

Membership Spotlight - Philip J. (Phil) Schmierer

I have always been infatuated by trains, ever since I was a toddler. I was born in Los Angeles in September of 1956 and raised in Redondo Beach, CA. The first train that I can remember seeing was Southern Pacific Black Widow F-units. We used to go out to Banning, California, and watch trains on Saturday morning, spend the night and come home Sunday, stopping in Yucaipa to visit Aunt Emma. The spotting of the Black Widows was on one of those trips.



I graduated High School in 1974 and after I turned 18, I actively started trying to obtain employment down in the LA area with SP/UP/AT&SF. No one was hiring as there was that recession starting in 1974. So, I attended El Camino Junior College there by Redondo and worked in two gas stations, worked in a liquor store and I was also a "Burger Boy" at Carl's Junior Unit #71.

In early 1977, I went up north to get out of LA and I ended up taking 10 student trips on the McCloud River Railroad Company. I had been riding the McCloud since 1969 as my parents and I discovered that railroad on one of our Pacific Northwest summer vacations.

Sid Muma, the president of the McCloud RRR, knew that I was riding and I asked if I could get a job there. He said he'd give me 10 "Official Student Trips", but he would not hire me because he said that the McCRRR would probably fold up when I was in my late forties/early fifties. But he could give me a letter of recommendation if I was successful in showing ability to grasp railroad safety and the operating rules. I did, he gave me the letter. It was early June 1977, I was staying with my brother Bill in Hat Creek, California. Just for fun, I was looking in the phone book and saw the WP office number for Keddie. I called and I believe it was Phil Olds who answered the phone. I told him I had completed 10 student trips at McCloud and I was wondering if they were accepting applications. Phil said that as a matter of fact they were ! I asked him how late they were open and he said he'd be there until 4 p.m. So, I jumped in the old 1970 Mustang and flew over to Keddie. I got there in time and filled out my application. I got picked up by WP and did the Brakeman School at Stockton, CA. I did two weeks switchman student trips in Oroville, then three road trips out of Stockton Yard .

I passed all the tests and made my first paid trip as a switchman in South Sacramento Yard on July 28th, 1977 at 23:59 on the So Sac "Hill Job". Forty one years , three months and three days later, I retired here in Dunsmuir CA.

I got turned on to the Portola Railroad Museum in 1984, I believe it was. Jim Ley was already there and he was the person who turned me on to the place. I knew Jim from being a Docent at the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento. Kirk Baer and I did docent training together at CSRM and met Jim there.

I really thought that WPRM was the coolest place I'd ever been, RR wise, and was hooked! It was in its infancy back then. The WP 921 and the WP 608 were there, as were the Silver Debris and a sister bunk car which I believe now is the "Silver Shower" car. I might have those reversed as that's been 36 years ago....

I currently work in our Mechanical Department as Lead Carman. I also will jump into other projects as needed as I like the variety of various chores that are needed to be done around the property.

I'm not afraid of getting dirty! Now that I'm retired, I hope to come over more often as it's a pretty painless 4.5 hour drive down 89 to 44 down to Quincy and on over to Portola from Dunsmuir. Besides I get to foam on the Highline both ways on that journey! I'm looking forward to many more productive years as a volunteer at WPRM. It's always a blast to come over and contribute plus see old friends.