A letter of Introduction: CEO

Allow me to introduce myself,
Francesca Balistreri
Chief Executive Officer

I want to take this opportunity to introduce myself as your new Chief Executive Officer. My name is Francesca Balistreri and I have been an employee of the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad for almost 11 years. The railroad has had a huge impact on me, both professionally and personally. My family had been coming to Oak Meadow and Vasona parks for years; we always stopped for at least one train ride and carousel ride. The last time I visited the railroad recreationally was when I asked for a job application, and the rest, as they say, is history.

I fit into the job seamlessly and really enjoyed all aspects of it. My coworkers were great, the job was fun, and I put smiles on children’s faces. What more could you ask for in a job? I worked at the railroad while I pursued my college degree, and when graduation approached I thought about how life would be after college and after the railroad. Lucky for me, I didn’t really have to figure out the latter. After a short stint in management, I was promoted to Interim Executive Director while the railroad embarked on an extensive track project. I jumped at the opportunity, and

A letter of Introduction: COO

Allow me to introduce myself,
Rosie Balistreri
Chief Operating Officer

My name is Rosie Balistreri and I am the new Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad and W.E. Bill Mason Carousel Chief Operating Officer. If you see the resemblance in our surnames, you know that my sister Francesca was Chief Operating Officer for the last two years. It was my sister who got me involved with the organization, when she urged me to apply for a position. After seeing how much she loved it, I had to work here myself.

I have been involved with this organization for nearly six years and have loved every second of it. I have worked in every position here at the railroad, and have seen not only the operation side but as well as the mechanical side. I want to really learn everything there is to know about the way the mechanics of this railroad work, and how I can work along side the staff and volunteers to make sure the railroad is running as smoothly as possible.

I strive to bring in new ideas to keep this organization going. I want to push myself this summer season to reacquaint myself with Steam Engine #2 and work my way up to becoming certified on Engine #5; luckily, here at the railroad, we have excellent engineers to teach both myself and our CEO the rails.

I have a deep passion for this place because Billy Jones had such a passion for putting smiles on all the neighborhood children’s faces. We are a family at the railroad and we appreciate the support your families bring to us by riding our train and carousel. ♦

Any comments, questions or concerns for our COO please email her at bjwrr3@gmail.com

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immersed myself in the organization. I wanted to learn everything about it, and continue to run the railroad as the well oiled machine that it was and still is.

Three years later, I was presented with a new position and one that in my opinion really suited me. I became the Chief Operating Officer, and really got to run the railroad and all the fun day to day stuff. I became in charge of the special events, and was able to add a few new extra ones in the mix. One of my proudest moment so far has been the special event the Pumpkin Train. This event was my baby. From conception to execution, I oversaw every detail to make sure our first ever pumpkin patch went off without a hitch. Now, this wasn’t the easiest of projects, and most certainly we did encounter a few “hiccups” as the event went on, but watching the sort of response this event envoke made all the hard work worth it. Watching the joy on children’s faces, as they ran through the patch of pumpkins, straining their little bodies to pick those pumpkins up; then watching them leave with a smile on their faces because they knew they picked the right one. Needless to say, I love my job.

So I was especially honored to be considered for the Chief Executive Officer position, and I am so thrilled at the opportunity. I am excited for all the new ventures the railroad has on the horizon, and all the more smiles we can still place on the children’s faces.

Any comments, questions or concerns for our CEO please email her at bjwrr2@yahoo.com

Employee Spotlight:
Jessica Sanchez

Francesca Balistreri
Chief Executive Officer

If you come around on any given weekend day, you’ll see or interact with our many young employees. Here at Iron Horse Quarterly we have decided to spotlight those employees who strive to provide a great experience for everyone who comes and rides our rails. This month’s spotlight follows our young employee Jessica Sanchez. Jessica has been working at the railroad for almost two years, and has shown tremendous grown in the position. Jessica is one of our trainers for new hires, and is one of our team leaders in the day to day railroad operations. I sat down with Jessica to talk about her time at the railroad, and to get some of her insight into what it is like to be a BJWRR employee.

Q: How did you learn about the railroad, and what made you apply for a position?
JS: I used to visit the train as a child. My mom saw an advertisement on facebook that the train was hiring and that they hired at 14 years old. I knew I was ready and mature enough to work, so I applied. I’ve always wanted to work at a job where I could work with the public.

Q: What have you taken away from your employment so far?
JS: I have learned that giving good customer service is more than just a smile. I am learning that I need to look at the needs of others before my own. I have also learned to work better as part of a team.

Q: What is your favorite job?
JS: Conductor. I like conductor because I am more active, and am able to see the excitement of the kids when they ride the train.

Q: What do you hope to achieve at the railroad?
JS: What I hope to achieve at the railroad right now is to make people happy, and make sure that they have a great experience. My long term goal is to one day learn how to drive the train.

