

Volunteers Getting Their Hands Dirty Keeping the Trains Running

Since its first wheel turned nearly 30 years ago, ASTA has always worked because of the dedication and labors of its volunteers, who the public sees as operating crews and onboard-service car attendants. Behind the scenes, though, a growing third group of volunteers has been regularly assisting A&TC General Superintendent Chris Hoff in maintenance, repair and restoration projects in ASTA's home yard in Cedar Park.

"For the longest time," said ASTA President Dr. Robert Schoen, "our volunteers have spent 95 per cent of their time volunteering in capacities that got the train over the road: our onboard-service crew and our covered service--engineers, conduc-

tors, brakemen--and we are grateful for that.

"But now, with the leadership of our General Superintendent Chris Hoff, we have a growing group of volunteers that tackle the daily mechanical tasks, as well as the longer term restoration projects at ASTA, and we are really excited about that!"

ASTA is eager to have new volunteers interested in the mechanical end of the operation, and their work helps Chris to keep up with the many tasks required to keep the A&TC's wheels turning.

Among recent projects in the yard aided by the volunteers are these:

★ **Rippling Stream lounge-sleeper improvements.** Helping with trucks



Volunteers Brian Urban, Rich Wise and Dave Shannon help the general superintendent in positioning a wheelset under the trucks of the Rippling Stream lounge-sleeper.

and wheels have been Dave Shannon (who also serves regularly as the A&TC's wheel inspector), Bennie Kirk, Mark Staerkel, Rich Wise and Steve Barry. Organizing, planning and carrying out improvements to the car's electrical system have been Bennie, Rich, Dave, Mark Staerkel, Randy Leo, Chip Carter, Dar-

ren Haan and Bruce Nye. In addition, Chip, Bruce, Mark Staerkel and Mark Opperman have been working on interior stripping and painting.

★ **Frisco baggage car re-lighting and reorganizing.** Bennie, Rich, Mark Staerkel, David and Randy.

(See 'Volunteers,' next page)



Superintendent Chris Hoff, Mark Staerkel and Robert Schoen take a break from unloading and reconfiguring an SP boxcar for a role in filming the movie "Fugitive Dreams."



Chris Hoff leads volunteers working on a crucial job, replacement of a new traction motor powering ASTA's leased locomotive HZRX 3134.

Thanks to our generous friends!

(Donations from January through April 2019. 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.)

\$3,000-plus:
Brian Smith

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Ben Sargent
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\$20 to \$49:

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We'd Love to See Your Name Here!

For building and investing in the future of historic railroad preservation in Central Texas, ASTA depends on the kindness and dedication of its friends! To make a donation or sign up as an ASTA member, call **512-477-8468** or visit our website, www.austinsteamtrain.org.

\$500 to \$999:

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Lee Crain
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Douglas Smith

A Special Thanks to Our Friends and Supporters, the City of Cedar Park and Cedar Park Tourism Services!



Volunteers...

★ **Tool-car organizing and categorizing.** Bennie, Rich, Mark Staerkel and Doc Schoen.

★ **Reworking the train's sound system.** Chip and Bruce, with the help of Javier Pardo.

★ **"Painting and TLC of random yard and train entities."** Doc.

In general, says Chris, he

has begun to count on a regular group of yard volunteers who "help me from week to week with odds and ends to keep our train in top-notch condition."

This regular crew, he said, includes Bennie, Mark Staerkel, Rich, Dave and Randy. "These men have been a huge asset to our organization," he said.



Eagle Scouts Provide Handsome Comfort for A&TC's Cedar Park Passengers

Four sturdy and handsome new cedar benches at the A&TC's Cedar Park depot will both provide comfort for waiting passengers and help to qualify Jack Martin of Boy Scout Troop 454 for the rank of Eagle Scout.

The benches grace the outdoor walkway leading from the ticket office to the Cedar Park boarding platform.

Jack planned the project and involved the whole troop of 34 scouts, both boys and girls, in the construction and installation.

Jack is also an active ASTA volunteer who has worked on the North Pole Flyer with his father, John Martin.

Eagle Scout is the highest

rank in Boy Scouting, and to earn it a scout must, among other things, "plan, develop, and give leadership to others in a service project helpful to any religious institution, any school, or the community."

Troop 454 is sponsored by Riverbend Church.

The benches took about two months to plan and build; the scouts first constructed them off-site and then reassembled them at the depot.

"We at ASTA are exceptionally grateful to Jack, and to Troop 454 and its scouts for this project that accommodates our passengers and contributes both to our mission and that of the Boy Scouts," said ASTA Chairman Ben Sargent.

"I utilize them in many ways. Breaking off into groups or tackling things as one group, most of them dedicate at least two days a week to help me out."

Examples of their tasks have included servicing air filters, oiling and greasing bearings, traps, doors and hand-brake mechanisms, replacing light

bulbs, random carpentry work, rewiring and troubleshooting problems. "The list goes on," says Chris.

Anyone interested in volunteer work in the mechanical, electrical, carpentry, finishing and general maintenance end of the railroad's operations should contact Volunteer Coordinator Erin Hoff at volunteers@austinsteamtrain.org or 512-477-8468 ext. 205.

Make Plans Now for a Circus-Themed Celebration in November!

ASTA's first full-scale dinner in support of the organization's missions of education and historical preservation will be at the Hyatt Place hotel in Cedar Park the evening of Thursday, Nov. 7.

