

# IRON HORSE QUARTERLY

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## *The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad & W.E. "Bill" Mason Carousel*

### **Spring is in the Air**

*Winter Gives Way to Spring at the BJWRR*

Peter G. Panacy  
Chief Executive Officer

Spring has special meaning to all of us. If you are a baseball fan, spring usually means Spring Training. If you are an outdoors enthusiast, spring usually means better weather, clear skies, and warm temperatures. At the Billy Jones Railroad, spring also has plenty of special meaning.

Spring has long been the traditional opening season for the railroad. For years, fans of the Wildcat Railroad looked at Easter Sunday on calendars, knowing full well that was the weekend that the train would return from its winter hibernation. In those years, the railroad remained closed over the winter months.

Now the railroad and carousel remain open year-round, as long as the weather permits. However as winter slowly becomes spring, things begin to brighten up, both literally and figuratively. The days are longer and the weather gets warmer. Away go the jackets and out come short-sleeves. The train and carousel also come out longer.

With the added daylight, the railroad and carousel are able to

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### **BJWRR #2 Returns to Service**

*The 2-Spot Back Again after Winter Repairs*

Peter G. Panacy  
Chief Executive Officer



*BJWRR #2 shall resume its weekend operations at the beginning of April. Photo by Greg Reiter.*

It has been a long winter for the oldest member of the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad locomotive fleet. After its 107<sup>th</sup> year in service, the BJWRR #2 was removed from the active locomotive roster like it has been for many winters since the railroad's inception. In previous years, the #2 would simply sit idly by as the two diesel locomotives, #2502 and #3502, would fill the void left in its absence.

This winter was much different for the #2. Before the fall season and steam operations came to an end, BJWRR maintenance crews decided that it would be prudent to repair and replace much of the piping systems on the locomotive. Initially, the project was slated to begin towards the end of December, considering the #2's involvement with the Los Gatos Children's Christmas Parade held at the beginning of the month. Weather thwarted the railroad's involvement and work started early.

Chief Engineer Bill Church spearheaded the efforts. Most of the time was spent on locating sufficient piping, used to replace some of the older, worn out pipe systems. Once all of the necessary piping was located and acquired, work

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switch to their extended hours. The train and carousel are now open Saturdays and Sundays from 10:30am until 4:30pm. The carousel also opens Wednesday through Friday from 10:30am to 3:00pm. The BJWRR #2 steam engine also wakes from its winter hibernation and begins to pull happy passengers around the park. Of course, the rain may always be a factor, but it does not keep people away for too long.

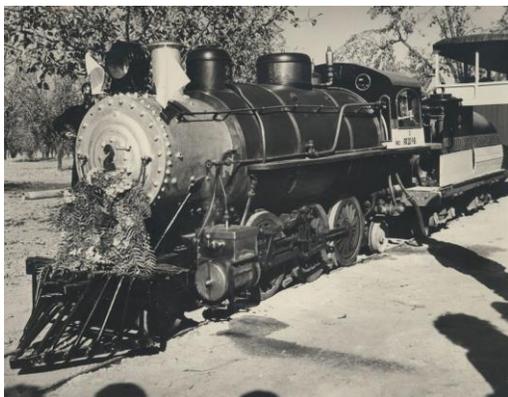
Spring has always been a beautiful time of year at the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad and W.E. "Bill" Mason Carousel. It will to be again this year. Young and old can look forward to another beautiful season in the park, where the flowers bloom, the trees turn green, the carousel horses gallop, and there is a warm scream of a steam whistle echoing through the trees of Oak Meadow and Vasona Parks. ♠

## Hear That Lonesome Whistle Blow

*Excerpt Written by Sally Howe for the West Valley Times, July 6, 1966*

Billy Jones believes strongly that every kid should know the excitement of standing I the station waiting for the train to come in, that a child should hear the nerve-tingling cry, "all aboard," and feel his or her body sway with the movement of a train. Every Sunday, Billy Jones does something about it.

It is the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad whose mournful whistle echoes in the West Valley each Sunday afternoon. It's the sound of a train that has been operating on the corner of Daves Avenue and Winchester Boulevard for nearly 23 years, guaranteeing an afternoon of fun for kids and grown-up kids alike.



*Engine #2 as part of the opening day celebration in 1943. Photo courtesy of BJWRR.*

Billy always wanted to build his own railroad. He married and settled in a small orchard in Los Gatos. His dream didn't die. It wasn't until he got the famous engine #2, which had been part of a Southern California developer's service, which Billy really set to work building his own train. In October of 1943, the train was set in motion.

Each Sunday, #2 is fired up and guest engineers take the throttle. Sponsors for the day, usually a non-profit club, publicize the fact their group gets all donations offered that day. This doesn't exclude any who do not donate and no one checks how many times a visitor rides.

Long-time residents often point to the little train with pride and say, "you know that train could be in Disneyland now, but Billy wouldn't sell us out." Others say Walt Disney wanted to buy the train for his play-land, but Disney didn't like it. Neither story is right according to Billy.

When Disney arrived, he took so much pleasure in running the little train that he remained several hours past his intended visit. Eventually, he offered to buy the rain and Billy agreed. Shortly after the plans for Disneyland doubled and then tripled, Disney saw that the train wasn't going to be big enough to do the job. Disney and Jones are still darn good friends. The walls of Billy's home bear cartoon drawings autographed, "For Casey Jones from Casey Disney."



*Walt Disney (center) looks at a 1.5" scale live-steam locomotive with Billy Jones (right). Photo courtesy of BJWRR.*

Honors have been bestowed on Jones during the "train" years. In 1951, town citizens voted him "Citizen of the Year" and presented him with a plaque complete with an etching of his train.

