

**Kerry Cochran**

**From:** John Walker [mailto:john8john@clear-cxn.net]  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 12, 2004 4:26 PM  
**To:** Thom Anderson; Frank Brehm; Steve Habeck; Kerry Cochran; Eugene Vicknair; Hank Stiles; Norman Holmes; Rod McClure  
**Subject:** Museum Manager Report Feb.04

## Museum Managers Report February 11, 2004

My apologies for missing the last two meetings. Here is a belated report to keep you abreast of what is going on up here.

- 1) It's cold, with temperatures as low as 13 degrees at night. On average the temperature runs between the low twenties to high thirties on good days. Although Rod McClure has been able to keep the access road open and I have shoveled out most of the walkways, we still have one to two foot snowdrifts on the property and lots of ice.
- 2) The roof leaks, the snow curls down off the roof breaking windows on the North side of the building and is pushing the glass out into the engine house floor. Estimate we have lost 10-15 windows so far. We must come up with some plan to stop this problem. Have discussed several ideas with Eugene Vicknair and local people. The heater in the women's bathroom is sucking down fuel like the 608 in run 8. Whatever heat it is generating is going right out the wall, which of course, is not insulated. Everyone is pretty much in agreement that we will drain the entire water system after Santa Trains next year and turn off both bathroom heaters and water heaters. This should save us a lot more money on gas. Water for coffee can be brought in and if someone really needs a restroom, they can use the one in the shower car. The cat is continuously hungry and no matter how warm it gets outside, the gift shop remains a constant 25 degrees inside. In addition, I'm running out of suntan lotion. In short, it's just lovely here in Portola at this time of the year.
- 3) Nothing but positive comments on the Santa Trains this year. My compliments to everyone involved, especially the Habeck and McClure families.
- 4) Mary Ohren at the Portola Reporter continues to give us great press. I was photographed meeting with Merchants Association directors at a mixer in January. Mary also wrote up a positive article about the trade of equipment with BAERA in Rio Vista. I will send her an article on the WP 165 and 705 as well.
- 5) I have been talking and socializing with lots of local people, maintaining a positive portrayal of the FRRS and the museum. Our successful Railroad Days and Santa Trains, combined with our continuing cleanup of the property are having a very positive effect with the local community. I believe this will open many doors for us in the future. But in order for this to happen, we need to continue building something that not only benefits us, but the community as well.

The local merchants know that the museum is bringing business to this town. They are grateful. They will support us as much as they can. But we still have an image problem with the rest of the Portola community. They see us as a novelty, a place to bring out-of-towners for an occasional visit, a place to baby-sit their kids. But not as a member of the community. They don't really care how many engines we have or that we are preserving WP history. They want us to become more involved in the community. It's kind of hard to explain. The best example I can think of is this. Your neighbor doesn't care what your doing in your house, but they would like you to keep your property clean, house painted, don't make too much noise and don't speed down the street. In addition, they want you to participate in other community events, buy Girl Scout cookies from their kids, support other neighborhood concerns and be friendly, socialize with the other neighbors. Many in Portola would like us to be more integrated with the community instead of just hanging around down here by ourselves.

I have no concrete suggestions on how to proceed on this. A local lady is trying to revive the local Cub Scout

program and I think we could offer our facility for their use on certain projects. Hopefully the boys can earn their merit badges and maybe we can cultivate some of them as volunteers and tour guides this summer. The good press would not hurt us.

There is talk of building a new community center in Portola. Doug Morgan brought it to my attention and suggested a possible cooperative venture involving the old hospital building. Maybe going half and half on the rehabilitation of the building and making it a combination community/visitors center, museum and Railroad museum office, library and gift shop. Something for you to consider.

Anyway, I bring all of this to your attention. You should keep this in mind when considering community outreach programs or other opportunities to improve community relations. I would imagine some token offers to the community would improve relations. Things like helping to sponsor local sports or recreation programs, donations of train rides or RALs. It would cost us some money, and unfortunately, open the door for more people to come asking for money, but the trade off might open some doors for us and improve our community relations. Remember, Portola is a small town, population 2,000. They don't have a lot to give. There is a lot of unemployment and government assistance in this town. The greater Portola area is getting richer and trendier. But Portola is still Portola and has no control over the surrounding communities.

I've had casual discussions with two City Council members who are interested in the museum and, on the surface, very supportive. I get the feeling that they don't know what we are doing and thus, don't know how to help or support us. The city is facing budget cutbacks and has more important things to worry about, unless we can find a way to get their attention and possible support. I suspect that the same is true of Plumas County.

6) Sales are negligible. I attended a model train show in Roseville and rustled up \$778 in sales and donations. We are selling gift RAL certificates and I will begin a "spring cleaning sale" using the FRRS list on Yahoo soon. I will also try to come up with some new promotions using the Train Sheet as the Wine Set promotion did generate almost a dozen sales. Hopefully, Sam will get the web pages updated soon and we can start using that more effectively as well. I know that many of you are pushing for the development of an on-line store. I agree that this would be good for us but we still don't have the infrastructure to support this at this time. The museum has no working computers, no UPS shipping system, no heat in the gift shop, the roof leaks and we need Sam to get the web pages straightened out first.

