

## Santa Trains A Big Hit

The Portola Railroad Museum's 1999 Santa Trains proved to be quite popular again this year. The City of Portola and the Eastern Plumas Chamber of Commerce as a natural follow-up to the City's tree-lighting ceremony, December 4th, advertised the first weekend's train. As a result, we enjoyed large crowds of visitors who came to the Museum. Estimates have placed the number of visitors at 350 people. In fact, the train ran nearly two hours without a break for the crew due to the crowd size. Many people took advantage of our hospitality, cookies, and hot drinks in the Beanery keeping the crew in there hopping.

Although we feared a low turnout on the second weekend, December 11, since we had no corresponding activities in town, we were pleasantly surprised. What can only be described as an excellent turnout again enjoyed our hospitality and train rides, whose ambiance was enhanced by a small mid-week snowfall, just enough to make things white and glistening in the train's lights.



Santa and Mrs. Claus heard many "gift requests" from visitors as they enjoyed hot chocolate and cookies from the Beanery

- Norman Holmes

Preparations for this year's trains began in October, when Steve Habeck continued the process started last year of drilling and setting hex-head screws on the cabooses to hold the strings of lights, replacing the cumbersome, time-consuming, and unsightly use of duct-taping the lights in place. The actual stringing of lights started the week before Thanksgiving, and all five cabooses were ready by Thursday, December 2nd. Steve Habeck's family, who gave up a Saturday to assist, untangled lights, tested, repaired, and staged over 30 strings of lights. Meg Evans made rapid progress possible in the last 3 days of light stringing.

The locomotive used for the train, our Fairbanks-Morse switcher 1857, had its lights installed on the 4<sup>th</sup>. The very capable crew of volunteers that were there saw to this as well as countless other tasks (cleaning the shop, lighting caboose stoves, preparing the water system in the Beanery, etc.) that needed taking care of as

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Santa's helpers in the Beanery included l. to r. Mary Habeck, Missy Iverson, Loli Bryan, and Edna Ede.

- Norman Holmes

## Railfair Expenditures

Our participation in Railfair '99 in Sacramento was costly, but the value of exposure to the public showing our museum cannot be calculated. We spent \$15,100 for brochures, program advertising, booth set up materials and volunteer supplies.

Restoration and repair expenses to bring our GP20, 2001 up to FRA standards cost \$9,134. Only \$1,030 was made up by member donations. Many, many hours of volunteer labor was donated.

Gift Shop sales netted the museum \$2,500.

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the afternoon wore on. Bruce and Sue Cooper decorated the Beanery and due to the group effort, everything was ready on time, and worked! We had heat in the Gift Shop, Beanery, Ops Office, the 1857, and in 4 of the 5 cabooses, by use of electricity, propane, fuel oil, and hot water (thanks, Ed Powell, for fixing the stove in the ATSF caboose).

The Santa Trains would not be possible without the volunteers. The December 4<sup>th</sup> crew included Santa train "veterans" Tom Graham, Judy and Melissa McGrath, Bob Carr, Ken Iverson, and Steve Habeck, joined by "first-timers" Jim Gidley, Sr. (FRRS Trainmaster), Ed Powell, and Pat Brimmer, who with wife Linda came in from Salt Lake City. Most of these people were at the Museum all day Saturday, the 4<sup>th</sup>, making sure all last minute tasks were attended to. As usual, Tom Graham's presence, in particular, was invaluable. The very busy crew in the Beanery was led by Edna Ede, assisted by Missy Iverson, Linda Brimmer, and Lolli Bryan, who had

to close the gift shop intermittently to assist the swamped crew in the Beanery. Ken Iverson assisted in the Gift Shop when possible amongst his many other tasks. The Christmas tree was set up in the Beanery through the efforts of Andy and Gayle Anderson, and looked great.

The December 11 Santa Train was operated by a crew consisting of Directors Vic Neves and Ed Wagner, Asst. Trainmaster Kerry Cochran, Don Borden, Vickie Krois, Ken Iverson (who seemed to be everywhere), along with Steve Habeck. Edna Ede and Missy Iverson were in the Beanery again, and Lolli Bryan again did double duty between the gift shop and the Beanery. Santa himself made an appearance this weekend (Mrs. Claus had to fill in the first weekend). Our thanks go to Dave Rudolf and Linda Knudsen who helped with the arrangements for the visit by Mr. and Mrs. Claus. Ken Roller operated the model railroad on both days, fascinating throngs of children of all ages. If

we have omitted anyone who helped out, please forgive us. Recognizing our volunteers, regardless of what tasks they perform, is essential.

Even Mother Nature and Uncle Pete contributed to the success of this year's trains. The weather for each night was clear, cold (but not too cold), no wind, and the UP yard was clear most of the evening on both nights, allowing the train to be seen from Highway 70.

Special recognition is due Ken Iverson, who allowed us to use his generator to power the lights on the engine, as well as being seemingly everywhere at once. He also made himself available many times during the

preparation phase to assist in moving equipment. Recognition is also due Mary Habeck who is used to Steve being a stranger in November and December while the train is set up. She also had the insight to provide pizzas for the crews on both weekends, since none of them had time to eat all day each Saturday the train operated. On top of that, after she brought the pizzas, she helped out in the Beanery! All of the lights were removed from the



The Habeck family's work "glowed" as the trains left the station on the trip around the balloon track.  
- Norman Holmes

train were between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of December and placed in storage ready for next year.

Cookies for the evenings were donated by Edna Ede, Leslie Anderson, Missy Iverson, Sue Cooper, Lolli Bryan, Mary Habeck, Elaine Lucas, Marietta Thomsen, Kay Betzer, Irene Bonta, Ann Foster, and Good and Plenty. We wish to thank all of you for your donations, which helped make this event a success.

The Santa Train idea was conceived by Skip Englert, and turned into reality by Gordon Wollesen and Steve Habeck. We are proud of our accomplishment and can't say enough about our FRRS volunteers that make this event happen every December. Those of you who have stood out there in the cold, looking at all the wide-eyed kids and talking to appreciative parents, know why you do it. We thank you. For the rest of the FRRS membership, take pride that your support helps make things like this happen.

- Steve Habeck, Sue Cooper, Ken Iverson