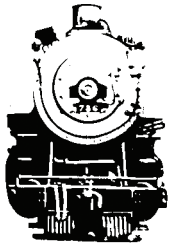


April
2020

The CALL BOARD

Newsletter of the Austin Steam Train Association



SPECIAL EDITION

ASTA Rises to an Unprecedented Challenge: a Global Pandemic

The new year 2020 unexpectedly turned the world on its head with the outbreak of the coronavirus and its seismic interruptions to daily life, and the Austin Steam Train Association was no exception. ASTA's last train ran on March 14, and our conservative assumption is that we may not be able to run trains until the end of June.

Since 100 per cent of our operating revenues come from train tickets and merchandise, ASTA suddenly faced a wide financial gap that we will have to bridge in order to resume our operations and our mission when conditions allow.

A piece of good news is that ASTA has been approved for a partially forgivable loan of \$82,600 from the federal government's Payroll Protection Program, which will allow our dedicated staff to keep working during the hiatus.

We have also made a good start on a fundraising campaign to build up ASTA's finances for this emergency, powered primarily by a Go-FundMe online effort. Results have been heartening since the campaign launched on March 31, and to date it has raised more than \$38,000.

We are also working on the expense side of the ledger, getting some helpful cooperation from the owner of our leased locomotive HZRX

3134, pursuing any relief we can get from the rent on our Cedar Park office, and actively looking for any other expenses we can reduce or eliminate.

Despite all these things, ASTA must keep up, and step up, whatever measures we can take to reinforce our financial foundation and thereby ensure that we'll be ready to resume operations in a robust way when the conditions of the pandemic will allow. (We also want to be prepared for the unknowable question of how quickly our customers will want or be able to return to attractions such as ours.)

ASTA's team of directors, staff, volunteers and supporters have already stepped up heroically to meet the need, though continuing effort will be necessary to see the organization and railroad to the other side of the crisis.

ASTA will need more financial support, spreading the word of our needs, encouraging people to participate in our online fundraising, identifying and calling on likely prospects for more substantial contributions, and creative thought on any other ways we can conceive to save expenses or raise new money.

Said ASTA President Dr. Robert Schoen, "immediate and decisive actions will make the difference between ASTA surviving this disaster, or us

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It's Easy to Do Your Part!

To make it simple for friends of ASTA to make financial commitments in this season of maximum need, our staff launched an online Go-FundMe page on April 1 that has already brought in much-needed donations of more than \$38,000. But since the goal for bridging our financial gap is \$106,000-plus, there's more to be done.

In the first three weeks of the campaign, donations came in from 147 generous people, and if you haven't given (or would like to do so again), the process is quick and easy. Just go online to...

<https://charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/asta2020>

As a non-profit pursuing its missions of historical preservation, education, local economic growth and family fun, ASTA has always counted on the generosity of donors to finance things such as capital improvements and restoration projects, while ticket sales paid for regular operations. Now with the pandemic-caused interruption in train service, we hope we can count on you to bridge the financial gap and have the trains rolling again when recovery arrives!

becoming just a footnote in history.”

As to ASTA’s continuing functions during the crisis, Marketing Director Zena Vaughn reported that “our humble non-profit railroad has gone into emergency mode. Daily operations are down to bare bones. While we are working with local, state and federal agencies on any possible sources of revenue, the loss of ticket sales is devastating. We are quickly running out of cash to pay rent, utilities, liabilities and to maintain our small and loyal staff of five.”

“On the other side of this pandemic,” she continued, “we are going to need each other. We will need a place to come together and commemorate all the milestones we couldn’t celebrate during isolation. We will need a place to collect, connect, and make new memories. There is so much to look forward to, and ASTA must be here when our community is ready.”

Over its 31-year history, ASTA has again and again proved its grit and resilience in meeting often daunting challenges, and we have not only survived, we have pre-

vailed. The current situation, which for ASTA as for everyone else in our society is pervasive and unforeseen, is one

of the most challenging yet, but with the help of everyone involved, we are confident we will be back even stronger!

Unsettled Times Bring Other Schedule Changes...

Pandemic-related uncertainty about scheduling has affected at least a couple of ASTA’s regular events:

- The annual Day Out With Thomas event, affected both by schedule uncertainty and declining revenues, will not be held in 2020.
- The annual “Circus of Wonders” fundraising event, a great success in 2019, will be postponed until May 21, 2021, at the Sheraton Hotel and Conference Center in Georgetown.

You Can Help Keep ASTA on Track!



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Taking on the Challenges, ASTA Staff Resilient in Tough Times

As ASTA and its finances have been tossed and blown in the midst of the pandemic, our professional staff has been in the front line of keeping organization and railroad functioning in the crisis.

Executive Director **Lil Serafine** has kept things organized and aggressively tracked and protected ASTA’s financial position, in particular working energetically to obtain federal stimulus help.

General Superintendent

Chris Hoff has continued to maintain the railroad’s essential rolling equipment, and made sure that capital projects remain on track.

Marketing Director **Zena Vaughn** has been managing ASTA’s message to the public, and in particular has done heroic work in setting up and managing the GoFundMe fundraising effort.

Volunteer Coordinator **Erin Hoff** has been handling communications with

the public, including issuance of more than \$40,000 in gift certificates, helping with the fundraising effort, and being a general cheerleader for all the staff is doing.

And Yard Manager **Tino Perez** has been keeping the yard tidy, helping Chris in his maintenance work and in general preparing for the return to normal business.

ASTA is deeply indebted to our loyal staff for standing fast through difficult times!

You Can Help
Central Texas’
historic excursion
railroad make it through
the crisis!

- ➡ Send your donation.
- ➡ Tell your friends.
- ➡ Keep Smiling!