7) I had hoped to show all of you a copy of a newspaper advertisement that I think would be effective in getting the RAL program kick started this spring. I'm working on it and hope to show it to you in a few weeks. I will begin scheduling RALs for this year by the time you read this.

8) Had a nice visit with the folks in Henderson Nevada in January. What they are doing is very impressive, and they haven't even built their museum yet! They have a state of the art shop, trackage, excursion train, train loading and concession area, an impressive collection and a vacant lot where the museum will go someday. They are building the infrastructure first and the museum last. Very interesting.

9) Been doing a lot of reorganization in the gift shop and RAL record keeping. Have met with Susan a few times and we should have a better breakdown and accountability in our gift shop sales and donations this year. Still not perfect, but it is getting better. We have found a few areas that still need more work. Specifically, taxable food sales, taxable consignment sales, show sales, membership and monthly pledge accounting but we will work this out to make sure it follows standard accounting and sales tax reporting practices.

10) Work progresses on the volunteer lounge car, the Silver Debris. I also have a local volunteer working on getting some of these old computers up and running. Hopefully, we will soon have some running in the office car, Op's office, volunteer lounge and maybe some other areas.

11) Donations. CZ Headrest covers from John Swiderski of Valdosta Georgia. An 1918 advertisement concerning hop trains from member George Childs in Piedmont California. Lots of HO train cars for our model train layout from Fred Smith in Eugene Oregon. Railroad timetables from Richard Rowe of San Diego. An old rubber mallet used in track work (found in the desert near the WP mainline) by retired conductor Jim Nelson of Portola. Lanterns and switch markers from R. Fernandez of Concord California. Another trip pass from our friend Mr. Olsen in Salt Lake City and various documents and photo's from A.B. Abernathy, Mr. Hambleton, Norman Tutorow and Michael Andrews.

12) Sat down one cold afternoon and mailed out brochures and a 2004 schedule to all of the visitor centers in Plumas County. Also sent along a little note explaining our hours, train rides, RAL program and how to contact us for more information. Was surprised to find over a dozen different visitor centers and museums in the area. Hope this will increase visitors and knowledge of our operations.

13) Have Jim Cooper and Frank Beavers working on some archive stuff over the winter. I have my new computer set up at The Pullman House (where I'm staying) and will begin work on a Visitors guide and a Railfan guide which I hope to sell in the gift shop.

14) Passed along to Gail was information about a new small business loan/grant run by the City of Portola. Basically, they received half a million dollars to loan out to small businesses. We qualify as they want to invest these low interest loans in tourism/recreational type businesses.

15) Was contacted by Caltrans in regards to pre-planning the replacement of the Spanish Creek Highway Bridge near Keddie. This area will hopefully be bypassed by a new bridge, which will be higher and go over the ridges here, eliminating all the sharp curves on the road. I responded with a letter outlining my ideas of keeping the existing bridge for pedestrians and transforming the area overlooking the Keddie Wye into a rest stop/campground/scenic overlook. Rod and Steve looked over the letter and approved our tentative cooperation in establishing informational signs, possibly a historical marker and other assistance should this every come to pass.

16) Please remember my cell phone number. [REDACTED] I'm generally at the museum between 10:00 and 5:00 but occasionally I am out walking around the museum or running into town for some reason. If you can't reach me at the museum, give me a call on the cell phone. Please don't call The Pullman House unless it's an emergency and you can't get me otherwise.

Respectfully submitted.

John Walker

**Kerry Cochran**

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**From:** Rod McClure [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, February 28, 2004 8:27 PM  
**To:** John Walker; Hank Stiles; Frank Brehm; Norman Holmes; Kerry Cochran; Eugene Vicknair; Steve Habeck  
**Cc:** Gail A. McClure; Wayne Monger  
**Subject:** RE: FRRS Business

John,

I need to talk to you about this but NOT by Email. We have seen what happens to emails with good intentions in the past.

I will talk to you by phone or in person in the next few days.

And officially, you are instructed to NOT discuss this with ANY city employee or elected official.

Rod

-----Original Message-----

**From:** John Walker [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, February 27, 2004 2:02 PM  
**To:** Hank Stiles; Frank Brehm; Norman Holmes; Rod McClure; Kerry Cochran; Eugene Vicknair; Steve Habeck  
**Subject:** FRRS Business  
**Importance:** High

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Board.

Take a moment and print this out. Find a comfortable chair and read this carefully.

Soon after my arrival here in Portola, I was welcomed by Portola Mayor Pro Tem Bill Weaver. Bill also works at Ace Hardware and his wife is on the Portola Merchants Association. Needless to say, I run into Bill fairly often and he has been very friendly and supportive to me. He has been encouraging me to attend City Council meetings and offer fresh input to city officials. I told him I really have no interest in City politics but, he said it would be good for me to be seen at the meetings and become more involved in the community.

