A Note from the Editor
Saying “farewell” after nearly 20 years at BJWRR

Peter G. Panacy
Chief Executive Officer

Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad hired me in August of 1995. I was a 15-year-old kid back then. I took over full-time duties in April of 2001 and have been serving in such capacity ever since.

But the time has come for me to say goodbye to this organization and to move on towards new horizons and challenges. I will be leaving at the end of January, and this newsletter marks the last bit of correspondence I will have with many of you.

My wife and I are leaving for the Sacramento area and are excited for what this opportunity will offer. And no, I will not be staying in the tourist-railroad business!

For me, the important part is to know that I have left my mark on this organization. Having grown up in Los Gatos and making the railroad a frequent destination in my childhood, I want to ensure that generations of children will enjoy this place as I had. I have the full confidence in this place’s ability to fulfill this request.

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The Last Holiday Train?
2014 could mark the final year of a BJWRR festive tradition

The Holiday Train has been a tradition since 1999. Photo by Jim Koski.

Peter G. Panacy
Chief Executive Officer

2014 marked the 15th year in which the BJWRR celebrated the holidays with its annual Holiday Train—a festive, lighted train that toured Vasona Park’s Fantasy of Lights each December.

This season marked another successful event with lines frequently extending beyond the station and platform. Riders enjoyed all the sights from the comfort of the lighted passenger cars while being serenaded by cheery music aboard the train. While waiting, guests frequently enjoyed complimentary carousel rides and tasty snacks and beverages offered up on chilly nights at Oak Meadow Park.

Numbers were incredible all across the board according to BJWRR’s Chief Operating Officer Francesca Balistreri. The long lines and big crowds justified all the efforts made by the railroad’s crew to host the traditional event.

Yet signs are looming that this could be the final year of the Holiday Train and the Fantasy of Lights in general.

Vasona Park abbreviated the Fantasy of Lights this year. Previously, the county event lasted from Thanksgiving until

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I have seen plenty of positive change during my 19-year tenure. The railroad and carousel have grown from a small, ma-and-pa-feeling place into a legitimate business. Yet the business still sticks to its mission and goals. I’m proud of that.

I’m also proud of the countless efforts from those who have been associated with the railroad and carousel over the years. They deserve all the credit in the world for what they do, and it often goes unnoticed by the public.

But most importantly, I want everyone with whom I’ve worked to know that I consider it an honor and a privilege to call each and every one of you a teammate and colleague. This place has given me countless friendships and associates, all of whom have had tremendous influence on my life.

It’s been a great ride. And here’s to the next chapter! ♠

Chief Engineer’s Corner
Highlighting the railroad’s accomplishments in 2014

Bill Church
Chief Engineer

Time flies when you’re busy or having fun. We’ve had an abundance of both this year. Our locomotives kept us busy with various issues throughout the year. We also needed to upgrade our rolling stock. All in all, it’s been a challenging year for us.

The No. 2 needed work on its main cylinders, which had become worn through the years. The nature of the job led us to contact Hillcrest Shops in Reedley. The No. 2 was hauled down to Hillcrest in February for the needed repairs. A horizontal boring machine was used to precisely bore out the cylinders to specifications. When the No. 2 returned in March, our volunteer staff got to work overhauling the drive and valve assemblies. New pistons and shafts were also installed, and the locomotive was back up and running in July with considerably more power.

No. 5 was out of services for most of the summer. A recurring problem with a drive-wheel pivot pin kept the locomotive inactive, and a new one was sent out by the manufacturer. The steam-driven air compressor was also having some problems, which required a slight change in the lubrication oil to be used. Given the difficulty in finding such compressors, we elected to purchase two new compressors as backups. Once these repairs, and others, were complete, the No. 5 was put back into service even though it was at the very end of the steam season. Hopefully 2015 offers more opportunities for our new locomotive.

Both Nos. 2502 and 3502 remained reliable fixtures. Although No. 3502 had a problem with its charging system. It was quickly fixed with a new alternator and some wiring-harness repair. No. 2502 was a little more temperamental, and a surging problem appeared sporadically. After various tests and evaluation, we determined the forward/reverse switch was defective. A new installation and adjustment has since resulted in a very smooth operation.

The passenger cars underwent a wheel overhaul for most of the year. Brand-new wheels and axles have now been installed on each car, and spares are being completed as we speak. In all, the railroad purchased 80 wheels and 40 axles from the same manufacturer that built the No. 5. They are machining-works of art! These upgrades put an end to the series of minor derailments that hindered operation for much of the spring. On top of the new wheels and axles, the passenger cars are also being prepared for new flooring. The 15-year-old linoleum floors will be removed, and a synthetic floor will be installed during the winter months. Additionally, we have installed a new sound system that will allow us to play numerous types of music. Conductors can also amplify their own voices as needed to ensure the safety of our passengers.

