



# THE TRAIN SHEET

News from the Feather River Rail Society



## Preserving "THE FEATHER RIVER ROUTE"

Issue - 199

October/November/December 2023

### President's Pin

- Greg Elems  
12/14/23



This will be my last President's Pin for the year of 2023. With that in mind, I would like to wish everyone a happy holiday season. We are bringing the 2023 season to a close with our long running tradition of Santa and a train ride. Our first Saturday was very successful in three ways. First, we had a great turnout, second everything on the train looked good and finally, the cookies were delicious. The second weekend was even better. We had to make a store run to resupply our hot chocolate and cookies. We ended our second weekend of Santa and Trains with pizza. With two weekends under our belt, I'm looking forward to our last weekend.

Even in this joyous time of year, we have had some sadness also. We lost our founding member Norman Holmes on November 12, 2023. Be sure to check out our web page for Norm's departure on the society's website.

While I never worked with Norman on the Union Pacific proper, I did work with him at the museum. I consider it an honor to have done so. I would be visiting the museum and Norman would wrangle me into helping with switching at odd times. I was working out of Portola in 1986 as a brakeman and occasionally had to fill my time between runs so I'd check out the museum.

We also lost Jim Lekas on November 27, 2023. Jim was looking forward to authoring a book about the WP's lost railroad under the waters

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### Departure - Norm Holmes 1927 - 2023



Norm Holmes passed away peacefully at home with his family on Sunday, November 12, 2023.

Norm began his year-round employment with the Western Pacific Railroad in 1953. He worked switching and locals in the San Francisco Bay Area. He made 90 round trips on the *California Zephyr*, being promoted to engineer in 1959.

Norm decided to move to Portola with his family in 1970. They bought 15 acres of pine forested land and built a home in 1971. He lived there until it became necessary to move to Carson City, Nevada for health care.

The Western Pacific was absorbed into the Union Pacific System on December 22, 1982. In an attempt to preserve some of the equipment from the WP, Norm Holmes organized the Feather River Rail Society. He arranged for UP to donate a "covered wagon", WP 921D streamline diesel locomotive, for preservation at Portola. The unit was formally presented to the Greater Portola (now Eastern Plumas) Chamber of Commerce at the Feather River Railroad Days in August 1983.

Norm was elected to the Board of Directors and became FRRS President in February 1984.

Shortly thereafter, the FRRS became a nonprofit corporation. A new museum was created, the Portola Railroad Museum. Under Norm's leadership the museum grew from literally an empty building to what it is today, the Western Pacific Railroad Museum at Portola.

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## November 2023 WPRM Track Work

- Roger Stabler

In the last few years, several FRRS members were able to work with him to create articles for the WESTERN PACIFIC Headlight magazine, the society's journal of WP history. It includes articles of interest for modelers and those wishing to know more of the historical aspects of the Western Pacific and subsidiary roads.

One of Norm's greatest adventures was when he returned to the museum in 2022 during the WP convention, and was an engineer on the restored WP 165 steam locomotive.

We will all miss the founding father of the Feather River Rail Society.

There will be a Celebration of Life for Norm and Barbara after museum closing on May 25, 2024.



*FRRS Founder Norm Holmes ready to run WP 165*

*- Photo by Kerry Cochran 5/15/2022*



*Above: Roger Stabler spiking ties in the Rip Switch - Photo by Greg Elems 11/16/23*

*Left: David Elems spiking the switch stand on the Rip Switch - Photo by Roger Stabler 11/15/23*

## 2024 Operating Department Crew Training

- Kerry Cochran  
General Superintendent

Crew training will be held on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024, starting at 10 a.m. at the museum. Please register for crew training and complete the online rules exam before attending the crew training day on the society's website. There may be another crew training day scheduled, if necessary, so please watch for any announcements.

I want to invite all FRRS members to become a member of the Operating Department and give us a hand operating the caboose trains at the museum for the general public. We also need crew year-round to move equipment at the museum for display and maintenance. Additionally we need crews for our Pumpkin Express and Santa Trains events.



I would also like to have all of the current Operating Department crew members check their calendars and see if they can volunteer at least one or two days a month during the 2024 operating season. "Many hands make light work" certainly applies to running our museum. By working together we can provide a safe, enjoyable experience for our guests and other members.

All of our time is valuable and I certainly appreciate all your help. However, we need to staff the caboose trains for our visiting public and we need to make sure that we can operate with a full crew each summer weekend.

There may be questions along the way so please send email to me at [operating\\_dept@wplives.org](mailto:operating_dept@wplives.org) and tell me what weekends you may be able to commit to volunteer. If you have any other comments, please tell me so I may be able to address them.

(... President's Pin continued from page 1)

behind the Oroville Dam and other local rail-roading history. I never met him but heard all about him and his knowledge and enthusiasm for the WP.

The FRRS as a whole will feel these losses and as FRRS President I want to pass on my condolences to all the family and friends of our departed brothers in the WPRM family.

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## Departure Jim Lekas

- Jim Atkins  
Archive Staff

I received sad news today that my good friend and fellow railfan Jim Lekas passed today at age 87 in Winchester, Virginia, where he was living with his son. Jim was in the hospital after a fall.



*Jim at a recent game night with his family.*

- Kevin Lekas

A longtime member of the FRRS, He contributed many materials for Ken Rattenne's Feather River Route books and several other books on railroads.

He was an avid Western Pacific Railroad fan and his knowledge of the Feather River Canyon was next to the best of the WP engineers that ran over the line.

The museum just started working with him on a new book project. We hope that we can continue on the book project in his memory.