Dubbed the "Circus of Wonders," ASTA's event promises a full evening of fun and camaraderie in support of the good cause that's been chugging along in Central Texas for 30 years.

"The Circus of Wonders," said Executive Director Lil Serafine, "offers the opportunity for our current donors, board members and volunteers to introduce new potential supporters to ASTA by encouraging them to attend the event, learn about our mission, and our projects.

"In addition, we will be leveraging some of our existing partnerships to help offset some of the costs and in turn showcase partners' businesses and strengthen our relation-



ships. The result is stewarding the partners and new donors to become lifelong supporters."

The event will be from 6:30 to 11 p.m. on Nov. 7, at the Hyatt Place, 1315 E. New Hope Drive in Cedar Park.

The evening will begin with cocktails, featuring a new signature cocktail, the "Vapeur Merveille" ("Steam

Wonder,"), followed by dinner, magic and a live auction. There will also be a silent auction throughout the evening.

ASTA staff and board members are actively looking for event sponsors at these levels:

- "Big Top," \$10,000.
- "Aerialist," \$7,500.
- "Tightrope," \$5,000.
- "Roustabout," \$2,000.

Each level of sponsorship brings benefits including a table for eight at the dinner, various kinds of public recognition, and the top three packages include train tickets.

Anyone interested in being a "Circus of Wonders" sponsor, or in donating items for the live or silent auctions, should contact Lil Serafine, director@austinsteamtrain.org or 512-477-8468 ext. 204.

Serving as "ringmaster" for the evening will be ASTA's chairman Ben Sargent, an A&TC conductor and retired editorial cartoonist for the *Austin American-Statesman*.

ASTA is pleased to welcome Etix as a "Big Top" sponsor!



And Get Tickets Now for 2019's Day Out With Thomas and North Pole Flyer!

The ever-popular highlights of the A&TC's operating year are the annual "Day Out With Thomas" celebration in the fall and our *North Pole Flyer* trains throughout the holiday season.

Tickets are now on sale for both events, and these trains fill up fast! To make reservations, call our ticket line at 866-468-7630, or go online at AustinSteamTrain.org.

This year's Thomas the Tank Engine event, as always featuring the full-scale replica

of the little engine of television and story, will be in Burnet Sept. 28 and 29.

Operating from the Burnet Community Center, this year's event will be Thomas' 16th visit to ASTA's rails. Tickets are \$24 apiece for everyone two years and older.

Centerpiece of the event, of course, will be 25-minute train rides, a dozen each day, behind Thomas.

But there will be plenty of other family-friendly activities, including coloring and

crafts, storytelling and videos, a rock-climbing wall, a magician and balloon artist, a selection of Thomas souvenirs and the opportunity to have a photo made with the famous little blue engine!

This year's *North Pole Flyers* will again be operating out of our restored 1912 depot in Bertram, making two-hour round trips between that point and Burnet.

As always, the *North Pole Flyers* will have Santa Claus and Ms. Claus on board, as

well as carolers, balloon artists and storytellers, and there will be plenty of holiday hot chocolate, cookies, gifts for the children and other treats.

On the weekends of Nov. 16-17 and Nov. 23-24, the holiday trains are scheduled for departures at 12 noon and 3:30 p.m. each day. On the weekends of Nov. 30-Dec. 1 and Dec. 7-8, there will be four departures each day, at 8:30 a.m., noon, 3:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. Further *North Pole Flyer* schedules will be released at a later date.

An Update on Vital Capital Projects 442 and Rippling Stream

There's scarcely an enterprise that's more capital-intensive than a railroad. (As one old railroader told us years ago, "Everything around a railroad is heavy, greasy and expensive!")

And ASTA and the Austin & Texas Central, of course, are no exception. We do our best to keep up with recurring operating expenses from operating revenues, but it being a railroad, there are always other capital expenses that are essential to keep the whole operation running.

Here are a couple of projects topping ASTA's capital-investment plans for this year, and where they stand.

★ **Engine 442.** The A&TC's workhorse Alco diesel No. 442, which had been pulling our trains since 2000 before being taken out of service for

necessary repairs, is awaiting funds to lift the engine and roll out one of the trucks for rehabilitation. Estimated cost for a crane lift, truck inspection, new pedestal liners, and journal-box wear-plate rehabilitation will be around \$10,000 per truck.

★ **Rippling Stream.** Our handsome New York Central lounge-sleeper *Rippling Stream*, in the consist since 2014, is out of service having her wheels replaced for years more of active operation.

Mechanical forces are also installing conduit for HEP wiring under the car while it is out of service on shop trucks as new wheels, axles, and bearing boxes are being prepared by Texas Tank Car Works in San Angelo, Texas. Overall needs for this wheel work to get this high-revenue



car back in service will be around \$20,000.

ASTA's staff and board are actively seeking grants and donations to cover these one-time but necessary expenses to keep our trains rolling! If you'd like to help, contact Lil Serafine at director@austinsteamtrain.org or 512-477-8468 ext. 204.

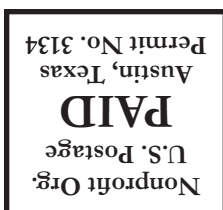
Join us for the fun, and for the satisfaction of a worthwhile job well-done....

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, Erin Hoff, at 512-477-8468 ext. 205, e-mail volunteers@austinsteamtrain.org or come by our office, 401 E. Whitestone, Suite C-100, Cedar Park.

Your Spring CALL BOARD!



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