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Photo courtesy WMSR

The Western Maryland Scenic Railroad (WMSR) continues to be a first class destination for guests while preparing for the 2016 operating season. Plans for the upcoming year are the most comprehensive since the railroad's founding and have already generated enthusiasm on a national level. Reasons for the interest may be found in two major conservation and restoration projects that are on time for a late spring unveiling.

Since the WMSR's acquisition of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway #1309 steam locomotive in 2015, rail fans across the country have been anticipating its return to service. Mike Gresham, General Superintendent of the WMSR, states, "The #1309 is an articulated Mallet model that will become the most powerful steam locomotive in regular operation within the United States."

Adding to the engine's provenance is the date of manufacture—1949. The date is significant because the Baldwin Locomotive Works never produced another domestic steam engine for a U.S. railroad after the #1309, making it an exclamation mark to the transportation industry that played a major role in building the country's economy.

Mike points out that in addition to being recognized as a noteworthy locomotive, the #1309 will become a living symbol of historical preservation because important skills and values have been passed from one generation to another. "The #1309 is a tribute and symbol to our industrial heritage and we are proud to have played a part in keeping those skills and traditions alive," stated Mike.

The locomotive has already generated worldwide interest among rail fans and contributed to the

WMSR's renaissance. Inquiries of general interest and offers of support have come from a variety of geographic locations and age groups over the past several months.

The second rebuilding initiative focuses on the historic #204 Western Maryland Business Car, one of two such cars in existence. Since being transported from Deep Creek Lake to the WMSR shop, the car has undergone lead paint removal and initial structural repairs. A crew has been dedicated to its restoration throughout the winter months which will make the car available for display by spring. "We expect the business car to be on the tracks and behind the #1309 by late spring, although it will not be completely refurbished," noted Mike.

In the meantime the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad continues its regularly scheduled operations that will extend through the 2015 Christmas season. The special Christmas trains always sell out and are on pace to do so again. This year (2015) is the final opportunity to ride behind WMSR's current steam locomotive #734 for a number of years, as Federal Railroad Administration requirements mandate a complete rebuild at the end of 2015.

With the operating season winding down, the WMSR is already looking forward to what promises to be its most successful season. As Mike states, "2016 will be the most successful year ever for the WMSR. We have a lot of work to do, but we are going to get it done!"

