

The WIG – WAG

The Official Newsletter of the NMRA – MCoR

Cedar Rapids, Davenport & Moline Area

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Area Membership Meeting

Mark your calendar! October 8 will be the date of the area meeting. It will be held at the Cedar Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, 424 First Avenue NE, and will begin at 10:00 AM. The on-street parking is free on Saturdays and Sundays. The parking ramp next door to the Chamber building charges for parking 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

At this meeting, you will receive a booklet compiled Gary Zillyette that contains an agenda, a report on activities to date, a discussion on becoming an active division and member involvement, what it will take to become an active division, a discussion about this newsletter and the web site (both named Wig-Wag), a discussion about participating in the World's Greatest Hobby, and a discussion about hosting the 2008 MCoR convention. We will also have door prizes courtesy of Gary Zillyette, Tony Bowen, and Allen Merta.

At the time of the preparation of this newsletter, we only have four registrations in hand.

This is your chance to have your voice heard! Be there – Saturday, October 8, 10:00 AM, Cedar Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, 424 First Avenue NE. Register online at www.thewigwag.org.

Thought of the Month

On September 1, The Great Change goes into effect within the National Model Railroad Association. Any member of the NMRA automatically becomes a member of his/her respective region and division/area. The Cedar Rapids, Davenport & Moline Area membership will increase from 27 to 41.

Area Director Gary Zillyette and I have discussed having a meeting of the entire membership to determine if there is sufficient interest in becoming classified as an active division. *To become an active division, many of you will need to volunteer time to make this work.*

To date, a small group of us have committed ourselves to the organization on your behalf. Gary Zillyette, Tony Bowen, and I have essentially been the only contributors to this newsletter. I personally have contributed more than 27 hours of time and more than \$100 out of own pocket to provide 5 newsletters to you. Gary generously has offered to split that cost with me, but I indicated that I would take us into The Great Change. Phillip “Flip” Klinger, an attorney and member, volunteered his professional services to develop a constitution and by-laws compatible with those of the Mid-Continent Region and the NMRA.

In October, the expanded CRDM Area membership will have a decision to make – whether or not to petition the Region for active status. To do that, we must have the signatures of at least 12 members in good standing, our constitution and by-laws prepared, officers elected and other positions filled. These individuals will be committing similar amounts

of time that Gary, Tony, Flip, and I have given so far.

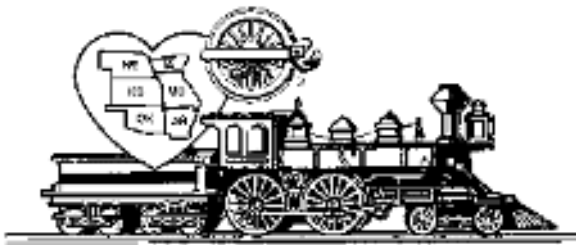
In the June issue of The Wig-Wag, Allen Keller wrote, *“If the Divisions fail, then the NMRA will fail. The NMRA’s re-invention I think is the last, best chance for the organization to continue into the 21st Century. The NMRA is each of us... it’s not just the elected officials. All of us must pick up the burden and do our share.”*

Think about Allen’s statement. If we fail at the local level, the National organization fails. Over time, the NMRA has led the charge on standardization. Examples of this are the standardization of scales, track standards, and most recently, the standard configuration of the DCC plug now on every model railroad locomotive you purchase. Prior to that we literally had chaos!

Gary and I know that several of you long time members have seen efforts like this fizzle out before. Were you involved? If not, maybe you were part of the reason it fizzled. The NMRA, the Mid-Continent Region, and the Cedar Rapids, Davenport & Moline Area are all volunteer organizations. The success of all levels of the organization depends upon your involvement.

Now think about your level of commitment and how you will respond when you are asked for that commitment. I, for one, will not sit on the front porch and watch the trains go by.

- Allen Merta



Amtrak Vacation to California

Amtrak’s Southwest Chief Vacation

In mid-June, my wife, our two girls and my in-laws traveled out to California to go to Disneyland for their 50th Anniversary Celebration via Amtrak’s Southwest Chief. We had done a lot of planning ahead of time and even booked our tickets 11 months early to get the best savings. I would recommend booking early and book on-line if possible. That will also save you some dough.

