



VRA DIGEST

“SO CLOSE, ONLY THE PA YCHECK IS MISSING”

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MEETING NOTICE

Our next meeting will be held on Friday, August 20, 2004 at the Hawthorne Station starting at 7:30PM.

Entertainment will be the traditional ***OPEN PROJECTOR NIGHT***. Bring along a two or three dozen of your own slides but be sure to be Kodak Carousel compatible. If you're not so equipped, bring your own projector! Remember to bring a chair and a friend. .See you there!

FROM THE CREWCALLER'S OFFICE

By Mark Schmitt

Please forgive the unorthodox look of your issue of the digest—the meeting deadline looms and there are a number of volunteer opportunities coming up soon, so I've been pressed into service to get a combination crew letter/newsletter out without benefit of the usual formatting. Since time is short, I fear that I'm going to monopolize this issue of the digest—so don't look for a lot of the usual departments.

One of the truly unique features of our group is the high level of membership involvement. In a lot of other organizations 90%+ of the membership just want to pay their dues, get their newsletter, and sit around at boring monthly meetings. While we certainly enjoy our newsletter and meeting, the vast majority of the membership actually gets their hands on at least a project or two during the course of the year. Some members show up for almost everything. While this sounds like work, and it sometimes is, it is also a great opportunity to meet new and interesting people, learn new skills, and get behind the scenes for a view of places you normally can't get. Most of it is actually fun. The VRA is also unique in its support of other group's efforts. Here's what's coming up:

AUGUST 21-22, 2004: BLACK RIVER AND WESTERN RAILFAN'S WEEKEND RINGOES, NJ

We'll be taking the speeders down to Ringoes, NJ for the weekend to give rides. Of course, we'll also be selling trinkets and doing general public relations work. If we can get together a crew of about six to eight people for each day, we should be well staffed. More details will be shared at the meeting.

SEPTEMBER 18-19, 2004: JERSEY CENTRAL VETERAN'S REUNION

LIBERTY STATE PARK, JERSEY CITY, NJ

This event has grown in popularity since its inception two years ago. The VRA has been glad to play a part in the behind the scenes set up and support of several of the activities, notably providing track car rides and assisting with the operation of the large scale layout. On Saturday 9/18, we will most likely be setting up chairs and tables on the old CRR of NJ terminal concourse at Communipaw Avenue in Jersey City (forgive me, I continually regress into the location's historical context.., many know it today as Liberty State Park). We'll also unload and assemble the large-scale train ride, get our motor cars situated, and generally lend a hand wherever we can.

Sunday 9/19 is the big event for the public where we'll operate the speeders and help out with the large scale railroad. Since this is the point at which passengers board the boats to the Statue of Liberty, this tends to be a popular event. Saturday tends to provide some unique opportunities to see areas of the old terminal building. As always, many hands make for light work and there's room for a large number of volunteers. With enough people, there should be opportunities for all of us to attend some of the events on Sunday and still keep our end of the event operating smoothly.

OCTOBER 16-17, 2004: NARCOA MEET ON THE NYS&W

BUTLER - WARWICK - LITTLE FERRY

This is another event that, thankfully, is becoming a tradition. As with the past events we'll be looking for six teams of flaggers each day to cover the grade crossings along the route and a few additional folks to handle registrations, lunch vouchers, and other details. These events run out of Butler, NJ both days and will run west to Warwick NY one day and east to Little Ferry the next. As with past events, if you'll work one day, you can ride on the speeders the other.

This is something in which many of you have not yet taken an interest, but something that you may enjoy if you can give a weekend to it. Basically, the North American Rail Car Owners Association (NARCOA) operates an excursion of track speeders (the small, gas powered hand cars that the signal and track maintenance crews used to use in the days before Hi-railers).

Flagging the crossings is what makes these trips so successful, especially here in Northern New Jersey. VRA provides safety vests, flags, and instructions to six two-person crews who drive along the excursion route by automobile and leapfrog the track ears from crossing to crossing. This may sound a little intense and it does require your attention, but it's actually quite leisurely. Those who flag on one day are welcomed to ride the other aboard the track cars. We set up the flagging / riding assignments on a first come, first served basis, so if you want to choose, sign up early! This is a really unique way to see a railroad. Obviously, what is needed for this activity is people with automobiles and a little knowledge of the railroad, although the instructions are so good that even this is optional.

DECEMBER, 2004: VRA SANTA TRAIN ????????

RIDGE WOOD, NJ--HARRIMAN, NY?????

As good as our organization is, and despite the high level of interest and commitment to the activities we support, we have to look to our own needs occasionally. The sad reality is that we need a pile of cold hard cash in order to have any hope of meeting our operating expenses next year. This includes such things as insurance; the phone, lights, heat, water, and rental of the Hawthorne station; printing and mailing expenses

for the newsletter and other correspondence, etc. The “Benign Dictatorship” that heads our group cannot launch something as involved as a Santa Train without at least some definite commitment of time and effort from a cross section of the membership. In fact, the officers would much prefer that a committee of the members to undertake the task with some help from them rather than the other way around. This includes more than the obvious duties of staffing the train and entertaining the passengers on the day the train operates. There are weeks of behind the scenes work— advertising, promotion, ticket sales, order taking, logistics, etc.—that must be done. While all this requires some time and effort, when broken into small tasks none of it is difficult. In short, without some work on the part of a few dozen of the membership, we cannot hope to mount an excursion this year.

