

The Digest

Volume 8, Issue 1

February, March april 2006

**Membership Meeting
February 17th at the
Hawthorne Station
starting at 7:30 pm.**

- **Business meeting**
- **Nominations for Officers and Directors**
- **Entertainment for the evening will be the classic old movie “Danger Lights”, you will not want to miss this one. See you there.**

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DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

As you may have heard by now, some fundamental changes have been made to our organization. Elections are on the immediate horizon. But before we can have elections, we have to have candidates, and before we can have candidates we must have members. Many of the old membership have already signed up as members for 2006 and some have even indicated an interest in running for office. In this issue of the newsletter you will find membership information, and a 2006 membership form. Please get back to us promptly.

Our “benign dictatorship” has often expressed the desire to put down some of the burdens of running the organization and now have their chance. The new VRA is structured to share the responsibility of running the group among the members. Charlie Roselius and Mark Schmitt have agreed to serve as a sort of nominating committee and will be working to put together a slate of candidates. They desire this to be an open process. So, if you have an interest in holding office, even to the point of nominating yourself, contact Charlie or Mark. Addi-

tional nominations will also be accepted at the February membership meeting and nominations will be closed thereafter. Once the slate is finalized, ballots will be mailed and the results made public before the May meeting.

As matters now stand, the following individuals are candidates for office:

PRESIDENT: Chris Vitz

VICE PRESIDENT: Charles Smith

SECRETARY: Vacant

TREASURER: Lou DiGeronimo

DIRECTOR: Bob Blumenstock

DIRECTOR: Dick Ray

DIRECTOR: K. C. Smith

DIRECTOR: Joe Weber

A few notes on the officers' positions: The directors will each serve a three year term, except this first board, where one director will serve a one year term, another a two year term, and the third a full three year term, in order to provide the board with some management continuity. In future, one directorship will expire every year and be due for election. Which director will serve in each of the various terms has yet to be determined. The president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer will each serve one year terms.

It should also be noted that the officers, President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, are the people who will oversee the month to month operation of the organization. The role of the directors is to manage the performance of the corporation as a whole. While the operating officers will meet many times a year, the directors will meet once, while attending, ex-officio, the operating meetings.

As you can see, with the exception of the

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION continued from page 1

directors, we have only one candidate per office. We need some friendly competition to help keep things from falling into a rut. Many of you are members of other organizations where the same people serve as officers year in and year out, often without any new people or fresh ideas coming into the management. They burn out but remain in office, with predictable results. It would be unfortunate if the VRA became this type of group. Participation here has always been welcomed, and encouraged. New



people, new ideas, new approaches to getting things done are what keep the better organizations alive and vibrant. The terms of office are not so long, nor the duties so onerous, that anyone should avoid them. Besides, once you're in charge, you can delegate—and the deposed dictatorship is always available for advice and counsel.

Our group has always operated on a very amiable basis and there's no need to feel that competition for office is some kind of personal contest where the winner is crowned king and the de-

feated are fed to the lions. Nothing we do here is *that* important. We'll all be together again at the next meeting, trying to make a success out of whatever project is on the table. If you have some new ideas, or wish to serve the VRA in a more formal manner, please consider running for office.

If you would like to find out more about what would be required of you to help lead our group or already know you would like to do so you can reach Charlie at 973-838-7384 or Mark at 973-584-4043. They will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

First off, there's the Easter Bunny Train on Saturday April 8th. We'll be running three trains, at approximately 10:30, 12:30, and 2:30 from the Boro Hall station at Glen Rock on the Bergen County Line. We'll obviously need a trainload of car

hosts, Easter Bunnies and other costumed characters, and some people to meet & greet on the platform. Long before we get to running the train, we'll need some evening and week-

end support at the station, answering phones, entering orders, and stuffing envelopes. And before we can get to selling tickets, we'll need to advertise, placing signs, hanging banners, printing and distributing flyers,

*With everything that's on our
plate, no one is sure to go
hungry!*

etc. Evening work is usually Tuesday and Thursday evenings 7 to 9 PM, and Saturday and Sunday from noon to about 3 PM. In keeping with past practice, you don't need to sign up to cover it all, the job gets done by a wide variety of people showing up on various schedules.

April 22nd is the date of an open

speeder run over the Black River & Western, and some flaggers and other support personnel would be useful here.

April 23rd, with a little luck, we might have an additional trip down the Bel-Del from Phillipsburg to Milford. Flaggers will probably not be needed here, but if you spend the previous day

flagging on the BR&W, this might be a good opportunity to ride.

April 29 – 30th is the weekend for the Shad Festival at Lambertville, where we'll be giving rides to the general public on a donation basis.

