

Train enthusiasts attend Train Day, T&P reunion

By Jessica Sepulvado, News Messenger

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The "Golden Spike" was driven into the final tie that joined the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railways to create the first transcontinental railroad May 10, 1896 in Utah.

To celebrate National Train Day Saturday at the Marshall Depot, a memorandum of understanding was signed to demonstrate an unprecedented level of cooperation and support for a stronger and expanded passenger rail system in the Ark-La-Tex region. The event was attended by more than 50 people.

Harrison County Judge Richard Anderson, Joy Smith and Griff Hubbard were some of those present that signed the memorandum. Letters of support were read by Christina Anderson, director of National Association of Railroad Passengers, from Jeff Everson, regional representative, Office of U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana; Leslie Quinn, community liaison, Office of U.S. Senate David Vitter of Louisiana; Congressman Marion Berry, Arkansas, First district; and Rep. Tommy Merritt, Texas House of Representatives, District 7. In addition, perspectives from Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas were read as well.

Other activities that followed the ceremony included cake, music performed by The Ark-La-Tex Dixieland Band and drawings for a free Amtrak trip for two to any destination along the Texas Eagle route.

Joy Smith, assistant superintendent for Passenger Services for Amtrak, was presented two plaques proclaiming National Train Day from Longview and Mineola. N. R. "Pete" Smith, mayor of Mineola, named May 10, 2008, as the First National Train Day and encouraged others in the community to take part and support the efforts of Amtrak.

Longview Mayor Jean Dean presented the Longview proclamation.

Ms. Smith has been apart of the Amtrak company for 30 years now and she describes the event as a way to widen the options of travel.

"It's a collective group to bring our cities options in traveling," she said. "Some days, people don't want to drive a car or ride in an airplane. Some days, they just want to go somewhere and relax on the way and on a train you can do that."

She explained that the goal of the signing was to not put freight trains out of business but to learn how to take freight tracks and rail tracks and stand side by side.

The original idea behind the event was East Texas Coridor Council for Higher Speed Rail.

"Higher Speed Rail means trains can move faster," said Hubbard, acting executive director East Texas Corridor Council.

Most trains today could move at a speed of 120 miles per hour but with the tracks only having a capacity of 80 miles per hour they can not go that fast. The memorandum of understanding plans to change that.

"The memorandum is among states to cooperate in bringing higher speed trail through East Texas which will allow the trains to go as fast as they are able to," said Hubbard.

Saturday's event has been two years in the making but the memorandum has been around for the past 40 years.

Judge Richard Anderson finished the ceremony by saying "make no mistake ladies and gentleman, today you are a part of history."

May 10 was not only history in the making, but shortly after the signing of the memorandum was the fifth annual T&P reunion honoring all former Texas and Pacific employees and their families at the Marshall Depot.

Nearly 100 people attended the event yet only 50 were actually employees with the other 50 being family members.

The event was started with speeches given by Anderson and Hal Evans, director of the depot, which was followed by names plates being awarded.

So far, there are 154 employees with their names engraved into a golden plaque that is attached to a wooden trail hanging in the Marshall Depot; this is called the Train of Fame.

The event honored several more news names that will be joining the previous ones. Some of the names included Charles Herbert Elder, Machinist for 50 years; Richard Porter, Division Store Keeper from 1927 to 1970; Mary Hendrix, Head of Grants Department from 2004 to 2008; Gary Hendrix, Department Board Support from 2008 to 2004; Bobby G. Coleman, an engineer for 46 years; and several more.

Many with their names on the Train of Fame consider it to be more than just a name plate.

"It's an honor to be on the board, it really is," said Mary Hendrix, Head of Grants Department.

The board is capable of holding 29 more names and then another Train of Fame will be sure to follow.

Bill Oney once worked at the T&P Railroad and he was thrilled to be at the event.

"It's an honor for me to be in my home town," he said. "I love Marshall, Texas."

Tim Phillips, who was a locomotive engineer for 22 years, was attending the reunion for the first time.

"It was really good and different than anyone I have ever been to," Mr. Phillips said when asked what he thought of the event.

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