



Rachel Naron Will Be Responsible For Overseeing Vital Volunteer Program

Rachel Naron has stepped into one of the key jobs on ASTA's administrative team, taking over as volunteer coordinator in early August.

Rachel comes to ASTA from four years with Good Samaritan Community Services in San Antonio. (Good Samaritan helps more than 5,000 individuals and 1,800 families in eight South Texas locations in facing the challenges of poverty.)

Rachel served the agency as asset-building coordinator, Hill Country Camps and family-engagement coordinator, and as volunteer coordinator.

"I am delighted to have Rachel on board as our new volunteer coordinator," said ASTA Executive Director Lil Serafine. "She is filled with

New Faces in Important Places on ASTA Staff

Mike Gresham Brings Wealth of Experience To General Superintendent's Position

Michael Gresham, with more than 35 years of railroad experience to his credit, has taken charge of ASTA's rail operations as general su-

perintendent. Mike comes to ASTA and the Austin & Texas Central from a three-year stint as general superintendent of the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, a \$1.9-million-budget operation carrying 40,000 passengers annually into the Allegheny Mountains from Cumberland, Md.

"We are all very pleased," said ASTA President Robert Schoen, "that Mike will be our next general superintendent. With his extensive former experience, I am sure he will bring a lot to the table to help ASTA grow and continue to be successful. Let's all welcome him aboard and do whatever we can to make this a smooth, positive, and successful transition."

The A&TC's general superintendent has wide-ranging responsibilities that include managing regular train operations, maintaining and repairing cars and engines, supervising restoration projects, training and qualifying operating volunteers, maintaining the Cedar Park yard, and interfacing with regulatory authorities and ASTA's com-



muter and freight partners on the railroad.

Prior to his employment at the Western Maryland Scenic, Mike managed five freight, passenger and excursion railroads in the Pacific region of shortline operator Iowa Pacific Holdings.

He also has had extensive experience restoring, maintaining and operating private rail cars (his own and others') as president of Vista Dome Corporation and proprietor of Sunview Passenger Car Co., and as a consultant to American Orient Express.

Mike is also an Air Force veteran, having retired as a major after 20 years of working with military satellite and nuclear-weapons systems. He holds a bachelor's degree in aviation from the Ohio State University.

Mike was preceded in the superintendent's job by Paul Phalen, who went to work for Capital Metro's rail staff in late 2015.

Thanks to our generous friends!

(Donations from April through July 2016. If we have left anyone off, please accept our apologies and contact us at director@austinsteamtrain.org so we can make sure we recognize you in our next edition.)

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North Pole Flyer Returning for Holiday Festivities

The *North Pole Flyer*, the festive trains with which the A&TC rounds out every year, will return to the schedule the last weekend in November and operate through the first three weekends in December.

Three trains a day will of-

fer 2½ hour round-trip excursions including visits from Santa Claus and Ms. Claus, holiday music, hot cocoa and Christmas cookies, and readings from *The North Pole Flyer*, our railroad's own Christmas story.

The train, decorated in holiday finery for the occasion, will depart Cedar Park at 10 a.m., 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. on each day of operation. The *Flyer* will run the weekends of Nov. 26-27 and Dec. 3-4, 10-11, and 17-18.

That's 24 trains in all, but *Flyer* tickets sell out fast! To inquire, call ASTA at 512-477-8468 or visit us www.austinsteamtrain.org.

Tickets in excursion coaches are \$38 for age 3 and up and \$43 for an adult with a lap rider, in first-class coaches they are \$43 and \$48, and in first-class lounge cars they are \$48 and \$53.

At holiday time, many *North Pole Flyer* passengers tell ASTA's crew and staff they have made the train ride a regular holiday tradition. Hope you'll join them!



A young passenger enjoys a visit with Santa Claus, always a highlight of any trip on the *North Pole Flyer*. ASTA volunteers and staff go all out every holiday season to make the decorated trains a festive ending to another operating year.

Join us for the fun, and for the satisfaction of a worthwhile job well-done....

Be an ASTA Volunteer!

If you love railroading, love history, or just love helping people have a good time, give us a call. We have a place for you!

It's simple....call our volunteer coordinator, Rachel Naron, at 512-477-8468 ext. 1, e-mail volunteers@austinsteamtrain.org or come by our office, 401 E. Whitestone, Suite C-100, Cedar Park.

Now Departing . . . The A&TC's Original "Great Green Fleet" of Coaches

After 24 years of faithful service on A&TC trains, the six heavyweight standard coaches which were the heart of the railroad's original passenger fleet left Cedar Park Yard for the last time the night of July 15, bound for a new home in Iowa.

After years of carrying thousands of passengers over the railroad, it was determined by ASTA management that the cars, built in the 1920s, had reached a stage in life in which the expense of keeping them safe and mechanically reliable would be more than they would realize in revenue.

