

2000 Santa Trains - A FRRS Tradition Continues

By Steve Habeck.

Dedicated to the late Skip Englert, who first came up with the Santa Train concept.

Once again on the first two Saturdays in December, the FRRS extended its hospitality to the community with the annual Santa Trains. The first evening, Dec. 2nd, got underway following the City of Portola's tree-lighting up town, and resulted in the FRRS volunteers working non-stop for nearly two hours, as a large crowd came down to the Museum to sample cookies and hot drinks, visit Santa in the Beanery, and ride our brightly-lit train. Despite not having any city function scheduled on the 9th, a crowd nearly as large as the previous weekend's came down to enjoy our hospitality. Good weather (clear but cold) also helped bring out the crowds.

As usual, the Santa Train itself consisted of the five cabooses used for the summer train rides, all decorated with white lights outlining their shapes (a scheme devised by Steve Habeck and wired up by Gordon Wollesen), and pulled by our Fairbanks-Morse switcher FR&W 1857, also decked out in lights. The usual high standards of hospitality were maintained by the Beanery crew, serving up hot drinks and cookies by the plateful; the model railroad was in full operation, despite the recent theft of some rolling stock, and the Gift Shop was open for business. New this year was the opening of the WP CZ dome *Silver Hostel* and SN caboose 1632 for walk-through by our visitors, both cars lit up for inspection. Ken Roller has done a great job setting up the interior of the SN 1632 to look like a working caboose, and although it's still a work in progress, it makes a good display.

Of course, the Santa Trains project does not run so smoothly without set-up work. Yardmaster Steve Habeck and his family spent a large part of the Thanksgiving weekend at the Museum putting lights up on the cabooses, a job Steve wanted to finish, since he had been bumped out of Portola as an engineer and had to leave for Winnemucca. Fortunately, the effort put in over the two previous years to put screws on the cabooses, making light installation much easier and faster (and eliminating the use of duct tape!) allowed all five cabooses to be completely decked out after about eight hours' work (about 1/3 of the time it previously took). Cabooses done, Steve headed for Winnemucca to work. He would be back for the weekend.

On Saturday, Dec. 2nd, the first Santa Train wasn't scheduled to run until about 5:30 PM, but Facilities Manager Ken Iverson was at the Museum by 9 AM. The water system for the Beanery had to be filled and vented, the hot water heater fired up, and the locomotive had to be watered up and its hot-start system fired up to preheat the engine, so we could get it to start later in the day. Tasks accomplished, Ken went back home for a while, but was back by mid-afternoon. Meanwhile, Steve Habeck had arrived from Winnemucca, and set about rigging up lights for the 1857, with Tom Graham, Judy McGrath, and Melissa McGrath from Santa Rosa arriving in time to finish all the prep work. The generator for the train lights had to be tested and serviced; the caboose stoves had to be fueled and lit; and the yard had to be

switched to get ready for the train to run. In addition, the Beanery still had to be decorated; the tree Norm Holmes set up had yet to be trimmed, and several lights were burned out in the shop and outside. However, by 5 PM, the Beanery was decorated, the tree was trimmed, the shop lights all worked, the yard was switched, and all was in readiness. Again, somehow it all came together.

Another unseen part of the Santa Train operation is the restoration phase. After each weekend, the Beanery water system must be drained and blown down; the locomotive must be drained (after switching the yard!); the caboose stoves must be shut down; and after the second weekend, the lights must be taken down and stored for next year, the generator put away, and the Beanery returned to normal. While it may seem there is no rush to accomplish these tasks, winter storms can make removal of the lights (and Museum access) difficult. There is typically no list of volunteers to put things away, so it usually falls upon the "regulars" at the Museum to clean up. Help here, as well as with the setup phase, would be much appreciated later this year. Contact Ken Iverson or Steve Habeck if you'd like to get involved in the satisfaction we get out of doing all this work.

The impressive list of FRRS volunteers that played a part in this year's successful Santa Trains includes:

Cookie Bakers: Missy Iverson, Edna Ede, Leslie Anderson, Barbara Holmes, June Mathews, Elaine Lucas, Kay Betzer, Marielta Thomsen, Sue Cooper, Bud Edwards.

Beanery Decorators: Mary, Donna, Kathy, Jackie, and Jennifer Habeck; Vickie Krois.

Beanery Crew: Edna Ede, Missy Iverson, Mary Habeck, Sue Cooper, Linda Brimmer, Donna Habeck.

Gift Shop: Barbara Holmes, Norman Holmes.

Model Railroad: Ken Roller.

Train Operations: Steve Habeck, Vickie Krois, Bob Salling, Tom Graham, Judy McGrath, Melissa McGrath, Ken Iverson, Ed Powell, Vic Neves, Ed Wagner, Pat Brimmer, Kerry Cochran, Eric Stephens, Eugene Vicknair, Frank Brehm.

Facilities/Support: Ken Iverson, Tom Graham, Judy McGrath, Melissa McGrath, Norman Holmes, Steve Habeck.



Santa and Mrs. Claus heard many requests during the evening.

-photo by Norman Holmes