We left June 16th from Galesburg, IL. The Southwest Chief was to arrive at 5:52 P.M., however, the freight traffic was heavy and the train was about 10 minutes late. Once the Southwest Chief pulled into the station, our sleeping car attendant, Ann Marie, came to meet us on the platform and helped us with our bags.

My wife and I felt with our girls that a family room was best to suite our needs. Family Rooms are on the lower level on the Superliner cars and take up part of one end of the car. It was very roomy and you could see out from both sides of the car. My in-laws had a Deluxe Room, which was very nice with having a small shower / bathroom combination right there within their room. Most Deluxe Rooms are on the upper levels of the Superliner cars.



Passengers get a chance to get out and stretch their legs at Raton, New Mexico. The bus to the right is the connection to Colorado Springs and to Denver

Amtrak Meals

The meals on board the train were out of this world. If you left the table hungry you did something wrong. The menu had a good selection of items, such as fish, steak, chicken and vegetarian items. It was also nice that they offered a Kid's Menu with their favorites such as Mac & Cheese, chicken strips and mini-pizzas. The desserts were wonderful. I love chocolate and they had a Chocolate Brownie and a Chocolate Bombay Pie. I tried both, they were wonderful! The other deserts looked good, too, such as sundaes, strawberry pie and Key-Lime Pie.



My wife Jennifer, and my daughters Claire and Isabelle are ready to make their order for the evening meal.

Sleeping

Sleeping on the train the first day was not what I had expected. I did sleep, however, it was one of those sleeps where you sleep for a few hours, then wake up, then fall back to sleep and then wake up again. Of course, I think the biggest cause of me not sleeping well was the train traveling at 75 plus M.P.H. over jointed rail track through Kansas. It made the passenger car pretty shaky. My wife slept about as well as I did. Our girls slept fine with the rocking motion of the train probably helping them fall asleep.

We slept better the second night when we were on welded rail through Arizona and California.

The Sightseer's Lounge Car

We spent a lot of time in the sightseers' lounge car. I guess it is up to the train crew, but the sightseers' lounge car is intended for first class passengers, however, many from coach also hung out in there. The conductors on our way out to California didn't seem to care who was in the lounge car as long as things were going okay. However, some of the conductors on our trip home would ask to see tickets and if you were a coach carrying ticket holder you were pretty much asked to go back to coach P.D.Q. The sightseers' lounge also has a snack bar in the lower level. You can get a wide variety of items. It made me think of a small convenience store on rails and without the gas pumps.



People were lounging around and either watching the scenery or the movie that was playing in the Sightseer's Lounge car.

National Park Service

On our trip, a National Park Ranger rode the train from La Junta, CO to Albuquerque, NM. The National Park Ranger spoke over an intercom, which you could turn on in your individual room, or listen to them live in the sightseers' lounge car. The Ranger pointed out interesting facts about the Santa Fe Trail, which paralleled the railroad in many places. The Ranger would also give some notice ahead of time so you could get a camera ready for heading into the Raton Tunnel or traveling through the Dick Wootton Ranch, which had beautiful rock formations surrounded by many tall pine trees.



One of the many sign along the right of way as the train was travel in the Dick Wootton ranch. Some of the sign would give elevation above sea level. The grades and curves were pretty sharp; the train was probably only going 25 to 30 M.P.H. through this section of the line.

Shopping the platform at Albuquerque, New Mexico

The Southwest Chief stops in Albuquerque daily to refuel the engines and to restock the train with ice and other items that may be needed in the diner. The train crew encourages passengers to get off the train to stretch their legs and to check out the Native America items that are being sold on the platform, or to check out some of the downtown stores, like the Cold Stone Ice Cream Company, which we tried. Of course, it was only 100 degrees the day we stopped and the ice cream melts pretty fast in New Mexico's heat. I had to help out our girls a few times by taking licks of their ice cream.