Q: What kind of advice would you give someone who is thinking of applying?
JS: The advice I would give is to come with a happy attitude of love and service. Many people come from different situations- we need to treat everyone respectfully

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Winter Projects: Transfer Track
Francesca Balistreri
Chief Executive Officer

Another big project for the railroad was to create more space in our ‘roundhouse’. The roundhouse is our shop area where all the locomotives and passenger cars are stored. Since the purchase of steam locomotive #5 we have been working on creating more space not only to store everything, but to create enough space for our volunteers to get work done. One idea for extra space was to create a transfer track. A piece of track that has mobile parts that is able to move from one area to another. Using a transfer track would help maximize the room, or lack thereof, available to us.

The backyard behind the building was the perfect host for this track, and will ultimately help our space issues. A spare track was placed along the side of the building for easy storage, and plans developed for our transfer track to be built from that.

Work on the transfer track began in December. Part of the backyard had to be excavated and leveled out so a track could move easily. Board member and volunteer George Shannon contracted CB Construction prepare the backyard, and get it ready for the next phase of the project. Once the area was prepared, nearly five yards of crushed drain rock was filled in.

Long time volunteer and board member, Tom Waterfall began work on the transfer track itself. Waterfall is a master welder, and created the transfer track from steel. Once all the basic components for the transfer track were completed, the next phase of the project started. Pieces of track were welded on to smaller ties to be used as a platform for the transfer track to move on.

The project has taken a few months to completed, and we await the finishing touches. So far the track looks and works as we expected. When we begin work on a brand new passenger car the transfer track will come in handy.

Winter Projects: Passenger Cars
Francesca Balistreri
Chief Executive Officer

After The Holiday Train event comes to a close, the railroad moves into the low season. The low season for us means that there are no big events planned, and the weather tends to keep a lot of patrons away. We take this opportunity to take care of larger scale shop projects that need time and of a lot of attention to complete.

This winter we had two big projects, the first being the passenger cars. Over the years, the flooring of the passenger cars had become worn and started to crack. On each run, the cars flex as they move down the track, and it was in those areas that the flooring was coming apart. The process of looking for new was very difficult, since most companies don’t cater to 1/3 scale train cars -- there isn’t much of a market for that. The project was headed by volunteer, Paul Croisetiere. Croisetiere ripped part of the flooring out himself to evaluate the required scope of work. Once he had an idea he began meeting with different flooring companies. “I went through about 6 or 7 companies to get information, then put it together on a spread sheet to compare pricing, quality, etc.” Croisetiere said.

Precision Flooring won the bid due to their quality of work and their great reviews. “Precision flooring wasn’t the cheapest, but they had better ratings.” Croisetiere added. Work then began at the end of January and started slowly, due to the uniqueness of the job. Precision Flooring acclimated very well, and were able to finish the job right on time. “Overall everything turned out great. I’m really happy with the work and the company. They were quick and efficient. They have a contest for best flooring once a year, and I will enter the railroad in.” Croisetiere said.
Steam Season Is Upon Us!
Steam Operations resume at BJWRR

CJ Vargas
Shop Assistant/Track Foreman

It is almost that time of year again; steam season! During the last week of March, both of the steam engines were fired up, waking them from their winter slumber. We needed to do this for many reasons, the first for our QSI annual state inspection. Every year the state inspector comes to check that everything is still in operational and in accordance with the state regulations. We run all of the equipment under his supervision, and, once all rides have been tested, receive clearance for continued service. The inspector generally puts each locomotive through tests including emergency stops and similar emergency situations.

We had one issue with the #2. During fire up the union directly behind the steam valve for the water glass developed a slow leak. We tried tightening the union but that didn’t fix the issue, so we had to think quickly to figure out what caused the problem. Siding with safety, we decided to shut the locomotive down until we could remove the union out without the potential of steam burns. Upon inspection the union showed obvious signs of wear from possible improper seating. We were able to replace it, and the new one held up just fine. I then fired the locomotive back to operating pressure and we continued the inspection. The steam season is a go!

While running the locomotive for the inspection, McCracken and I noticed it wasn't square by way of the consistency of the exhaust. This means the engine was not in time. 'In time' or 'square' means that the locomotive chuffs every 90 degrees based on driving wheel rotation. The following day, volunteer Bob Poli

Thank you for Calling Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad…
New Phone system comes to the BJWRR

Francesca Balistreri
Chief Executive Officer

If you’ve called the railroad in the last couple of weeks, you may have noticed that a few things have changed. When you dial 408-395-7433 you are greeted by an automated voice that guides you through a menu system. Prior to the upgrade, it was my voice trying to get through all possible information so whoever called could get all the pertinent information. Now when customers call all the information they need is at the press of various buttons.

I spearheaded this new project after the old fashioned answering machine had failed. I went in search of a new phone answering machine. To my surprise, old fashioned answering machines were, at best, scarce. Instead I purchased a phone with a voicemail set up, but the headaches continued as the system was unreliable. After much frustration, I decided it was time for the railroad to join the ranks of other companies with a professional menu option system.

