

KEEPING TRACK

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The Word From the Prez

ASMR Enjoyed Upbeat 2006, Anticipates Even Better 2007

We are starting a new year and hopefully we will continue to grow and improve our club. This past year had a bump or two in it, but all-in-all it was a good year. Changes will be coming in 2007, and we hope they will all be good ones. We have seen better participation in club functions, growth in club size, and we have completed or started several improvements, including our portable modular display layout. More people are now able to enjoy what we have to share.

Thanks to everyone who helped out at the State School's Christmas Lane event. Those who did had a blast. If you didn't get to participate, you missed out on a lot of fun. As Dusty Garison said, "I can't believe anyone who loves trains wouldn't want to come and get to run trains to their heart's desire." The joy on the children's faces (and most adults, too) as they viewed the layout said it all. Some didn't want to leave, and some only left kicking and hollering as their parents pulled them away. State School officials said we had the most popular exhibit at Christmas Lane (there were some 78 in all). This was my second year to participate and I will say the response was even better this time. We heard over and over how our exhibit just keeps getting better each year. And these comments were about a layout that is only on its second showing and has some modules that are still "a work in progress"! We found a few "bugs" that will have to be fixed, but the trains still ran remarkably well for the number of hours they were in continuous operation. Thanks again to everybody for your help and participation during 2006, and Happy New Year. **Your President, Ken Riediger**

Texas State Railroad Faces December 30 Shutdown

According to a recent article in the *Dallas Morning News*, the Texas State Railroad (TSRR) is in such deep financial trouble its last run may be on Dec. 30. Cutbacks in funding for state parks in Texas have already made a big impact on the historic railroad's operations and maintenance as it tries to keep its steam locomotive-powered "tourist" trains running between Rusk and Palestine. Fortunately, a task force of advocates for saving this Texas treasure is working hard to head off disaster. They submitted a

request to state officials for \$650,000 in emergency funds to keep things going for a few more months while alternatives are being explored. One plan is to have the railroad leased by the state to a private company which they believe can turn things around financially. Although TSRR, which started in 1976, expects to carry some 65,000 passengers this year, it is still running about a million dollars in the red annually. A petition you can sign to demonstrate your support for keeping the TSRR "on track" is available on several internet sites you can easily access by putting "Texas State RR" in a Google search. So far, help and action promised by state officials has not been forthcoming, and if nothing is done soon, the *best case* scenario is that TSRR will become a "static display" of rusting historic railroad equipment. Included on TSRR's locomotive roster, by the way, is a T&P 4-6-0 steamer that came from a city park in Abilene. You might want to check out that petition before it's too late.

ASMR Meeting Notes

The Dec. 2 business meeting was called to order by Pres. Ken Riediger at 10:17. Minutes of the Nov. 4 meeting were approved, but no treasurer's report was available due to Treas. Dan Brady's absence. Members discussed the option of trying to get Habitat for Humanity's old location for a new "home", and voted for Jim Gibson to continue exploring the idea. Pres. Riediger mentioned the State School Christmas Lane event and called for volunteers to sign up to monitor and run trains on the club's HO modular layout which will be on display from Dec. 7 – 24. Dusty Garison proposed including a donation "pig" for United Way in conjunction with the club layout, pending approval from the State School, and members voted for him to check it out. Steve England said he hasn't been getting club emails, and Sec'y. Cody Hilliard said he would try and find out why. Mel Herwick said David Damiano told him recently that he liked getting the club's emails and Cody said he would take care of that, too. Pres. Riediger said he was pleased with the results of both the club's open house and the one he had for his home layout. He said that the bank needs Cody's and Mel's signatures for the club account. He announced that Joe Steward has resigned due to the pressures of his job, but plans to rejoin when things improve. Also, Dan Brady will be gone most of December and part of January getting settled

into a new job he has taken. The meeting adjourned at 11:06.