Weather Watch on the Train

As we were crossing New Mexico, I noticed how dry the land was. We could see a storm brewing several miles away. Right away our girls were a little fearful. As storms go, they don't care for them much, and being away from home their fear was heighten. However, the train headed into the storm and things weren't so bad until it started to hail marble size to golf ball size hail for almost 30 minutes. Then once we went through the storm the train came to a stop in the middle of nowhere. I happened to see the

conductor walk by our room and asked what was going on. It seemed that the rainstorm caused some major flash flooding up the line so a track crew was checking out some of the bridges. After about a 40-minute stop, the train was given permission to proceed and we were on our way. However, as we went over some of these bridges the normally dry river basins of New Mexico where full to the rim with rainwater.

Middle of the Night Ear Pain

As I stated earlier, I did sleep better the second night on the train when it was on wielded rail. I did wake up once during the night with this awful ear aching pain. Sure enough as the train was dropping in elevation my ears needed to pop. Once that happened, I felt much better and was able to go back to sleep. The same pain hit my wife and girls in the morning when they woke up. I told them how to cure it and they felt much better. I guess I had not taken into account how at once during our journey our train was at its highest an elevation of 7,588 feet above sea level at Raton Tunnel. As we were reaching San Bernardino the train was only at an elevation of 3,750 feet above sea level, and would continue to drop as we got closer to Los Angeles.

Los Angeles Union Station Terminal

The Los Angeles Union Station Terminal is a busy place daily with regularly scheduled commuter's trains, Amtrak trains and the red and yellow subway lines that lead there. At one time our train was going to be 47 minutes late into Los Angeles Union Station, however the conductor told me they were pretty good about clearing up other train traffic to get passenger trains in and out of the station. Our conductor was right, our scheduled time to arrive in Los Angeles was 8:15 A.M. however I looked at my watch just as I was stepping off the train in Los Angeles and it was 7:50 A.M. So we made up the 47 minutes, and then some.

The Amtrak Crew Member I Visited With

I talked with the car attends both on the way out and back on our trip. Ann Marie who was our Car Attendant on #3 has worked for Amtrak for 12 years and is based out of Los

Angles. She prefers working Amtrak's Starlight Coastline, however seniority still rules on the railroad and many times she gets bumped to different trains like the Southwest Chief or the Sunset Limited.

Rene who was our Car Attendant coming home on #4 has been with Amtrak since 1973. He started out as a cook, in the diner. Then Amtrak retrained in the late 1970's deciding to have all employees be trained to do a variety of different jobs on the train, most of them worked either in the diner, baggage handler, or car attendant. If a person wanted to pursue an engineer / conductor position they fall into a different seniority category and different training.

Tips are appreciated by the Amtrak crew's which we did after each meal and also gave our car attendants a tip once we got to our destination. The working schedule for engineers and conductors go from crew change point to crew change point, such as Chicago to Ft. Madison, Ft. Madison to Kansas City and so on. For the car attendants and dining crew they work through the whole route on the train, planning their own breaks during the day / night. Once they arrive at their home terminal they usually receive 4 to 5 days off if they choose to. Or they are allowed to let the days build up, to take 15 days off at a time. It sounded like most of it depends on the train route and the seniority of the crew.

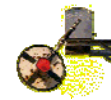


In this picture our Amtrak Car Attendant was helping to check baggage after the regular baggage handler took ill on our trip. This certainly is a good reason to have Amtrak crewmembers trained in other positions on the train.

National vs. State Amtrak Funding

Many of the Amtrak crewmembers were wearing buttons saying "National Funding Not State Funding." These statements were for the request of Amtrak's full funding to come from the National level, as much of it has since Amtrak's beginning in 1971. The fear is with individual state funding Amtrak's passenger service would be reduced due to lack of funds in some states and that passenger service in some areas would be cut back beyond daily or every other day service. The outlook by most of the Amtrak crew I spoke with is that the funding will come through, it is just a waiting game with President Bush's agenda as Amtrak is not something he is in favorite of supporting.

- Tony Bowen



Cedar Rapids, Davenport & Moline Area NMRA – MCoR Fall 2005 Area Meeting Registration Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: IA Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Others attending:

Mail to: Allen Merta, 5919 Purple Drive NE,
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402-1317 or email it to me
at armerta@msn.com