

Museum Managers Report November 2006

I attended the V&T Symposium in Carson City on Oct 20-21.

Three things of interest:

1) The NSRM was donated the McKeen car on a five year loan with the condition that the cars restoration be completed in five years (apparently, this was in the body of the donation contract and was overlooked by museum officials). \$700 K has already been invested in the car and it is still not finished and the donor wanted the car back! NSRM has asked the state for an additional \$150 K and got \$70 K plus another \$50 K in donations but the car is still only 65% completed! NSRM was the winner of the Trains magazine preservation award and received another \$10 K and the donation of a rebuilt Caterpillar motor (valued at \$15 K) and has negotiated an extension clause to allow for the complete restoration of the car and it's eventual donation to the museum. The car is listed on the National Historic Register.

I bring this to your attention as a comparison of our "Hanger Queens" verses what NSRM has done. Even they're not perfect.

2) Mark Bassett of the Nevada Northern gave an excellent update on the NN. They started about the same time we did in the 1980's. When they first started they had 5,000 riders on 45 trips and earned 120 K in revenue. It wasn't enough! Mark said the organization had no financial plan, no vision, no facilities or track rehabilitation plans and "No Professionalism"- Just a bunch of railfans playing with trains and running what they had into the ground!

Mark reported that they adopted the L.L. Bean business model of membership and marketing. And addressed their facility issues using the National Main Street (revitalization) (MAIN) program.

They now have 1600 members. Five people donate over \$10 K annually.

\$240 K in volunteer labor. They have acquired \$2.6 Million in grants.

They now operate 650 trains between April and December, daily steam between July and Labor Day.

They have a joint marketing program with the Heber City operation.

They are open late-till 7:00 PM

They have "forced walking tours" (They make people go where they want them to go) that concludes in the gift shop. Mark said that women love walking through the shops and the need to provide good explanations and sincere answers to their questions).

The NN operates photo trains, food trains, "Ghost" Trains, Train Robberies, and convention tours in addition to normal train rides.

They are working in partnership with the NRHS, UNLV, Great Basin College and the National Park Service.

For promotion they have a weekly news column in the local newspaper, a newsletter to members, press releases, brochure/timetable, a membership application on their train tickets, brochure exchange and maintain a database of all hobby stores, hotels, motels, RV parks, etc where they can send brochures.

Mark also offered these sentiments on their marketing/business philosophy:

What we don't know-we don't know (you can't make plans or decisions until you know the facts).

Are you open for the benefit of yourselves or your customers???

Are we running a museum (Business) or a private club?

NN also hires young people to replace the older folks and teach them how to take care of this equipment after the old guys are gone. They encourage young people to work on the property and equipment much like the John Ramesh theory (recently featured in Trains magazine under the title of "Young Guns of Steam").

3) Met several officials from NSRM who all encouraged us to work together on future projects, etc. One recommendation that I suggested was exploring the possibility of joining forces on some marketing/advertising. Something along the lines of "Fly to Reno and spend a day at Portola and a day at Carson City-the perfect railfan getaway". They liked the idea. I also had a lengthy conversation with their gift shop manager.

Around the Museum: Duane Vanderveen has worked hard this month on several facility issues including cleaning out the old storage room next to the gift shop, installing ceiling fans in the gift shop, dewatering the shower car, installing motion sensor security lights and other projects. He did a great job and he donated all of the minor costs involved.

The CCC visited again on the October 22 and cut back the fire load on the slope leading up to the Senior citizens complex. It was then that I noticed that someone up there has been tossing tree trimmings down the side of the hill in our direction, which effectively defeats the purpose. I visited with the manager of the senior facility and expressed my concerns and what we have done to prevent a fire and he agreed that he will make sure that we are not working at cross purposes in the future. There were no complaints from the senior complex other than questions as to the plans for the hospital.

Operations: We ran two successful bus tours in October and four tours for students. The bus tours netted another \$750 in train ride income for minimal effort. I will continue to try and develop more of this business.

RAL's are slow and nobody wants to do them anyway. We had to cut back from seven day a week operation to five days a week this year due to instructor shortages. If I don't get more people, I will be forced to cut it back to four days a week next year. Three of the instructors will be in their eighties next year. Most of them take off for several weeks of vacation each summer. I'm running out of people. We either need to raise the price again to make up the difference, raise the salary of the instructors or recruit and train more people. Failing that, I have no choice but to cut back on the number of days we can operate this program next year.