Fortunately, at the same time a willing buyer appeared who, as part of an effort to preserve as much historic PRR passenger equipment as possible, wanted to buy all six cars as a single set.

And happily enough, one of the buyers, Bennett Levin of Philadelphia, was the man from whom the cars were first acquired when ASTA commenced excursion operations in 1992. Mr. Levin and

his business partner, Henry Posner, president of the Iowa Interstate Railroad, arranged to have the cars transported in freight trains to the Iowa Interstate's yard in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

The \$155,000 proceeds from the sale will substantially strengthen ASTA's fund for restorations and capital improvements, and will enable ASTA, for example, to complete its new climate-controlled concession car and to put its second diesel locomotive, Belt Railway of Chicago 605, into active service.

"While many of us have fond memories of the old P70s over the years," said ASTA Chairman Ben Sargent, "this sale will enable us both to continue to upgrade ASTA's passenger fleet and to be assured that the old cars are in a good home."

When ASTA started excursion service, the association's founder, Arthur Boone, bought the six coaches from Mr. Levin, and later transferred ownership to ASTA. In the A&TC's original consists, the PRR coaches were supplemented with the climate-



The P70s were nearing their new home when Luke Paardekooper, an employee of Heartland Co-op in Dexter, Iowa, spotted them passing by his siding on the Iowa Interstate Railroad. (Photo courtesy Luke Paardekooper.)

controlled parlor-sleepers ATSF 1343 (now the *Maurice Beckham*), *City of Chicago* and *Eagle Cliff*.

Before coming to Texas, the cars had been in excursion service on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad in Ohio.

Each P70 had a capacity of 72 passengers, and one of the cars was outfitted as a concession car for the sale of snacks, beverages and souvenirs.

The cars appeared in several different color schemes in their time on the A&TC, originally arriving in primer paint that was a vague equivalent of the PRR's tuscan red.

In 1997, the Lower Colorado River Authority donated \$25,000 to paint the cars a bright color that quickly became known as "A&TC red," and in return the cars were each named for one of the LCRA's Highland Lakes. Finally, in 2006 the cars received the Pullman green paint that gave them the traditional look of most 20th-century American heavyweight cars.

The Pennsylvania's P70s were the first and most famous class of heavyweight steel passenger cars in U.S.

railroad history, and more than 1,000 were built. As the 20th century dawned, concerns for the safety and reliability of wooden passenger cars spurred the Pennsy to design and produce new heavyweight cars made entirely of steel, the first rolling off the production lines in 1907. The cars proved such a success that railroads throughout the country quickly began replacing their wooden fleets with steel, and though production of the heavyweights ceased with the advent of lightweight cars in the mid-1930s, the P70s were in use across the PRR system until the end of passenger service.

While the P70s at one time were equipped with steam heat and a primitive air-conditioning system involving forced air and large blocks of ice, in ASTA service they were run simply with open windows, pleasant in some seasons but subject to summer heat and winter cold. (The A&TC's passenger fleet of today is entirely of later-vintage equipment that is all climate-controlled for passenger comfort.)



On an early Hill Country Flyer, SP 786 in the lead, come following the P70s in their original paint: dark red in varying shades!

History Corner.

A&TC's Rails Share Complex Southern Pacific Pedigree

ASTA's sharp-eyed resident archivist, Dr. David Gracy, noted that this August marked the 115th anniversary of the official absorption of widespread Texas railroad lines, including the rails over which the A&TC operates today, into the Houston & Texas Central, the state's first large-scale railroad operation.

The H&TC was chartered in 1848, but economic strictures and the chaos of the Civil War delayed until the 1870s its fast-paced push from Houston northward to Dallas and the Red River, reached by 1873.

At the same time, it began absorbing smaller roads, including the one which made it Austin's first railroad in 1871. Local investors built the city's first home-grown railroad, the narrow-gauge Austin & Northwestern, to Burnet in 1881, but it, too, quickly came under the financial



control of the big H&TC.

On Aug. 22, 1901, the adoption became official, along with two other lines in North Texas.

The H&TC itself began in the 1880s to become part of the mighty Southern Pacific system, although it operated under its own name until merged with the SP subsidiary Texas & New Orleans in 1934.

The name of the Austin & Texas Central commemorates its ancestral predecessors, the Austin & Northwestern and the Houston & Texas Central, and its herald is a slight variation on the H&TC's historic star-and-circle design.

Big-City Railroading From the Golden Age...in Downtown Austin



Looking for all the world like a long-distance streamlined train backing into an urban union station, one of the A&TC's "Capital City Flyers" eased into Capital Metro's downtown station at the Austin Convention Center on May 8 just to check clearances. All fit just fine; A&TC trains have made two other visits to the Convention Center since, and more downtown runs will be on future schedules. (RJ McKay photo.)

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