

Midwest Central Railroad

ORDER BOARD

Distributed to Friends and Members of the MCRR

November 2005

Disney “Imagineering” With a Junkyard Wars Twist

by Jesse VanWinkle

At Disney they call it “Imagineering.” Well, we do that too, but with a Junkyard Wars twist. Welcome behind the curtain of Midwest Central’s Ghost Train. Every year for the past seven years just as soon as the Old Threshers Reunion is over the Midwest Central volunteers make a dramatic switch – from preserving, maintaining, and operating historic Railroad equipment to one purely creative. In just one and a half months the south station is transformed from a museum/station to a full blown spook house. This is quite a challenge, especially in a spacious, clean, new building. It requires many hours of work by some very clever volunteers. They always seem to pull through, seemingly at the last minute, as everything falls together at once.

The amazing part about these volunteers is their resourcefulness. The tools of the trade are unlimited – a lot can be done with garbage bags, tarps, 2x4s, rope, paper mache, cheesecloth, paint, old cloths, and it goes on and on. Some see a pile of scrap metal and junk as, well, junk but our people see PROPS!

Many would be surprised at what is powering many of our automated props. Old garage door openers, discarded air cylinders, all sorts of small motors – windshield-wiper motors, old gear motors, and that is just off the top of my head from this year. A satellite dish actuator motor can gain a second life turning the head of a skeleton, an air cylinder that once opened a vent now makes a skeleton bull buck his skeleton rider off. Add in a programmable logic controller, or some homemade circuitry, a maze of wires and pulleys all over the building and you have yourself a little show.

One of the biggest challenges is coming up with new ideas for each year. It has to progress so people will want to come back. It is fun to see what people will come up with each year. Midwest Central has really relied on the proficiency of our volunteers to put on a good show for not a lot of money. This has been very

important as the Ghost Train establishes itself, and extra income from the event has been invested in lighting and sound, signage, and the many things it takes to haul thousands of people in just a few nights in October. Now that much of this is taken care of we can look into purchasing some professional props to keep the Ghost Train on the top of everyone’s Halloween to do list. We will still need our dedicated spooks though. Ghost Train couldn’t go on without them, and I am sure the wheels are already turning for next year. I look forward to seeing what they come up with.

For a look at some of the past work of our spooks check out ghosttrain.org

Thanks to every one for another great Ghost Train!

**Thank you to all of
the Midwest Central
Railroad volunteers,
and other individuals
and organizations that helped
make the Ghost Train a success!**



**A special Thank You
to our event sponsors:**

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The Order Board is a newsletter of the Midwest Central Railroad. Photos and articles may be submitted to the Midwest Central Railroad office or to the Editor. The Order Board reserves the right to edit for length and clarity. Any opinions expressed are those of the author and may or may not reflect the opinion of the Board of Directors.

The Midwest Central Railroad was incorporated in 1960 as a non-profit educational organization, dedicated to the preservation and operation of narrow gauge steam powered railroad equipment. Donations of cash or materials are welcomed and are tax-deductible under section 501(c)3 of the federal tax code.

If you have articles, photographs, or story ideas for the next issue of the Order Board, please send them to the Editor or to MCRR at P.O. Box 102, Mt. Pleasant, IA 52641

Steam and Community Spirit

by Milo Van Veldhuizen

I followed searchlights one night in late October to a place in Mt. Pleasant occupied by people costumed as ghosts, goblins, and various other scary things – but mostly I followed the sound of a steam whistle, a low call in the night for people to come and enjoy a community event.

Children were playing, costumes were being judged, and steam was relentlessly panting from a train like the breath of a draft horse that is ready to work. Pumpkins grinned in lighted delight, as if they were pleased by this restless energy.

The steam of the train had the same vitality as the community spirit I saw that night at Midwest Central's Ghost Train event, and had also seen in Old Threshers. It is a powerful spirit, moving slowly and filled with purpose. There is a lot of such community spirit in Mt. Pleasant, powering forward movement, much like the steam in the big tractors of Old Threshers.

It represents something that, once present, tends to stay for generations after generation. Yet there is always anxiety that it will be lost between generations. During Old Threshers, I heard a conversation in which people were speculating about how long people would come to that event. One person speculated that, as people who are older pass away, the young will lose interest.