I began my research, and through our webmaster, Marketing Out Loud, I was introduced to the company Voice Ignite and the process began. New phones were installed in the main areas of the railroad, with myself and COO having our own mailboxes. Now if customers or vendors need to reach me directly they can, the voicemail can be left exclusively for the party whom they are trying to reach. Another great feature is that when there is a voicemail left it is forwarded to my email so that I may access it remotely. That way, if anyone really needs to reach me and I am out of the office they can reach me anywhere.

The process is still ongoing, as we have encountered a few bugs along the way. I suppose being in the middle of a park doesn’t necessarily get us the greatest reception. It is a process that we are going to be working on for some time.

Another cool feature that will come in the near future is a texting
and I discussed how we would time the locomotive, and once we agreed upon a procedure, I fired up the locomotive and brought it up to operating pressure. Once we were up to pressure, COO Rosie Balistreri rolled the locomotive outside providing had more room to work. Rosie spotted it precisely with the fireman's side rods at the 12 o'clock position so Bob and I could measure the fireman's side eccentric crank and how far off vertical it was. Through a series of tests and continued measurements we were able to determine the required adjustment. We determined the eccentric crank on the engineer’s side was the problem. We were able to adjust it by loosening it, tapping it in the direction it needed to move and then tightening it back up. We tested the locomotive by moving back and forth in the yard so we could hear the chuff. We repeated this process until we liked what we heard then connected the locomotive to a 3 car train and took a test run out. I still wasn't pleased so I made one last adjustment and took another trip. On the second trip everything sounded like it should; we were extremely pleased with how consistent the exhaust was and how the locomotive performed. Both steam locomotives are ready for the sea son, which will kick off on April 11th.

Look to the next Iron Horse Quarterly for more steam season and shop updates! ♠

We want your feedback!

Starting the week of April 14th the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad will be conducting a brief survey. Visit BJWRR.org and click to take the survey. The survey is very short, and can be completed within five minutes. We want to make sure that everyone who visits the railroad is having a wonderful experience. Your feedback will be greatly appreciated!

option. We will be able to text customers and in turn customers will be able to text us. Texting seems to be the way most everyone communicates now days, so the railroad will be on par with today's technology. Give us a call and listen to our cool new menu options! ♠

To reach the railroad call us at 408-395-7433!

BJWRR Seasons Change

Francesca Balistreri
Chief Executive Officer

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad operates on a seasonal calendar. The railroad is open year round with mostly weekend operations, we then open seven days a week during the summer. The dates vary based on the 4 seasons.

In recent years, we’ve had to modify our summer schedule to help cope with our staff going back to school earlier than usual. Our summer schedule had always been scheduled to conclude on Labor day, but in recent years it seems that schools ranging from elementary to college have been resuming in mid August. It became a problem, when ninety percent of our staff was back in school and we had no one to run the train and carousel. After years of struggling, we have made the decision to change dates to help make summer a better season for all. The dates in accordance to their seasons are listed below:

Spring Season
March 15th to June 7th
Train: Saturdays and Sundays 10:30 to 4:30
Carousel: Saturdays and Sundays 10:30 to 4:30
& Wednesday through Friday 10:30 to 3:00

Summer Season
June 8th to August 15th
Train & Carousel Open Daily 10:30 to 4:30

Fall Season
August 16th to October 31st
Train: Saturdays & Sundays 10:30 to 4:30
Carousel: Saturday & Sundays 10:30 to 4:30
& Fridays 10:30 to 3:00

Winter Season
November 1st to March 14th
Train & Carousel: Saturdays & Sundays 11:00 to 3:00

All times are weather permitting. ♠
**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**APRIL 11th - STEAM OPERATIONS RESUME**

Steam operations return April 11 and 12. The No. 2 will handle the bulk of weekend operations, as we work to get engineer certified on No. 5.

**MAY 21ST - CB HANNEGAN’S VINO EXPRESS**

Come enjoy samples of local wines and food pairings in an exclusive adults only event sponsored by CB Hannegan’s, Los Gatos. Limited tickets available by contacting CB Hannegan’s restaurant.

**MAY 25TH - MEMORIAL DAY**

The train and carousel will be open Monday, May 26 from 10:30am to 4:30pm in observance of Memorial Day. Honor those who have given their lives in service of this country and spend a warm day with your friends and family at the park.

**JUNE 8TH - START OF SUMMER SCHEDULE**

From June 8 through August 16th, the train and carousel will be open daily from 10:30am until 4:30pm, weather permitting. Steam locomotives typically operate Saturdays and Sundays with the diesels running during the week.

**JUNE 13TH - “FLAPJACKS AND RAILROAD TRACKS” PANCAKE BREAKFAST**

Kick off summer with a fun-filled morning breakfast at the railroad featuring pancakes, sausages and much more. Breakfast starts at 8:00am and the train and carousel will be open early as well.

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**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.