Some time ago, Bill asked me what we were going to do with the old hospital building. I replied that we were going to try and fix it up and use the building but, that it was going to depend on the structural inspection of the building and finding some serious grant money. Bill has repeatedly expressed his encouragement of us saving the building. He says a lot of local people would like to see us save the historic old building.

Recently, I ran into Bill while shopping in town and he asked me if I had heard of the new community center the City is planning (I mentioned that Doug Morgan had told me about this in my last Manager's report). I replied that I had heard a rumor but had no details. He

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told me that no location or plan has been approved yet but, apparently, there is some money available for Portola to build a new community center. Apparently, the City simply has to apply for the money and they will get it. I don't know the details but this may have something to do with the cities recent sale of the burned out parcel behind the high school for housing development.

Bill has suggested that maybe the City and the Museum could come up with some kind of multiple use plan for the old hospital. We own the property and the building. They can get the money to rebuild it.

We had an off the record, casual discussion about various possibilities. Bill wants me to sit down with Jim Murphy and discuss the options in more detail. But, I made it very clear that I could not talk with Jim about this without contacting the FRRS Board of Directors first.

Here are my thoughts about the idea.

1) What are we going to do with the building? Ideally, I see it being used for displays and possibly a new gift shop, maybe a few offices. But, the building is a rat maze of rooms and hallways. And it is removed quite a way from the museum, making it hard to administer the museum from up on the hill. This is not necessarily a problem, we would just have to do some things differently.

2) Where are we going to get the money? I would think we are going to need several million dollars to save and refurbish the building. Although we have been successful in getting a few small grants, we're going to need a lot more than \$500.00 here and \$1800.00 there.

3) Who is going to do all the work on the building? We don't have the personnel. And we already have a ton of other projects to do. We excel at running trains on weekends. But our construction projects languish for lack of workers and money. We haven't even been able to put a fence up around the property since we acquired it, let alone fix the leaking fire hydrant up there. We can't even keep people from breaking into the place.

I would love to save the old building and use it solely for ourselves. But, after twenty years of watching our hopes and dreams continually put on hold for lack of money and manpower, I'm realistic enough not to hold my breath on this. Besides, we have so much more that needs to be done around here.

Here is what the city might be able to do for us, providing we entered into some kind of joint use/ownership of the building.

- 1) The city and county has access to lots of grant money.
- 2) The city can do more of the work than we can. Or at the very least, contract the work out.
- 3) If we did come up with a joint use agreement of some kind, hopefully more local volunteers will volunteer there and we might be able to cultivate more volunteers to work on our side of the building.
- 4) It would be a good way to reach out to the community and establish a better relationship with the local governments and agencies.
- 5) If a community center is built, we could use the hall for dinners, parties and meetings just like anyone else in town.

Ideally, I'm thinking that it might not be a bad idea to sell the building, or part of it, or part of the land up there, to the city, let them fix it up and lease or rent a third or half the

building for our archives, display room and library. All of this would have to be worked out and settled with an iron-clad contract of course. This would get us out of the cost of surveying the building, putting up fences, property insurance, security, raising money to fix the place up, dealing with the building department, dealing with the health department, etc. In short, it would relieve us of a lot of headaches and extra work that we don't have the time, people and money to deal with right now.

I think we are all agreed that we want the original building saved. But do we have to do it all by ourselves? We need room for a nice display room and archives storage (a room that doesn't flood every winter). Many historical societies and museum groups store their displays and collections at another location. As long as there is a sign stating from where and whom the collection came from, it's not much different than our display at the local library.

So, at this point, I need to ask you if you want me to continue discussion on this. I could discuss various possibilities with Jim Murphy or Bill Weaver and continue reporting back to you without committing the FRRS to anything. All discussions would be solely exploratory and not released for public information.

I know there is bad blood between us and Jim Murphy and the city. Yet, this may be an excellent opportunity to bury the hatchet and start over. Remember, Jim works for the city and we can always go over his head to the City Council and the community. Jim is not the all-powerful evil dictator that some of you make him out to be. He is an employee of the city and as such, subject to rules and regulations and pressure from his superiors. I truly believe that Jim wants the museum to succeed and bring more tourist to Portola. He just had a different idea of how to do it.

If, you decide to drop any thought of doing this. I'll comply with your direction and will not discuss it any further with anyone outside of the FRRS. If, I have somehow already overstepped my authority, I sincerely apologize and will stand corrected.

Please think about this and be prepared to discuss this at the next board meeting. I could even ask Bill Weaver to come down and discuss it off the record if you like. Eugene, can you please place this on the agenda for the next meeting.

Please, give this some serious thought. This could be a great opportunity for us. Or, we may discover that it simply will not work out. But I recommend we at least open up informal discussions with the city to explore various possibilities.

Sincerely,  
John Walker