

Volunteer Work Sessions Keep Restoration of 786 Moving Forward

The day that Southern Pacific steam locomotive No. 786, ASTA's original and signature rail-restoration project, returns to active service grows ever closer, thanks to the regular efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers.

Work sessions on 786's components have been proceeding, usually weekly, since June and are continuing on a regular basis, organized by ASTA President Dr. Robert Schoen.

The "Mikado" type engine, built by the American Locomotive Works in 1916, served the Southern Pacific for 40 years before being retired to a downtown Austin park. ASTA was first organized to

resurrect 786 for active service, and once restored, she pulled her first passenger train to Burnet in 1992. The 143-ton engine was removed from service in 1999 for a necessary repair that turned into a complete rebuilding.

That effort continues, but is in its final stages of re-assembly, and the volunteer work sessions are part of that complicated process.

Here are some of the recent steps forward by the volunteer restoration crew!

Oil cellars which will lubricate the driving wheels have been machined and are being welded up.

The **engine frame** is being



Volunteer Marc Opperman wields a brush on one of 786's guide yokes, a vital part of the engine's foundation frame which is being protected with a fresh coat of paint.

prepped and painted.

A new set of **shoes and wedges**, vital parts of the driving-wheels suspension, have been cast and retrieved from a foundry in Victoria.

The locomotive's **cab** has been cleaned up and moved to a more accessible site in the yard.

The **dog house**, the little shelter for the head-end brakeman, has been fitted for placement back atop the tender for the first time since being damaged in the Jarrell tornado in 1997.

Stirrup steps for the tender, also torn off in the tornado, have been recast, fitted and installed.

All **pedestal binder** nuts and bolts (another vital part of the engine's suspension) have been freed up for upcoming final fittings for new bearing boxes on the drivers.

Critical **length measurements** have been taken of

both piston-and-crosshead assemblies as well as of cylinder centers to main-driver centers.

Next steps will include a **crane lift** of 786's frame to a higher working height, allowing for test fits of the eight driving boxes with shoes and wedges, to see what further machining might be required.

The **boiler and firebox** will also be lifted and cribbed for firm support.

All these measures are directed toward the next major goal in the 786's reassembly, which would be lifting the engine's frame onto its wheels—drivers, pilot truck and trailing truck—all of which have already been thoroughly renovated by volunteer labor.

That lift, though, has to be preceded by an exacting process of making sure the

(See "786," next page.)



A crane lift brought 786's cab from the back of the ASTA yard to a location where it can be cleaned, repaired, painted and relettered before resuming its position of honor on the engine.

Thanks to our generous friends!

(Donations from June 26 through Oct. 1, 2020. If we have left anyone off, please accept our apologies and contact us at director@austinsteamin.org so we can make sure we recognize you in our next edition.)

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786 Donations.

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(*Walking-stick project.*)

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



786...

engine's bearings, spring-suspension system, cylinders and valves, and brake rigging are mounted and adjusted to perfection.

The 786 volunteer work sessions began last June and, despite a few interruptions, have generally continued on a weekly basis.

In addition to Dr. Schoen, regular volunteers who have been particularly valuable to the project have been Marc Opperman, Jerry Halstead, Brian Smith, Noah Jarrett, Edward DeLaPeña, Greg Duepner and John Mandell, assisted by other ASTA volunteers from time to time.

◀ Greg Duepner and John Mandell, taking critical measurements on one of the engine's pistons and crosshead.



▲ A freshly cast tender step, replacing one of those damaged in the 1997 tornado.

Autumn Trains Leading Up to Festive North Pole Flyer Season

A&TC trains continue to offer passengers a safe and relaxing getaway with regular weekend schedules that will round out the year with the traditional *North Pole Flyer* trains in the year-end holiday season.

With an eye toward protecting passengers and crews in ongoing pandemic conditions, the trains are operating at 50-per-cent capacity, with proper physical distancing provided by the computerized ticketing system. Masks are required of everyone in the train, and ASTA personnel are onboard to provide continuous cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces.

Coming up for the fall, planned trains include:

The *Hill Country Flyer*, the A&TC's original popular run, which departs Cedar Park at 9 a.m., makes a two-hour journey through the Hill Country to Burnet, spends a relaxed stopover for lunch, shopping and sightseeing, then returns to Cedar Park at 3 p.m.

Hill Country Flyers are scheduled for **Oct. 17, Oct. 24, Nov. 7, Nov. 14** and **Nov. 21**.

The *Bertram Flyer*, a shorter Hill Country jaunt, departs Cedar Park at 2 p.m. for a journey to our historic 1912 depot in Bertram, returning at 5 p.m.

One more *Bertram Flyer* is scheduled for **Nov. 15**.

Wedding Oak Wine Trains depart Cedar Park at 10 a.m. for a trip to the Wedding Oak Winery in Burnet. The jour-

ney includes wine tasting and light snacks, and returns at 4 p.m.

The *Wine Trains* are scheduled for **Oct. 18** and **Nov. 1**.

