

Come Celebrate Our 30 Years!



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Photos courtesy WMSR

Thirty years ago, large industry started leaving the area. Cas Taylor and others were concerned for the region's economic structure. The brain trust envisioned the creation of a "scenic" railroad, akin to the success of the Cass Scenic Railroad located in Cass, West Virginia. This concept would be the cornerstone for the future of Allegany County. They formed a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization called the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad Development Corporation. Knowing the Chessie System Railroad was liquidating rail lines they no longer found valuable, the entrepreneurs approached the Chessie management to see if the Corporation would donate the ex-Western Maryland Railway Company (then forged into the Chessie System Railroad) main line railroad from Cumberland to Frostburg to the newly formed not-for-profit corporation. Chessie agreed to do so.

With the formation of the development corporation, the goal was to find an operator, a company that would be hired to make repairs to the railroad and operate trains. Jack Showalter was hired to be the operator. He brought his Allegany Central Railroad equipment to Cumberland. He brought his two steam locomotives to pull the passenger

train up the mountain. At that time, heritage steam operations were a rarity...even more so today. After the years of the Allegany Central, the WMSR brought in Sheridan Rail to operate the railroad. Sheridan Rail used heritage Alco brand diesels to pull the passenger train to Frostburg. With the cost associated with finding an operator, the WMSR decided to become the operator for the 1993 season. Hiring an appropriate staff, the railroad acquired a steam locomotive that would soon become the famed "Mountain Thunder." Heritage diesel locomotives were acquired from Conrail. Not too long after the railroad acquired the locomotives, passenger equipment was acquired from various sources. Mountain Thunder would toil on its job until April, 2016. The Federal Railroad Administration guidelines state that a steam locomotive must undergo a mandatory rebuild program every 15 years – or 1472 days. And now, present day, the GP-30 Diesel Engine still works the mountain on operating days with a typical eight car consist of heritage coach and dining cars.

Since our last article, we are very excited to announce that work has resumed on the ex-Chesapeake and Ohio steam

locomotive, 1309. It was the last steam locomotive built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia for domestic service. Thisallet-type, 2-6-6-2 steam locomotive successfully passed its hydrostatic test in June and machining and fabrication of parts continues. We are very optimistic that steam will return on the mountain in 2019 in the form of “Maryland Thunder.”

As we continue to move full steam ahead, we have a variety of events for the old and young alike. We have recently been voted the “Best Date Spot in Maryland” by the Daily Meal. We operate an evening dinner train; we are one of a handful of heritage railroads that stores, preps, cooks and serves meals on board the train – this is not a catered affair! Along with dinner, pending the schedule, our guests can enjoy a Family Pizza Train, Murder Mystery, Wine and Cheese or even a Mountain Moonshine excursion. Our dinner train now operates all year long!!

Do not care for lunch or dinner aboard the train? Our new lounge service aboard the “Will’s Creek Tavern” lounge car might be the perfect fit for you. It is for our guests over 21 who appreciate an adult beverage and light hors d’oeuvres in a mid-century décor setting. Our staff will make sure you are well pampered during the excursion.

October is one of the three months of the year that finds our station platforms full of faces in search of the fall foliage experience. During this time, our trains operate every day except Mondays. If you are looking for a colorful time of the year to ride, there is no time like October!

Then, in mid-November, we begin decorating the stations and operating our WinterLand on the Western Maryland Christmas Trains. November and December find our railroad amidst a magical experience of Christmas magic. From the interactions with Santa and Mrs. Claus, reindeer games and more: there is something for the entire family! We have been told that many families hold our holiday trains as a staple in their family traditions. Last year, we had the pleasure of meeting a few families that have been returning guests for many years! That is tradition!!

Finishing out the year, we will host our annual New Year’s Eve Murder Mystery train. Featuring a champagne toast at midnight, we invite you to ride the rails with heritage style into 2019!

Tickets are on sale now and can be purchased at WMSR.com!

Come celebrate our 30 years!! See you on the platform!

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