You can see that it has been a busy year, and it will continue to be with many projects yet to come. I want to extend special thanks to our volunteers for their tireless work and talent brought to the BJWRR. Without them, this railroad and carousel would not be providing the public with a fantastic experience so treasured in Los Gatos’ parks. If there are any readers that have such talent and desire to keep BJWRR running, please don’t hesitate to call or come on down on Tuesday for our work day! ♠
New Year’s Eve. 2014 saw Vasona cut the operation from December 6 to Christmas Eve on December 24.

This meant that the Holiday Train was also shortened. Typically, the railroad would stage as many as 16 nights of operation. Instead, BJWRR was relegated to just 11-scheduled nights—two of which were rained out.

But this isn’t the entire story.

Numerous sources within the Santa Clara County Department of Parks and Recreation have stated that the county may cease the Fantasy of Lights after 2014. Even though lines are long and event nights are busy, the generated revenue barely exceeds the large expenses incurred over the event per the reports.

As such, the county is seriously considering ending the Fantasy of Lights after this season.

What this means for BJWRR is not clear. It is possible that the railroad continues this tradition even if the Fantasy of Lights is not a part of it. But this will inevitably mean less lights and displays and a decrease in interest from activity-seeking patrons.

Does this mean the railroad follows suit and ends its own holiday tradition?

Hopefully both events continue. But if this isn’t the case, one will look back upon this festive tradition with plenty of good memories. December is always filled with holiday cheer, and the Holiday Train and Fantasy of Lights served to add such cheer to those who visited Oak Meadow and Vasona Parks each year dating back to 1999.

FROM THE PRESIDENT’S CABOOSE

Doug Sporleder
President, Board of Directors

Hello everyone and Happy New Year! As we greet 2015, we will see big changes at the BJWRR and WEMC.

Our executive director and CEO Peter Panacy will be leaving the railroad after nearly 20 years of dedicated service.

Peter and his wife Kristy are leaving the area and moving up to Folsom, California. Peter has served the railroad and carousel in a number of various capacities during his tenure, and he has taken on numerous projects and tasks over the years.

He has been a tremendous asset to the continued operations of our railroad, and he will be greatly missed.

At our December meeting of the BJWRR Board of Directors, we approved the promotion of current Chief Operating Officer Francesca Balistreri to the position of Executive Director—a post she held in interim while Peter was working on the restoration of our track in 2009-10.

Francesca has the experience and has been part of the BJWRR staff for 10 years, serving in many capacities over that duration.

The board also approved the promotion of Rosie Balistreri to replace her sister as COO. Rosie has been with the railroad for five years and recently served as our most senior supervisor on the managerial staff.

The board and I have every confidence that our new management duo of Francesca and Rosie will keep the railroad operating in a safe, efficient manner.

It will continue to be a fantastic asset to the local Los Gatos area and community.

During the new year, many projects to upgrade the railroad, carousel and our facilities will be undertaken.

Our dedicated group of volunteers will continue their wonderful efforts on behalf of our operation and keep our rolling stock and buildings in wonderful condition.

A huge THANK YOU to all of them.

GET INVOLVED WITH THE BILLY JONES WILDCAT RAILROAD THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA!!

“Like” us on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/BillyJonesWildcatRailroad

Follow us on Twitter:
@BJWRR

As always, visit our website www bjwrr org and stay tuned for exciting news, events and updates!
BJWRR Is Hiring!
The railroad and carousel offer a tremendous venue for persons entering the workforce

Peter G. Panacy
Chief Executive Officer

Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad is putting together yet another hiring class this winter.

BJWRR is looking for motivated and team-oriented people to join the ranks that help operate the train, carousel and concession stand throughout the year.

No specific skills are required—just the desire to be a part of a hard-working, enjoyable team that consistently displays smiles and a pleasant demeanor to the thousands of people that visit the train and carousel.

Entry-level jobs are perfect for high school and college students entering the workforce for the very first time. New employees receive training in customer service, cash handling and ride operation. Compensation is competitive and hours are flexible. Since the railroad and carousel are typically open on weekends during the school year and daily during summer vacation, this job is perfect for those who rank their education as their No. 1 priority.

Many of our employees have gone on to do great things with their respective careers. BJWRR provides a first step in achieving young people’s goals. The experienced gained during one’s tenure with the railroad pays off in many ways down the road.