Almost needless to say, all of

What's on the menu? Continued from page 2.

these operations will involve some work on weekends beforehand, clearing brush, etc. Some administrative issues could use attention, such as identifying hotels and restaurants, etc.

In May (approval pending), we'll do our traditional NYS&W Southern Division NARCOA trip, and we'll need flaggers and other support here.

In June (approval pending), we may run the Central New York

Railroad from Port Jervis to Binghamton. This will be a two day trip. Some flagging and motor vehicle support would be helpful here.

In September (approval pending), we'll repeat last years run over the NYS&W Utica and Syracuse lines, probably on separate weekends, and possibly as two day trips. Three teams of flaggers should cover these runs and other logistical support would be appreciated. Hope-

fully, we haven't cursed ourselves by committing our plans to print. As you can see, a busy year of interesting projects is on the menu! Mark Schmitt will be performing his usual duties as crew caller, feel free to contact him at 973-584-4043 or erie3319@optonline.net.

WHO'S HUNGRY?

"RULE 106. In all cases of doubt or uncertainty, it is required that the safe course be taken and no risks run."—*Erie Railroad, Rules of the Operating Department, November 1, 1908.*

There are few places where the cold chill of doubt runs up the spine faster than when launching a major project that will require the active

participation of a sizable portion of the membership, especially when the project is a needed fund raiser. Often, the reaction of the membership is apparently lukewarm, and the leadership is left standing in the shadow of the entire project,

wondering how all the myriad steps are going to be accomplished. Doubt and uncertainty loom—should we go ahead and hope that others will step up and help or just pull the plug and forget the whole thing now? The safe course is not to risk

The Easter Bunny is hungry and needs to eat. Who's going to feed him?

the organization's treasury or reputation on something that will fail outright, or worse—go to pieces while being executed.

We're at that crucial point again. The Easter Bunny Train needs to roll. It's not like we haven't done this all before. It's a question of, "who?" Who's going to print the posters, hang the signs, place the ads, answer the phones, mail the

tickets, and staff the train. Who's got the decorations, who's going to be the Easter Bunny, who's going to sell hot dogs? All small, easy to do stuff when taken a bite at a time, but collectively overwhelming when you think you have to eat the whole elephant alone.

The beauty of a volunteer organization is that any large undertaking can be broken into small, easy to

chew bites. The question now is "Who's hungry?" It's time to stand up and be counted before rule 106 must be invoked.

To be part of the Easter Train project all you need to do is write an e-mail to our clubs address or call the station and say you want to help. We have already put together the chairmen for each committee now we need to the people to make it all work. **Mark**

2006 Is Looking To Be A Busy Year

As of February 1st we have the following tentatively scheduled;

April 8th, Easter bunny trips on NJT from Glen Rock (tentative, awaiting approval from NJT)

April 22nd, Public Motorcar run on the BR&W between Lambertville and Three Bridges.

April 29 & 30th, Shad Festival in Lambertville, two day event of giving rides to the public from Bridge Street to the canal bridge for donations. (tentative)

May 20-21 Motorcar trip on the NYS&W Southern Division (tentative)

June 17-18, Motorcar trip on the Central New York Railroad (tentative)

Sept 16-17, motorcar trip on the NYS&W Utica line (tentative)

Oct 14-15, motorcar trip on the NYS&W Syracuse line (tentative)

The Easter Bunny Trip is our largest revenue generator each year, usually making up 70% or more of our annual revenue. We can only make this happen with the help of our members, and the involvement of as many people as possible. If you can lend just one hour of your time, it is greatly appreciated.

The Shad Festival was also a large contributor to our funds last year. Over the two days, with only four motorcars we made nearly \$1,000. It is lots of fun for the kids and adults as it is the only ride in town, and it helps

us educate the public about motorcars and helps advertise the Black River & Western Railroad and Bel Del Train rides not that far away. This was a fun two days for those that helped last year and it should be more of the same this year.

The other motorcar trips are awaiting written approval from the NYS&W. Once granted we must make an extra effort to accommodate our guests. The Southern Division trip will be easier than the rest to prepare for, but the others will take more effort especially since many of us are not familiar with the rail lines outside of our immediate vicinity. Help will be needed in find-

*It's up to you to make it all
happen.*

ing, motel/ hotel facilities near the set on point, and near the far away point. Dining establishments must be located that can accommodate a rush of people. And most importantly bathroom facilities must be either brought with us (port a potty on a trailer) or public facilities must be found adjacent to these rail lines at convenient locations to accommodate everyone.

We can make it happen, if everyone is able to contribute a little. For instance, if you have been to Binghamton and know of a place to stay let us know about it.

