

### The Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Endowment Fund

On Saturday mornings, train whistles can be heard blowing throughout the rural community of North Judson. The Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, which has been in operation since 1988, has successfully preserved the rich railroading history of the small town of North Judson, bringing in visitors from various states across the country as well as Canada and England. It has been built up over time through the hard work and dedication of its volunteer members who strive toward the worthy goal of educating people about railroading and the railroad's instrumental role in building America as it is today.



The name of the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum (HVRM) was not adopted until January of 1992. The organization was previously called the Miami County Steam Locomotive Association (MCSLA), and it was based out of Peru, Indiana. When a steam locomotive was brought to North Judson, and the operations resided there, the name was no longer fitting, so "Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum" was adopted in its place.

Bringing the steam engine from Peru to North Judson was not an easy task. It weighed roughly 850,000 pounds and held 30 tons of coal. It had been taken out of service in 1955 and was donated to the city of Peru a few years later. It sat there for 24 years, collecting dust and costing money in land and insurance fees. Some of the MCSLA members decided they would restore it. In order to move it, they hand-laid four city blocks of railway. It was at first moved to a grain elevator in Monterey, but it got in the way of the elevator's operations. Finally, it was pushed to North Judson.

In June of 1988, the engine was on display for North Judson's annual Mint Festival. In addition to the steam engine, the yards housed some track, a caboose, a passenger coach, and one car. There were no buildings at that time, so MCSLA members held their meetings with coffee in the caboose.

When the HVRM was able to obtain buildings, they often had to go through great obstacles to get them to North Judson. Their back shop alone was built in three sections. The middle section was an old World War II building that was used for manufacturing in Valparaiso. Some HVRM members numbered all of the parts, unbolted it, and hauled it to North Judson. It had only 10" clearance, however, and the steam engine alone needed about 17", so they put foundation down, built pillars, put the building back together on top of the pillars, and sheeted the bottom.

The track, too, has been pieced together and has come from all over the state. Most of the parts which make up the HVRM have been donated, and the members have worked diligently to restore them and create the beautiful museum as it is today. They have refurbished multiple train cars, rebuilt three diesel

engines, hand-laid all of the track, put up all of the switches, signals, and buildings, and they have worked hard on the steam locomotive.

The HVRM has been made possible by these donations, the hard work of the members, and the generosity and support of various people and organizations. Many people were involved in obtaining the track on which they run their excursions, for example. They have also received many grants, which greatly support their operations. In 1997, they received a \$5,000 grant from the Starke County Community Foundation, which was one of the first big grants that the HVRM received.

The HVRM members have shown their appreciation by giving back to the community in various ways. They helped lay the railway in Knox, put down track in Rochester at the Historical Society Building, hand-laid railway for the Grand Central Station building in North Judson, and they even hosted a wedding reception at the railroad museum.

"We have some fun too," said Bob, a member since 1989. They helped one of their young members propose to his girlfriend by hanging a sign over the side of a train saying, "Will You Marry Me?" They then drove the train across the bridge in English Lake where the couple stood by the river.

They have had countless visitors, including Lieutenant Governor Sue Ellspermann, and Governor Mitch Daniels, who was an engineer for a day. Once, three brothers who were in their sixties came from Montana, California, and Southern Indiana in order to see the steam engine, on which their dad had been an engineer.

In 2013, the trains hauled 4,500 passengers and another 400 or more passengers rode on the Santa trains, which are excursions held around Christmastime when Santa rides the train, visits with the kids, and hands out goodie bags. Community organizations and clubs sometimes bring in groups for train rides, and schools will sometimes bring more than 200 students to the HVRM.

The HVRM members are proud of what they've accomplished, and they enjoy being able to honor the history of the railroad and of North Judson. North Judson "is really an old railroad town," said Bob. Four railroads met here, the first being established in about the 1860s. One mile North of these crossroads was a town called Brantwood, which had fifteen city blocks with a town square, post office, and some businesses. However, when all of the railroads came here, the town of Brantwood moved here to North Judson, since that's where all of the business was. At that time, 3/4 of the people who worked in North Judson worked at the railroad.

North Judson certainly would not be the town it is today if it weren't for the railroad. On May 20, 1897, a newspaper article published in the local newspaper announced that a big Bohemian picnic sponsored by Pilsar Turners in Chicago was being held in North Judson at Enterprise Park (where the Lutheran School is now). The Erie Railroad brought in 6,000 people for that picnic, which cost 75 cents a person.

The HVRM is dedicated to honoring the railroading history of the region. They've had publicity in South Bend newspapers, Chicago newspapers, and they have had several articles in *Trains* magazine, which is distributed all over the United States.

Today, the HVRM has around 270 members, scattered all across the United States, Canada, and England. About 15-20 volunteers, directors, and officers continuously oversee the progress of the museum.

In 1999, the HVRM was able to establish an endowment fund through the Starke County Community Foundation, which helps to pay their utility bills & expenses. In total, the Starke County Community Foundation has provided the museum with more than \$155,000 to help them tell the story of the railroad and preserve the history which helped build North Judson and America. The HVRM has many long-term goals. It has overcome many obstacles in the past, and its hard-working volunteers are dedicated to ensuring its future success.