New Modular HO Layout Popular at State School's "Christmas Lane" Event

Set up in a 16 X 16-foot configuration, the club's new modular display layout was a big hit at Abilene State School's annual Christmas Lane event. Like the two previous years, the ASMR layout occupied "center stage" in the "Shirley's Cinema" building situated at the end of the outdoor drive-through part of the Christmas lights display. It ran every evening from Dec. 7 through Dec. 24, and many of the visitors asked questions and expressed great pleasure at seeing what we had built. It was easy to identify some of the children (and adults) who came to either of the previous years' shows because they immediately wanted to know where was the "red button" they could push to make the train go. (Since we were using DCC, we didn't have the popular red button feature this year.) Special thanks to Ken Riediger, Jim Gibson, Cody Hilliard, Dusty and Travis Garison, Mel Herwick, Chris Thomas, Ken England, Dan Brady, and Charles Chinn, who took turns at the display on various nights. Also, Mike Ziegenhagen, who took photos of the layout for the club. If you didn't help out with this major ASMR project this year, you missed a great opportunity to run trains for, and visit with, a large number of interesting and appreciative visitors from Abilene and the Big Country area.

ASMR Team to Teach Scouting Railroad Merit Badge Course

For the second year in a row, Ken Riediger and Jim Gibson have volunteered to teach Saturday morning merit badge classes on January 6 and 20 for the Boy Scouts. They will provide training for a group of Scouts interested in qualifying for a "Railroading" merit badge. Some of the topics include railroad history, passenger and freight operations and safety, and model railroading activities and skills.

The Editor Speaks

Lionel Catches a Break, and I Discover Another RR Tunnel

I've written more than once this year on various trials and tribulations in the hobby industry, including the ongoing legal battle between Lionel and Mike's Train House (MTH). The latest chapter in that sad

saga is that Lionel has won the right to appeal the \$40 million settlement awarded to MTH in a 2004 jury trial over "trade secrets" (locomotive blueprints) allegedly stolen by a Lionel manufacturer in South Korea. Had Lionel lost its appeal and been faced with paying the award, \$12.8 million of which was viewed as "excessive" by the court granting the appeal, the company would probably have been in perilous, if not fatal, financial trouble. It had already filed bankruptcy in the wake of the original jury award. Now it's beginning to look like an out of court settlement between Lionel and MTH may be in the offing. I hope so, and I hope it's reasonable, because I would hate to see Lionel forced to go out of business or be severely crippled by an oppressively large award payment to MTH. Lionel, the hobby industry, and model railroaders would all be losers in that situation, in my opinion.

In the September issue of *Keeping Track*, I wrote an article about the historic "Big Hill" railroad tunnel located near Fredericksburg. At the time I thought it was the only such bore in Texas, but I recently found out about another one. The "Clarity Tunnel", located in the Texas Panhandle, is 742 feet long and situated on the old Fort Worth and Denver South Park Rwy. right of way. In 1963, 64 miles of the abandoned route, from South Plains to Estelle, was made a hiking and biking trail in the Caprock Canyon State Park Trailway System. The tunnel is about 4.5 miles southwest of the Monk's Point Crossing access point, or about 13 miles east of South Plains. Like its "Big Hill" cousin, Clarity is home to a large colony of bats. Judging by photos on the internet, the trail wanders through some very rugged and scenic Caprock Canyon terrain, and there are 46 bridges on it. It seems like Clarity and as much of the trail as you wanted to explore would be well worth checking out on a hike or a bike ride this spring, when the weather is mild. JG

PS: I learned after writing this that Ken Riediger took a "speeder" ride on the rails of this right of way before the tracks were torn up, and he put a video copy of his adventure in the club library. I can't wait to check it out! JG

Model RR Meets & Events

Jan. 6 - 7 – "Wintertime Train Show", Waco
Jan. 13 - 14 – 22nd Annual Dallas Area Train Show, Plano