

Like 37 Share Tweet Save 5 Email Favorite Share

News

January 09, 2020

Passion to give: We wouldn't have history or art without the work of those who volunteer for a cause

BY NEW TIMES STAFF

Welcome to 2020! It's always at the beginning of the year that *New Times* shows its appreciation to the volunteers who give their time working for something they are passionate about. In this year's Volunteers Issue, Assistant Editor Peter Johnson talks to the folks who dreamed up the SLO Railroad Museum and brought history to life, Staff Writer Karen Garcia focuses on Paso Robles youth who honor veterans through Wreaths Across America, and Staff Writer Kasey Bubnash writes about the Morro Bay Art Association's newest event.



—Camillia Lanham

click to enlarge



Photos By Peter Johnson
PRESERVING HISTORY SLO Railroad Museum Manager Diane Marchetti (left) and President Brad LaRose work daily to keep Central Coast railroad history alive.

All aboard: The SLO Railroad Museum is still finding new ways to bring history to life

Stepping into the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum takes you back in time.

The restored freight house, built in 1894 by Southern Pacific Railroad, doesn't look like much of a relic from the outside. But inside, an authentic historical experience comes to life.

The freight house's barn-like ceiling creates a drafty and rustic atmosphere. The space—formerly a hub for loading and transferring goods by rail across the region and beyond—is now occupied by thoughtfully arranged exhibits displaying various railroad artifacts. There are furnishings, like an original freight house agent's desk; pieces of train equipment, like a mine ore car; plenty of photographs, maps, and information plaques; and much more.

It's a time capsule dedicated to a unique and vital part of Central Coast history.

SEARCH, FIND, ENJOY

EVENTS MUSIC DINING

-All Dates-

-All Categories-

-All Neighborhoods-

<https://www.newtimeslo.com/sanluisobispo/passion-to-give-we-wouldnt-have-history-or-art-without-the-work-of-those-who-volunteer-for-a-cause/Content?oid=9165871#>

Find Events

SUBMIT AN EVENT

MORE BY NEW TIMES STAFF



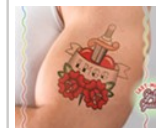
Health and Wellness 2020

Jan 23, 2020



Battles, scandals, and #MeToo: The riveting and riotous news that made headlines in 2019

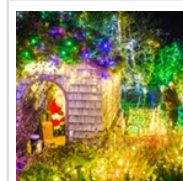
Jan 2, 2020



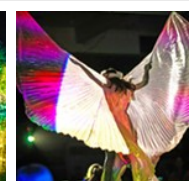
Last-Minute Gift Guide: Give the presents that will last a lifetime—experiences

Dec 12, 2019
 More »

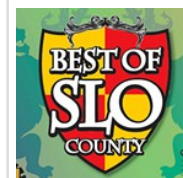
NEWEST SLIDESHOWS



Get festive: The Central Coast puts up holiday cheer every year



The Body Positivity All Gender Fashion Show 2019



MORE SLIDESHOWS...>



"We're the only one doing this in this region," said Brad LaRose, president of the museum.

Decades of dreaming, planning, and artifact collecting among local railroad enthusiasts finally paid off when this museum first opened its doors in 2013. While the museum has existed in concept since 1991, it struggled for years to find a permanent home.



Photos By Peter Johnson

MODEL A model railway sits in the SLO Railroad Museum. Pictured is the train station in SLO—note Bishop Peak and Cerro San Luis in the background.

said, many items were collected long before there was a museum to put them in.

"There's a guy who lived 300 feet from here who brought an artifact to us," LaRose said. "And, on the other hand, I've driven all the way to Baltimore, Maryland, just to pick up a bell and a whistle."

What's in the museum now is all thanks to the tireless efforts of a few dozen dedicated volunteers—and, of course, generous donors.

LaRose noted that all of the artifacts were carefully selected to be authentic to local history—to the Central Coast railroad industry that was the region's economic engine in the 19th and 20th centuries. Before highways and commercial trucks, goods, food, and people moved by rail, not just on the Southern Pacific line that traversed the West Coast, but on forgotten local networks like the Pacific Coast Railway (which connected Avila Beach to SLO) and the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. Even individual farmers made their own makeshift railways, installing temporary lines in their orchards, for example, to easily transport harvests.

Practically everything was done by rail—first via steam engine trains and later electric and diesel locomotives—until Southern Pacific shut down for good in 1996. It's an era of history that fascinates the volunteers who contribute to its preservation.

They contribute in different ways, too. Volunteer John Marchetti, for instance, is the mastermind behind the museum's spectacular model railroad, which is tucked in a back room of the freight house. John (who's married to Diane) said he first started constructing the model at home back in the 1950s. Now, it's on display at the museum—the incredibly detailed tracks, trains, and stations backdropped by colorful depictions of the landscape that show exactly where along the route the model is.

"There's Paso Robles; it goes down the grade and works its way around," John explained as he showed the model. "That's the building you're in right there."

The model, which winds all around the room, represents years and years of painstaking work.

"It takes so many hours to produce just even one of these tiny buildings," Diane noted.

