

Colebrookdale Railroad takes trial run to Pottstown

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By [Paige Cooperstein](#)

What's next for railroad?

The Colebrookdale Railroad Preservation Trust is planning a soft opening in October, when it will welcome the public for rides. The grand opening is anticipated for October 2015.

The trust announced Wednesday that it has reached \$100,000 in cash donations for the rail project between Boyertown and Pottstown. And, counting in-kind donations, the total is \$200,000, according to Nathaniel Guest, trust president.

The trust also announced it has received a \$200,000 grant to begin development of the Boyertown Rail Yard, including the construction of a platform, station building, lighting and landscaping.

Additionally, once funding is in place, the trust will move a former freight house along Furnace Street in Birdsboro to Pottstown's Memorial Park. The freight house will serve as the train station in Pottstown.

For more information, [visit Colebrookdale Railroad's website](#).

Nathaniel Guest walked through the Boyertown Rail Yard Wednesday morning, crunching gravel under his shiny black shoes as he went.

He tipped his conductor's hat to Colebrookdale Railroad Preservation Trust volunteers and periodically wiped his brow with a white cloth. It was 9 a.m., and the temperature already was pushing a humid 80 degrees.

"He sleeps in that suit," joked Leonard Shaner Jr., a volunteer from East Coventry Township. It was appropriate for Guest, president of the trust, to dress the part of conductor as he welcomed over 70 people to one of the first trial runs of the 9-mile passenger rail line between Boyertown and Pottstown. Guest and a group of volunteers have spent more than two years saving the line from closure and subsequently restoring it.

Wednesday's run carried mainly local politicians, trust board members and volunteers along the scenic route that began at the Boyertown Rail Yard at Third and Washington streets and headed for Pottsgrove Manor, the Colonial home of Pottstown founder John Potts.

Along the way, the train wound its way along the Manatawny Creek, through shady woodlands and over quaint bridges as it chugged through Pine Forge and into West Pottsgrove Township.

The restored locomotive and caboose both had previously run the rails in Pennsylvania, while other passenger cars ran in New York, Vermont, Kansas and Kentucky. The vintage cars were built between 1910 and 1920.

Eventually, the Colebrookdale Railroad, nicknamed the "Secret Valley Line" by Guest, will have eight passenger cars capable of carrying about 200 people at a time. A one-way trip takes about 40

minutes, and organizers hope to offer stops at local parks for fishing, camping and biking, as well holiday-themed leisure rides.

"Loco goes with locomotive, and the people behind this project are kind of loco," Boyertown Mayor Marianne Deery joked during remarks before the train embarked. "But as you can see, this is not an impossible dream."

"It was a grass-roots, multi-community, multi-county, public-private partnership," Guest said. Berks County commissioners Christian Y. Leinbach and Mark C. Scott attended the ride, along with Montgomery County Commissioner Bruce L. Castor Jr. They offered remarks about the economic and recreational benefits the line will create for both counties.

"Nathaniel (Guest) likes to refer to this as the Secret Valley Line, but after a few more people ride it, it's not going to be a secret any longer," Scott said.

As the train left Boyertown, onlookers waved from their backyards and held up camera phones from roadsides. Sun dappled the canopy of the open air car, and at some locations, the train passed within several inches of rock formations and trees limbs.

State Rep. Marcy Toepel of Montgomery County pointed out where she used to fish while growing up in Douglass Township.

Passengers disembarked twice - for a short stop at Pottsgrove Manor, across King Street from Memorial Park in Pottstown, and then again at Ironstone Recreation Area in Douglass Township for lunch. The park, which features a picnic area along the Manatawny, is a short walk from where the train stops.

Officials touted the economic benefit of a tourist rail line. Organizers estimate the project could bring 30,000 people a year spending time and money in the Boyertown and Pottstown areas.

Tom Palladino, a West Pottsgrove Township commissioner, believes people new to the area will even explore the neighboring Pottsgroves after biking or hiking from the railroad's stop in Pottstown.

"The railroad ties these counties and communities together in a way in which they haven't been tied for many decades," Leinbach said. Guest and his crew brought the train back into the station in Boyertown with a look to the future. Guest discussed plans for developing platforms, station buildings and landscaping at the stops in Boyertown and Pottstown.

The project was made possible in 2009, when Berks County bought the rail line, known as the Colebrookdale Spur, for \$1.35 million. The money came from a legal settlement, not taxpayers' dollars. The Berks County Redevelopment Authority took ownership of the railroad in March, and ownership will eventually transfer to the trust.

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- See more at: <http://readingeagle.com/news/article/colebrookdale-railroad-takes-trial-run-to-pottstown#sthash.p04Fwjed.dpuf>