Though *North Pole Flyer* service is necessarily curtailed this year, the holiday trains, operating between Bertram and Burnet, will include most of their regular amenities, including onboard visits from Santa Claus, packaged cookies, hot chocolate, whistles and storybooks.

So far, two weekends of *North Pole Flyers* have been scheduled, **Nov. 28-29** and **Dec. 5-6**.

The holiday trains will make four departures daily from the Bertram Depot for a two-hour round trip, leaving at 8:30 a.m., noon, 3:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.

To get more information and to make reservations for any of the fall and holiday trains, call **512-402-3830** or visit austinsteamtrain.org.



'Gentleman and a Scholar,' Dr. David Gracy Departs at 78

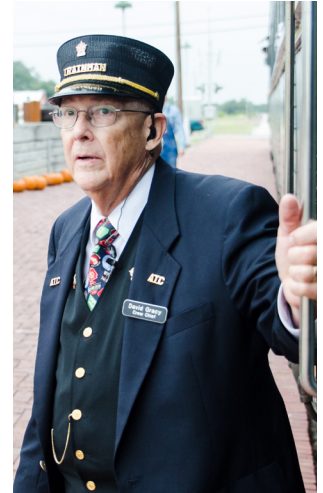
Dr. David B. Gracy, a longtime ASTA volunteer and director who was as erudite as he was unfailingly congenial, died Sept. 26 at his home after an extended illness.

Dr. Gracy had a long and distinguished career as an archivist, culminating in his position as professor emeritus in archival enterprises at the University of Texas School of Information. David truly embodied the old expression, "a gentleman and a scholar."

He had served on the ASTA board since 2011 and was a member of the executive committee. He also worked on the trains frequently as a car attendant, crew chief and trainman, giving the passengers benefit of his wide-ranging historical knowledge and love of railroading.

ASTA President Dr. Robert Schoen saluted Dr. Gracy as "a prince of a man, always positive and optimistic, never a word of complaint, and always got the job done whether wearing the hat of board member, crew chief, or on-board service staff."

Born in Austin in 1941, Dr. Gracy received bachelor's and master's degrees from UT and his doctorate from Texas Tech. His lifelong career as an archivist began at Tech and at Georgia State University before he became director of the Texas State Archives from 1977 to 1986. He moved from there to UT, where



he created the archival and records-preservation program within the School of Information.

He received many honors as an archivist and headed up several archivists' professional organizations. He was also author of many scholarly papers and several volumes of Texas history, the most recent of which was *A Man Absolutely Sure of Himself*, a biography of Austin rancher-banker George Littlefield.

He is survived by his wife Laura, his children Laura Juba, Mary Beth Martinez and Ben Gracy, four grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

Dr. Gracy designated ASTA as one of his preferred recipients of memorial contributions.

He was laid to rest in the Gracy family plot at Austin's Oakwood Cemetery. David was a rare and special member of the ASTA family, and will certainly be missed.

ASTA's Officers and Directors, 13 Members and Growing

At its summer quarterly meeting in August, the ASTA Board of Directors was proud to elect **Nikelle Meade** as the newest member of the organization's governing body.

Nikelle is a partner in the national law firm Husch Blackwell, specializing in local government, real estate and urban planning. She's also been on the boards of numerous other local arts, environmental and community-development organizations.

Nikelle is a strong addition to the ASTA board that's guided the association through thick and thin for 31 years, and we thought we'd bring our readers up to date on who's a member of that body. The board includes:

Ben Sargent, chairman and (with John Charles) one of only two members who were on the original board

in 1989, retired editorial cartoonist for the *Austin American-Statesman*, and a volunteer conductor.

Larry McGinnis, vice chairman and head of the board-development committee, retired as a lobbyist with K&L Gates.

Robert W. Schoen M.D., president and CEO, retired as an orthopaedic surgeon with Texas Orthopaedics, and an engineer and conductor.

Brian Smith, secretary, retired as a business consultant with Allied Consultants Inc. and a volunteer engineer.

Bill Bingham, general counsel, partner in the Austin law firm McGinnis Lochridge.

Mike Barnes, retired U.S. Army officer.

John B. Charles, retired dispatcher with the Union Pacific Railroad and a volunteer

engineer.

David Dech, vice president for rail operations with Capital Metro, owner of the track over which ASTA runs.

Charlie DeWeese, retired from a career on several railroads.

Greg Duepner, an engineer with Matheson-TriGas.

Dennis Kearns, general counsel for the Texas Railroad Association.

Ken Price, chief commercial officer for the Lower Colorado River Authority.

ASTA directors are elected for two-year terms, and officer positions are elected yearly.

Chairman McGinnis and his committee have been involved in a carefully planned and vigorous effort to recruit new directors who can expand the board's expertise and roots in the community.

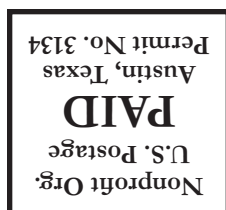
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the satisfaction
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well-done....*

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helping people have a good
time, give us a call.
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