On a good note, we have successfully taken care of every customer that had an advanced reservation. Our record is still 100% for two years straight. While we had to turn away a lot of walk-ins and some reservations, everyone who had an advanced reservation was accommodated. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no complaints or injuries. Well done. My compliments to all of the RAL engineers.

Revenue: Overall income passing through the museum has surpassed 2004 and 2005 levels. Sales and donations are up while Operations is still lagging behind previous years. Overall revenue is up \$17K from last years total and \$11K from 2004. We still have four or five weeks to increase these numbers. We have a mail order catalog out and will be attending one show in Roseville. I went to Yuba City on Oct 28th to learn a new software program for online stores. The program will work and the software is free. It will cost about \$15.00 a month to host the site on a server somewhere. While the program is acceptable to me, I will have to invest in some computer upgrades on my machine here at the museum before I can start using this. In the meantime, the old traditional methods should work if I can get some cooperation with the web staff.

Visitors have been steady. No complaints or injuries.

The shop, kitchen, stand pipes next to the oil house and water fountains and the west half of the shower car have been drained. I hope to have outside winterization completed right after the Train/ARM visit. I strongly recommend that we set up for the Santa Trains as soon as possible and I IMPLORE YOU to begin preparations now while the weather is good and not wait until the last minute like has been done in previous years. Traditionally, the weather gets really nasty over Thanksgiving weekend. It would be great to have everything set up before Thanksgiving instead of freezing our asses off getting this set up at the last minute.

Discussion: Winter Shutdown. Last year we found a way to completely shut off the water to the building and shower car, thus saving a lot of money on electricity and gas. The downside of this is that we had some problems with scale and other mineral deposits in the lines when we recharged the system in the spring. These deposits plug up the rubber diaphragms in the plunger type toilets, which cause them to run excessively. The deposits could also have an adverse effect on valves, etc.

The other downside of course, is that there are no usable toilets over the winter. I would not expect to recharge the system until mid March. This would include the shower car. I will investigate securing some kind of reduced rate for our volunteers who might come up to work in the winter at one of the local motels, which the FRRS could possibly subsidize. But since so little work gets done in the winter anyway, would it be worth it? We could have winterized the shower car completely after September and probably keep it off until mid March without losing much in the way of volunteers.

Question: How do you want to proceed this year?

Overview: We've had a good year. We've had no injuries and we haven't broken anything. This is very important.

It has been a year full of minor victories and slow steady progress in most areas with no steps backwards. I can only hope that this is a sign that we are getting better and that we're building a firm foundation for the future. My biggest disappointment this year is the lack of volunteer labor in all areas. There were a lot of things that we could have accomplished this year if we could just get some people up here to put in a few days of labor. We can't blame gas prices, because that did not keep the visitors away. While a few of our old members have returned, (Sluggo, Ski, McClain, Hanlon, Tom Potts, Bob Lindley, Jim Ley, etc) and we have recruited some new people (Cody Wilson, Paul Lanyi, Greg Elams, Duane Vanderveen, Charlie Spikes, James Mason, Rick Gruninger and others), WHERE are the regulars who used to support this place? We were woefully short on operating crews, RAL engineers, mechanical, facility workers, track workers, and special project volunteers.

I sometimes wonder if I, have somehow scared off volunteers. Or have I just scared off the members who used to come up and hang around but really didn't do any work anyway? Is it a management issue? Has this place become too much work for the casual volunteer who just wants to come up and have fun but doesn't really want to work? Are we inhibiting potential volunteers in some way? Have we become too structured and are inhibiting the free spirits who used to be here?

I'm not sure what the problem is. Maybe it's a transitional thing that will change. With all of the improvements to the place and the general acceptance of the direction we have taken, it seems strange that we seem to be losing volunteers.

Yet, when someone does come up to actually work, I think the productivity of these volunteers has risen dramatically and the quality of the work is far superior to what it used to be.

Strange. Maybe some of you can raise this question at the ARM/Train convention or during their visit here this week.

Introduce Allan Lamb

Show Christmas Tree Ornament

Gift Shop Theft