There are two items of good news. One is that we have submitted a request to NJ Transit for a train and are awaiting their reply. The second is that there is still time to get ourselves organized to pull a trip together if we have the collective will. Please give some earnest thought to a commitment to help this project forward. We will discuss the possibility of a Santa Train at the meeting on 8/20. If you cannot make the meeting, please drop a line on the e-mail address on the masthead.

DECEMBER 11, 2004:

TRI-STATE RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY SANTA TRAIN

NETCONG — HACKETTSTOWN — DOVER

JERSEY CENTRAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY SANTA TRAIN

RARITAN — WESTFIELD — HIGH BRIDGE

Yep, two of the local NRHS chapters are running Santa Trains and both have decided to run their trips on the same day. While this certainly complicates matters, I include this notice here so that others like myself who hold memberships in both organizations can weigh their options. VRA members who are not members of either of these groups are welcome to assist them nonetheless, especially if we decide against operating our own train. I am assisting John Drennan with the TSRHS train, while Jim Otten and Wayne Wasiler are heading the JCRHS effort. Both groups deserve and need your support so please consider turning out for one or the other. Car hosts, Santa's, Elves, Station Platform crews and a host of other positions need to be filled to ensure the success of these fundraisers.

JANUARY 14, 15, 16 & 17 2005: RRPCA MEET

MORRISTOWN, NJ

The Railroad Passenger Car Owners Association will be meeting at Morristown over the Martin Luther King Weekend in January. We have offered our services to the Morristown & Erie to assist them with registration reception, and possibly with trip operation over the weekend. Details have yet to gel, but let me know if you have an interest. This is a good opportunity for those who are interested in private cars to get a closer look.

MARCH, 2005: EASTRAIL

WASHINGTON, NJ

It's still a little too early to plan for this one, but here's a heads up.

I've enclosed one of my traditional survey sheets, so please return a copy, give me a call, or buttonhole me at a meeting if you're interested in getting involved in any of the above.

PROJECTS ON THE MOVE

HAWTHORNE STATION: Some progress has been made in discussions with the Hawthorne municipal government and the business council regarding the relocation of the station building about seventy feet north of its current location. It's just possible that DOT funding may be made available to facilitate moving the local landmark in order to improve safety and visibility at the Royal Avenue / Diamond Bridge Road intersection and grade crossing. Even with outside help, some additional fundraising may be needed. Stay tuned.

On a less dramatic but nonetheless important note, we need to put together a work detail to repair a couple of windows and perform some other minor maintenance work around the station.

BILL WILKIE: While not one of our own projects, Bill has been heading up an effort among other members of the URIIS to have a number of large format photographic prints by the late Homer Hill made available for public display in a variety of venues. Bill has successfully raised over \$2,000 for this effort so far and has succeeded in having several dozen of Homer's prints archivally preserved and framed for display. Currently, they are on exhibition at the Bernardsville Library in Homer's hometown, but can be made available for display at any other suitable venue. The project is still several hundred dollars short of its goal. While we as an organization cannot afford to contribute, Bill has asked for an opportunity to speak about the project at the next meeting. Projects such as these go a long way toward meeting non-profit organizations need to support public education in their areas of expertise and this project is especially noteworthy in that regard.

MARK SCHMITT: Speaking of being on the move, some of you may be unaware that I've moved within the past year and need to update your address books if you want to get in touch with me. My new address is 65 Oakwood Village Apt.7, Flanders, NJ 07836-8930. Phone 973-584-4043. I've also changed careers, so my old e-mail address is dead, and since I'm a bit of a Luddite, you'll have to contact me via traditional means...unless you happen to have a telegraph.

**VOLUNTEER RAILROADERS ASSOCIATION PARTICIPATION
SURVEY:**

NAME(s): _____

Mark,

If space and other circumstances permit, please schedule me according to the considerations shown below. I want to work: (*check as appropriate*)

JERSEY CENTRAL RAILROAD HERITAGE FESTIVAL .

Saturday September 18 & Sunday September 19

Liberty State Park, Jersey City, New Jersey

Please respond by 9/11

- Both days
- I day (*Check one of the choices below*)
 - I can work only Saturday 9/18
 - I can work only Sunday 9/19.
- Sorry, I'm not available to work either of these dates.

NARCOA TRACK CAR TRIPS

October 16, Butler, New Jersey to Little Ferry

October 17, Butler to Warwick, New York

Please respond by 10/1

- Both days
- One day (Check the appropriate choices below)
 - I can work the Saturday 10/16 trip.
 - I can work the Sunday 10/17 trip.
- Sorry, I'm not available to work these dates, but please contact me when you consider the next schedule.

(Use the line below to indicate any 'druthers' you may have; i.e.: car assignment, work with relatives/friends type of assignment preferred etc. We cannot guarantee a preferred assignment but will fry to accommodate oil reasonable requests. Use the back of the form if more space is needed)

If possible, I'd like to work / ride _____

SAFETY . CUSTOMER SERVICE . TEAMWORK

PLEASE RETURN TO MARK SCHMITT, 65 OAK WOOD VILLAGE APT. 7, FLANDERS, NJ 07836-8930

"So close, only the paycheck is missing!"