

Western Pacific Railroad Museum Events Feed the Community

- Patty Clawson

More than just facilitating local awareness or providing another event, the Pumpkin Patch Express and Santa Trains hosted by the Western Pacific Railroad Museum quite literally help feed the community.

It all started with a Santa Train in December 1992 when a group of Feather River Rail Society (FRRS) volunteers decided to decorate trains with festive lights and offer free hot cocoa, coffee and cookies to the community. As the event grew in popularity, so did the awareness about food scarcity in Portola, California, where the railroad museum is located. With this awareness, the FRRS decided to offer an admission discount with the donation of nonperishable food items so the local bank, EPCAN, could stock their shelves. "In true Christmas spirit, we wanted to find a way to give back to our community," said Eugene Vicknair, Secretary of the Feather River Rail Society. "We knew our community struggled with the ability to provide food for their families, so the FRRS decided to offer an admission discount with the addition of nonperishable food."



In the same spirit of giving, the Pumpkin Patch Express event was created in 2016. Admission was also discounted, cans were collected, and nonperishable food was once again provided to EPCAN.

According to Dink Rife, EPCAN volunteer, it is estimated that 650 to 850 pounds of food are donated yearly from the Pumpkin Patch Express event and 800 to 1,000 pounds of food are donated from Santa Trains. "In the short span of 10 months, we have served 3,944 clients (averaging 394 a month) and 1,635 households (averaging 163 a month.) She stated, "EPCAN welcomes all un-expired donations of food as well as monetary donations."

Even left over pumpkins from the Pumpkin Patch Express event don't go to waste. In recent years, the FRRS decided to support animal welfare, so the extra pumpkins are packed into boxes and moved by forklift onto a truck for the animals at the Sierra Nevada Zoological Park in Reno, Nevada.

"Donating pumpkins to the Sierra Nevada Zoological Park is something we've done for the last couple of years," said Greg Elems, President of the Feather River Rail Society. "It's yet another way our events help feed the community, even if they are on the wild side."

A refuge for exotic animals, the Sierra Nevada Zoological Park provides a permanent, safe, and comfortable environment for all displaced exotic species. In addition to providing care for the animals, the zoo strives to bring top-quality educational and enriching experiences to their visitors. According to Cheryl Jones, Manager of the Sierra Nevada Zoological Park, "the donated pumpkins not only provide hours of entertainment for the animals but offer an extra nutritional value to their meals."

