Meetings</b>	<i>(fourth Friday)</i>
Friday, March 27th @ 7:00 p.m.	
Friday, April 24th @ 7:00 p.m.	
Meetings are held at 300 S. Eastern Ave. (Corner of Eastern Ave. and Route 121)	

SOCIAL MEDIA

**YouTube**  
Whitewater Valley Railroad Official

**Instagram**  
Whitewatervalleyrrofficial

**Facebook**  
Whitewater Valley Railroad

Submit post ideas to:  
whitewatervalleyrailroadsocial@gmail.com

**Towpath Tracks** is published by the:  
Whitewater Valley Railroad  
P.O. Box 406  
Connersville, IN 47331  
765-825-2054  
www.whitewatervalleyrr.org  
© 2026 Whitewater Valley Railroad

**President:** Andy Schwering  
**Superintendent:** Travis Weller  
**Editor:** Tom Nitza  
**Photography:** Keiwoon Krause, Tom Nitza, Phillip Reiboldt, Justin Newhall  
**Proofreader:** Gene Gardner

**Questions, comments, submissions:**  
editor@whitewatervalleyrr.org

**Membership questions:**  
membership@whitewatervalleyrr.org

**Dues:** \$30 annually, or \$200 lifetime  
 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.