Chris Vitz

This issue of the Digest is full of lots of in-

Operations Report

formation that is very important to our future. As in everything we have ever done it is up to you, the members, to make all our projects and events a success. I hope that many of you step forward to help guide this group through 2006 and beyond.

In addition to all the projects and events already written about we have a few more that we will be working on this year as well. First is the station and the move we

hope will happen in 2006. We are awaiting the NYSW's final word on the move, which should come in April. If the answer is yes, we will have a big project on our hands and will need lots of help. The other thing that we have talking about for a long time is restoring our L&NE motorcar. I am not sure that we will find the time in 2006 to see that happen but if anyone has an extra special interest in seeing it happen, it can. KC

Damage to the M&NJ

If you have been a subscriber to our email list, you probably already know, some severe damage has occurred to the Middletown & New Jersey track in the last half of 2005. Most of the damage was located about 2 miles south of our shed, but more recently an expedition by Larry Ten Hoeve found that the gauge near the shed, including the switch had been disturbed, preventing any movement of motorcars out of the barn.

In late January Dick Ray and Craig Hartman brought 5-6 landscaping timbers up to the shed and got the gauge between the shed and the switch back in line, but between the switch and the roadway to the north (where we load / unload the cars) is still out of gauge. Frost in the ground is preventing any additional tie installations right now, but as soon as the ground warms up we will need to hold a work day to get the track in gauge. We will then be able to get the A-5 brush cutter down to the

Black River & Western prior to the motorcar trip and Shad Festival for a final grooming.

The section further south that is out of gauge is hundreds of feet long. If, after talking with the M&NJ, we decide there is worthwhile to expend the effort and there is enough interest among the members, we will have to obtain ties, deliver them to the line and then have a few workdays to install the ties, and re-gauge the line. It will be a huge effort if we decide to do it.

As a side note we have recently learned that the M&NJ has been sold and we are not sure of our future there. We made a call to our contact with the old ownership and asked that we get a chance to speak with the new owners to see what may or may not be possible in the future. Until we get the final word we are going to put on hold all but absolutely necessary work, stay tuned.

VRA EVENTS FOR 2005

2005 was a good year for the Volunteer Railroaders Association. We had many exciting events with a few disappointments. Throughout the year we spent many hours on the M&NJ clearing brush and snow and motorcar maintenance at Johnson, NY as well as some member's homes. In January we served as car hosts for the Railroad Passenger Car Alliance Convention Trip to the Meadowlands Maintenance Complex. In

VRA meets new challenges and tackles some old ones in 2005.

March we served food at Eastrail again. We also had our 2nd Easter Bunny trip on NJ Transit which required many hours of taking ticket orders, putting advertising signs all around Northern NJ and removing them after the trip as well as station & on board work on the day of the trip. In April we finally received the preliminary approvals necessary to move the Hawthorne Station. We also assisted the NJTHC museum effort in preparing Granton Tower for

removal of switch levers. In May we had motor car rides in Lambertville, NJ. We had to forego participation in the Minisink Heritage Festival in June because of other commitments, but we did have our first motorcar run on the Northern Division. In July and August we did brush cutting on the BR&W. In August and September some members worked on restoring the Waldwick Tower and helped out at its re-opening. In September our application for tax-exempt status was officially approved. Our motorcar trips on the southern division had to be cancelled, so we took the chance and worked on cleaning up in and around the Hawthorne Station. In October the

Hawthorne Town Festival was cancelled due to rain, and we did not participate in the CNJ Festival because of rain. In November we had our first organizational meeting as a tax-exempt Organization.

Editors note: Each year long time member Paul Trabert takes the time to go through all our Yahoo Group posts and put together a look at the past year. I want to thank Paul for his time and effort. year.

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So close....only the paycheck is missing.

*We are on the web
www.vratrips.org*

EXTRA, EXTRA READ ALL ABOUT IT!

In this issue of The Digest in addition to our normal reports and information you will find a membership letter and application. Please take the time to read over the 2 pages. It is our hope that most of you will like what you see and decide to join the new VRA.

Over the past 13 years this organization has gone through many changes and adapted what we do to what our membership was interested in and we plan on continuing that in the future. Unlike most other railfan groups we do not have a single railroad, era or area as our main focus. We have always been that group that goes with the flow and finds many areas of the railfan hobby for our members to get involved in and we are very proud if that.

We owe a great deal of thanks to everyone who has helped make us what we are today. From the peo-

ple who first came out to staff the NYSW 142 trains, to the folks who took the chance to run the first steam trips to Baird's farm and all the other passenger trains we ran, to all the motorcar guys



who spent countless hours cutting brush so we could have some fun to everyone who recently took their time to see the VRA become a reality to everyone in between.
Thanks!