Outside the museum, on a stretch of tracks that run parallel to it, several old train cars are also on display. Among them are an old caboose, a steel gondola used in the sugar beet trade, and an Army locomotive used during World War II at Camp Roberts.

"It was a museum without a physical location," explained Diane Marchetti, the museum manager. "Guys like Brad [LaRose] and some of our other members were, for many years, acquiring artifacts because in their minds someday there was going to be a physical location. And it came to pass."

That opportunity came in the 2000s when the city of SLO agreed to lease the building to the museum, as it had purchased the property for more Amtrak parking and was looking to revitalize the area.

"This was blighted; this should have been burnt down accidentally many times and didn't," LaRose said of the freight house. "The city didn't know what to do with it."

LaRose, one of the nonprofit's founding members in '91, has traveled from coast to coast—literally—to retrieve artifacts that are now on display at the museum. Found anywhere and everywhere, he

Monterey Bay Community Power: "What's to love about PG&E? We have zero..." Jan 22

SLO New Times: Beraud, on Monterey Bay Community Power: "I would've voted for community choice energy..." Jan 22

SLO New Times: Arnold, on not joining Monterey Bay Community Power: "For me a lot of it is I would like to..." Jan 22

SLO New Times: Arnold: "The sustainability plan is just where it needs to be." Jan 22

SLO New Times: Beraud: "There is little confidence that the sustainability plan will work. We need a plan..." Jan 22

SLO New Times: Arnold, on groundwater: "I am very excited & proud of the fact we worked to create a..." Jan 22

SLO New Times: Beraud, on groundwater management: "Paso Robles has been struggling for many many years..." Jan 22

TRENDING NOW

MOST READ | MOST COMMENTED

THIS ISSUE

1. Justice for Bubs: Recent officer-involved dog shooting sparks transparency and accountability debate at the SLO Police Department [READ MORE](#)
2. Women's March SLO removes Central Coast Health Coalition from event [READ MORE](#)
3. Learn your rights: Free expungement and immigration legal clinics to be held Feb. 7 to 8 [READ MORE](#)
4. Health and Wellness 2020 [READ MORE](#)
5. Hill and Korsgaden clash over housing, dunes, civility at *New Times* forum [READ MORE](#)

[MORE MOST READ](#)

Restoring these cars is LaRose's passion. With help from a crew of volunteers, LaRose consults old photographs, books, and blueprints to bring these artifacts back to a vibrant and authentic state.

His latest challenge is to restore a classic Southern Pacific boxcar—the last of its kind still around. Bill Walther, a retired Southern Pacific employee, made a donation to help the museum turn the old boxcar into an exhibit, which will house a theater and a photographic display dedicated to the thousands of locals who worked in the industry—some of whom died on the job.

Walther told *New Times* he wanted to pay tribute to all of the locomotive engineers who put their lives at risk working in the dangerous but important business. Having retired early due to a debilitating accident, Walther felt compelled to honor his peers who helped support his retirement. Recently, the last surviving steam locomotive engineer on the Central Coast, David "Duke" Duceshi, passed away, marking the symbolic death of that generation.

"I just think it's important to recognize the contribution that the railroad has done for SLO County over the years; it seems it's almost gone now," Walther said. "We need to recognize what it was."

For every facet of the SLO Railroad Museum, LaRose said, volunteers are needed and welcomed. From archival work in its library to restoration work on the train cars, the museum's leaders want the community to get involved.

"We all have something to contribute," he said. Δ

Learn local history: The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum is located at 1940 Santa Barbara Ave., SLO, and is open to the public on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission for non-member adults is \$5 (\$3 for children). To learn more about the museum and how to volunteer, donate, or become a member, visit slorm.com.

Assistant Editor Peter Johnson can be reached at pjohnson@newtimeslo.com.

During the holiday season, a local Air Force-focused nonprofit pays respect to veterans laid to rest

On this past Dec. 14, 25 volunteers gathered at the entrance of the Paso Robles District Cemetery in the Veterans Memorial area.

The gathering was in recognition of National Wreaths Across America Day, where volunteers place wreaths on the headstones of veterans who have been laid to rest.

Coni Wells' 13-year-old son participated in the ceremony by going to each headstone and paying his respects.

It's the first time Wells and her son have attended the ceremony, and she describes the event as incredibly moving.

"It was definitely hard for me to stop the tears. Even just walking around and especially watching my son salute each of the headstones and say out loud to each one, 'Thank you for your service,' ... even now it's making me tear up," she told *New Times*.

Wells' son Colton is a member of the Paso Robles Civil Air Patrol Squadron 446—a local chapter of the Civil Air Patrol nonprofit and part of the official civilian auxiliary of the United States Air Force.

The nonprofit is made up of adult volunteers and members ages 12 to 18 years old, and the organization works to instill the core values of volunteer service, respect, and integrity.

Michael Huff, location coordinator for the district cemetery and the captain of Squadron 446, said this is the fourth year that the squadron has participated in the



click to enlarge

Photo Courtesy Of Coni Wells
APPRECIATION During a Dec. 14 ceremony, Coni Wells watched her 13-year-old son Colton place wreaths on graves and salute veterans who were laid to rest in the Paso Robles District Cemetery.