I don't think so. The steam holds it all together, and symbolizes something that runs deeper than steam and tractors and trains – the dreams that move communities, and how those dreams draw life from the past. The steam symbolizes dreams as much as anything, dreams that energize community spirit and move us forward.

Monsters, ghosts, and things I couldn't put a name to swirled around me that night, but what I particularly noticed was the movement of puffing, swirling, powerful steam – waiting to release its energy, calling in long wails for the community to come and enjoy a community event. The steam drew it together, the steam that is more than steam; the steam that is a symbol of what gives life to a community; the steam that breathes the energy of the past into the present.

There is a lot of steam in Mount Pleasant, a town that moves powerfully and purposefully, full of volunteers who work on community events and further the growth of our community. This movement was evident the night I followed the searchlights, and watched pumpkins grinning into the steam. It was the community spirit of the people gathered there – in their industry and energy, the things that steam symbolizes. I think people will be drawn to that for generations to come, called by the whistle of a steam engine.

Milo Van Veldhuizen is the Pastor at First Congregational Universalist Church in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. This article originally appeared as a Guest Editorial in the Mt. Pleasant News. Reprinted here with permission from the author.

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Ribbon Cutting for the Bellevue & Cascade Caboose

by Amy Frantz

Midwest Central Railroad's new caboose, The Bellevue & Cascade Caboose Number 055, was put into service during the 2005 Old Threshers Reunion, and was featured on the passenger tickets for this year's Reunion. To make its debut official, a ribbon cutting was held on the morning of Saturday, September 3rd near the North Depot.



The Bellevue & Cascade Caboose Number 055 was built by the Ohio Falls Car Co. of Jeffersonville, Indiana, around 1880. The Bellevue & Cascade Railroad was a 36-mile long narrow-gauge railroad track that connected the Northeast Iowa towns of Bellevue, LaMotte, Zwingle, Bernard, and Cascade. The 055 served as the Bellevue & Cascade Railroad's one and only caboose until the railroad went out of service in 1936. The caboose was hauled to a nearby farm to be used as a tool shed, where it sat for decades, eventually rotting into disrepair. Around 1980, Jim Schroeder purchased what was left of the caboose and took it to his construction yard in Bellevue, Iowa. Jim and his sons set out to restore Caboose 055, painstakingly removing each piece of wood, measuring its dimensions, and creating an exact copy of each piece. They rebuilt the caboose using some of the original hardware, with nearly all new wood. In 2004 the Schroeder family donated the caboose to Midwest Central Railroad.



Many of the members of the Jim Schroeder family were in attendance for the ribbon cutting. The yellow ribbons on each end of the caboose were cut by Mrs. Jim Schroeder and Dee Mathews. President Matt Crull welcomed the Schroeder family into the Midwest Central Railroad family.

The Schroeder family was proud and excited that the caboose that Jim had put so much work into restoring was now riding the rails once again. Midwest Central would like to express our thank you to the Schroeder family for their generous donation of the Bellevue & Cascade caboose, which will be a part of many railroad events for years to come.



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MCRR Makes Donation to MP Community Betterment Foundation

MCRR's Board of Directors presented a \$500 donation to the Mt. Pleasant Community Betterment Foundation in October. The donation was made with proceeds from the Ghost Train event. Dan Prellwitz, Community Betterment Foundation President, accepted the donation, and pledged to use the funds "to beautify or improve Mt. Pleasant."

The Mt. Pleasant Community Betterment Foundation is a tax-exempt charitable foundation established to receive donations from individuals, corporations, and other organizations to create a permanent endowment fund. The endowment is used to provide grants to projects and organizations that will benefit the community. The Community Betterment Foundation is overseen by a Board of Directors, who determine the usage of the Foundation's grant funds.

"Midwest Central Railroad's willingness to donate is proof of your untiring interest and the pride you have in the community's well being," said Brent Schleisman, Mt. Pleasant City Manager. "Organizations such as yours, who graciously give, are of immeasurable value to us."

Midwest Central Railroad
P.O. Box 102
Mt. Pleasant, IA 52641

North Pole Express

Friday, December 2
6pm & 8pm

Saturday, December 3
12pm, 2pm, 4pm, 6pm, 8pm

Sunday, December 4
1pm & 3pm



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