

IRWIN HODSON BEWARE OF DOG NEW & VINTAGE EMBOSSED METAL SIGNS

HOME NEWS



Reading Eagle: Laura Newberry | In a full conductor's uniform, Nathaniel Guest, president of the Colebrookdale Preservation Trust, the driving force behind the Colebrookdale Railroad, fixes a lantern after the inaugural trip of the restored caboose on the rail line.

Caboose ride between Boyertown and Pottstown brings hopes of local railroad tourism

By Laura Newberry

Monday January 20, 2014 12:01 AM

The brick-red caboose rolled into town, the relic greeting its new home as its wheels ground to a halt on the rails.

"Welcome to Boyertown!" announced Nathaniel Guest, president of the Colebrookdale Preservation Trust, who was decked out in a traditional railroad conductor's uniform.



The 20 or so passengers who took the hourlong scenic excursion Friday afternoon applauded and then gathered their things.

The recently renovated caboose had just completed its inaugural run from Pottstown to Boyertown on the Colebrookdale Railroad, an almost 9-mile stretch of track

that connects the two communities.

The caboose was purchased by the Boyertown Rotary and Lions clubs for \$5,000 in preparation for the passenger line that's expected to be completed by October.

"There was an excitement that I didn't think I would have," Rotary Secretary Tracy Bernard said after the ride. "It brings back childhood memories for me, counting train cars as they passed by my house as a little girl."

The railroad, which was built in the late 1860s, is slowly being restored through efforts of the Colebrookdale Preservation Trust, a nonprofit that officially formed in 2012.

The purpose of the rail enterprise is twofold: to attract industrial freight business and to encourage area tourism.

The second half of that plan is where the caboose comes in.

"We need to have some kind of activity that brings people to Boyertown, with all the shopping centers right outside of us," said Charles Haddad, Boyertown Rotary president. "Hopefully, this will be it."

Guest said a round-trip ticket will likely cost passengers about \$20.

The restoration project is expected to cost about \$7 million over the next five to seven years. But the investment could pay dividends; the rail line is expected to have an annual economic impact of \$1.8 million through visitor spending, Guest said.

The trust is counting on state and federal grants, and private donations to bring the project to fruition.

Potential tourist attraction

The caboose's arrival signals the potential for the line to become a local tourist attraction, one that could attract an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 visitors to the area each year, according to a feasibility study.

But first, train platforms must be built and passenger cars must be acquired.

"Ultimately, there will be proper stations at both ends, with shops, food services and souvenirs, but that will take some time to get done," Guest said, adding that the organization has been shopping for passenger cars.

The cozy caboose, built in Altoona in 1941, once sheltered railroad workers during trips across the state, its coal-burning stove and bunk beds serving as creature comforts for the crew. But the car fell into disrepair. Restoration efforts began in 2005.

The caboose's fall from glory in some ways mirrors that of the Colebrookdale Railroad. Once a bastion of the local iron industry, by the mid-1990s the line sat unused and neglected.

A previous owner petitioned the federal government for permission to abandon the line in 2008, but the backers of the soon-to-be trust successfully fought the initiative by promoting the line as a freight connection with the potential to boost local business and tourism.

Line has historic value

Guest said the line's age and location make it all the more important to revive it. The line connects sites of the the oldest iron forges, foundries and furnaces in Pennsylvania, he said.

John Pfaltz, a retired University of Virginia computer science professor who led the caboose restoration, said the promise of the Colebrookdale Railroad was clear to him after a trip to Boyertown in the middle of last year.

Pfaltz spent six years and more than \$30,000 renovating the car near his home in Charlottesville, Va.

"When you retire you do nutty things," he said. "If you don't, you die."

With no practical need for the caboose, he decided to donate it.

Three other railroads scattered across the U.S. vied for the caboose, but he said Boyertown's enthusiasm made the decision easy.

In the caboose transfer agreement, Pfaltz stipulated that \$5,000 be donated to the National Railway Historical Society - whose members helped with the restoration - and that the car not go more than 18 months without running.

"Part of the excitement is that this is a very ambitious, audacious project," Pfaltz said before he rode the rails Friday. "It's just got to work."

Contact Laura Newberry: 610-371-5081 or lnewberry@readingeagle.com.

Facebook Twitter Pinterest Google+ Email Print + 7

ADJUST FONT SIZE: A A A

OTHER STORIES

- ▶ Reading family displaced by fire
- ▶ Police say property dispute caused fatal Schuylkill County shooting
- ▶ Family, friends hold vigil for man fatally shot eight years ago today
- ▶ Red Cross aiding Reading fire victims

250m /

Why/How
Eye
Mouth
Why skin
and rashes
Genital

What peop

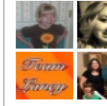
MOST POPULAR

- ▶ Relatives of protections
- ▶ Berks officia salt
- ▶ Babies' blue photo prize
- ▶ Relatives of protections
- ▶ Dan Kelly: A saved her lif
- ▶ Snow, frigid
- ▶ Family, fries eight years a
- ▶ Caboose rid brings hope
- ▶ Officials say accident in 1

Find us on Face



10,000 people li



Purchase D

Speed: Mar



Are you