Prospective employees under 18 years of age are required by law to submit a work permit, which can usually be obtained by the employee’s local school district. Prospective employees over 18 years of age are not required to have a work permit on file.

Persons wishing to apply for work at BJWRR should contact the railroad’s hiring department. This can be done by sending an email to hiring@bjwrr.org or by calling the main office at (408) 395-7433. Printable applications are available via our website at www.bjwrr.org/volunteer-employment/employment.

If you like working with children, have a love of trains and being outdoors, this is the job for you!

There are plenty of perks to being a part of our team. So if you are interested, don’t hesitate! Applications are coming in quickly and employee roster spots are filling up! ♠

Did You Know?
The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad and W.E. “Bill” Mason Carousel are full of fun facts

There is plenty of history surrounding the Wildcat Railroad and W.E. Mason Carousel. You may think you have a good knowledge of the railroad and carousel, but…

Did you know these fun facts?

Contrary to public perception, BJWRR’s steam locomotives burn diesel fuel. It’s not combusted like in a diesel engine, but atomized and ignited within a firebox.

BJWRR’s steam locomotives take between two and four hours to fire up each morning. For a 10:30 a.m. start time, engineers need to be onsite no later than 6:30 a.m.

When it was in operation at the Venice Miniature Railway in Southern California, the No. 2 had the honor of pulling U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt who was a pass-holder on the VMR early in the 20th Century.

Nos. 2502 and 3502 received their numbers from the Swanton Pacific diesel locomotive No. 502, which was numbered as such by the late Albert B. Smith after the Boy Scout troop he supported. No. 2502 was the second “502” and No. 3502 was the third.

There are 4,800 feet of mainline track extending from milepost marker “0”, which can be viewed on the western side of the Los Gatos Creek Bridge. This line runs just short of one mile in neighboring Vasona Park. Billy Jones’ ranch had just 1,900 feet of mainline track.

The entire mainline received a complete overhaul and repair from 2009 through 2011. Every tie was changed out and the entirety of the base rock was replaced.

As a non-profit organization, BJWRR receives zero support from public tax dollars, local or state governments. We lease the ground upon which we operate and are entirely reliant upon ticket/food sales and the contributions of outside sources.

BJWRR is governed by a board of directors, which meets on a monthly basis to determine the railroad’s direction and decide upon the business direction of the organization.

The railroad has had a longstanding tradition of supporting disabled groups and passengers. All disabled guests ride for free on the train and carousel. Various groups are also hosted free of charge. BJWRR has a custom-built wheelchair car for guests in need. ♠
Notable Contributions from 2014

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad and W.E. “Bill” Mason Carousel would like to thank the following benefactors for their contributions to the railroad:

A Tool Shed Rentals
Jerry Clouse and Kimball Midwest
Kay Mason Duff
Paul Gardner
John Hannegan
Los Gatos Community Foundation
Los Gatos Lions Club
Los Gatos Meats & Smokehouse
Los Gatos Parent Nursery School
Los Gatos Rotary Club
Ed Newman and Newman Steel
Geraldine Peters
Virginia Peters
Phil Reader

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization and contributions are tax deductible. If you are interested in making a contribution to the railroad, please contact us by writing to BJWRR, P.O. Box 234, Los Gatos, CA 95031-0234 or calling (408) 395-RIDE. You may also email us at info@bjwrr.org for donation information. Your contribution will help ensure that the railroad and carousel continue to serve the community for generations to come.
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MARCH 14TH - SPRING SCHEDULE STARTS

The train and carousel open Saturday and Sunday from 10:30am until 4:30pm. The carousel also is open Wednesday through Friday from 10:30am until 3:00pm. Times are weather permitting.

APRIL 4TH - STEAM OPERATIONS RESUME

As the weather improves, the BJWRR No. 2 and BJWRR No. 5 shall be doing the majority of weekend operations.

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad & W.E. “Bill” Mason Carousel, Inc.

General inquiries and correspondence to the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad & W.E. “Bill” Mason Carousel, this newsletter, or its Board of Directors should be addressed to:

BJWRR
P.O. Box 234
Los Gatos, CA 95031-0234

(408) 395-RIDE office (408) 354-2841 fax
EMAIL: info@bjwrr.org

Persons interested in volunteering in the machine shop may also call (408) 395-6269.

Visit our website at www.bjwrr.org for further updates and information.

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization working with the cooperation of the Town of Los Gatos and the Santa Clara County Parks Office. Contributions are tax deductible.

Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad
P.O. Box 234
Los Gatos, CA 95031-0234

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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