But his greatest pride, his ultimate joy, comes each Sunday afternoon when he sits affably in front of the roundhouse in his miniature station watching the train go by, waving at the friendly engineer. ♠

## Finding a “First Job”

### *BJWRR Employment of First-Timers in the Workforce*

Peter G. Panacy  
Chief Executive Officer

I remember my first day as an employee of the railroad. I had just celebrated my fifteenth birthday and I had never worked a job in my life aside from the menial tasks of house-sitting or helping with a neighbor’s housework. But as so many things go, I wanted the experience, I could use the money, and it was something to do.

Years later, I look back at the experience I gained during those critical stages of my life. I learned how to prioritize my commitments, handle various crises, and interact with a large diversity of people with whom I would otherwise have had little or no contact.

For many young people, BJWRR provides not only a paycheck but so much more. It offers real-time experience. Most of the railroad’s employees are entering the work force for the first time. Not only do they have relatively few lines on their young résumés, but they also learn invaluable lessons such as teamwork, public interactions, and schedule management. While these lessons are relatively small in nature compared to the complex aspects of life in the “real world,” BJWRR’s young employees at least begin their exposure to these elements and learn how to incorporate them into their early lives.

While these employees gradually leave the railroad to pursue higher educational and vocational prospects, many look back at their experiences and lessons learned while employed at the BJWRR as their beginning.

“I still consider the railroad my favorite job,” noted former BJWRR employee Matthew Fassler. “The hours were great and it was so much fun working with friends. I miss the hot dogs!”

In a way, the railroad is honoring its namesake by providing more than just a fun place for young kids to play. Billy Jones would have loved knowing his railroad also gives the opportunity to so many youths in the community to get an early start on their professional. After all, where else can a high school student work a flexible schedule, learn such valuable life-lessons, and eat some of the best hot dogs around! ♠

commenced.

The repair/replacement involved removing much of the previous piping and completely removing the #2 cab. The process itself was tedious, but essential. Once older components had been removed, the installation of newer piping began. The majority of it was seamless with only a minor adaptation being made to the locomotive firing manifold. The rest was straight forward.

“The entire process went surprisingly well and it took much less time than we originally anticipated,” said Church after the repairs were complete. “We basically followed the same configuration with only minimal adjustments.”

When the repairs were finished, the #2 went through its yearly inspections, conducted by the State Boiler and Pressure Vessel Unit and the Amusement Ride Unit. Thanks to the tireless work of the volunteer staff, the #2 passed both inspections with flying colors and is ready to resume weekend operations at the beginning of April.

The #2 remains the primary steam locomotive even after the soon-to-arrive #5 assumes its place on the locomotive roster. Engineers shall be spending considerable time learning how to properly operate the new locomotive and reaching a comfortable level of familiarity. While the #5 will certainly attract the attention of BJWRR fans everywhere, the #2 was and still is the main attraction. BJWRR #2 is the reason that the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad exists today. ♠



*BJWRR #2 with its cab removed and piping ready to be replaced. Photo by Bill Church.*

## BJWRR #5 Will Be Here Soon

### *Delays Push Back Expected Delivery Date of New Locomotive*

Peter G. Panacy  
Chief Executive Officer

Fans and staff members of the BJWRR have been anxiously awaiting the arrival of the newest member of the railroad fleet: the 4-6-2 "Pacific" currently finishing construction at the Merrick Light Railway Equipment Company yard in Marshall, Wisconsin.

The initial delivery date was expected to be in late January or early February. A number of minor delays have pushed back the date into late spring. The causes behind the delay are miniscule and will not interfere with plans to train and certify existing locomotive engineers.

A small team of railroad personnel are scheduled to make the trip back to Marshall and pick up the locomotive, using a recently purchased trailer attached to a pick-up truck. The trip, combined with the return delivery, is expected to take no longer than nine days.

Current estimates suggest that the railroad should be delivered towards the beginning of May with testing and training commencing shortly thereafter.

As always, persons interested in the locomotive's delivery and debut should keep posted for further updates. ♠

## Who Needs a Boom Box When You Have a Band Organ?

### *The W.E. "Bill" Mason Carousel Band Organ Gets a Much Needed Makeover*

Peter G. Panacy  
Chief Executive Officer

For nearly ten years, riders aboard the W.E. "Bill" Mason Carousel would pause and look at the strange box that stood to one side of the carousel building. On top of the box stood two speakers that played carousel music straight from an employee-operated stereo. Inside the box stood an organ; one that few staff members knew much about. At one time it played carousel music off of paper rolls.

Enter Dennis Taylor. Taylor saw an opportunity to turn a dust-gathering antique into a beautifully restored and fully functioning band organ. Transporting the band organ from the carousel to his home shop, Taylor spent countless hours replacing old valves, re-piping air lines, and cleaning out

clogged draft vents. In addition, Taylor modified the organ to play not only music from a traditional "vacuum" reel system, but also from a computer midi interface. The new and improved organ now has elements of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.



*Volunteer Dennis Taylor has spent countless hours repairing the W.E. "Bill" Mason Carousel band organ.*

Taylor wanted to repair the organ as far back as the late 1990s. Having known a number of volunteers associated with the railroad and carousel, Taylor was aware of the band organ's mechanical problems. He also knew he had the ability to make the necessary repairs.

After Taylor retired, he pressed the railroad to get involved. Finally, the restoration project began in late 2011. Taylor not only made all the minor modifications necessary to get the organ running like it had in the past, but he also added more musical elements including a series of glockenspiel bells. He also added the midi system, which allows a computer program to play music on the organ without the use of antiquated and fragile paper rolls.



*The WEMC Band Organ has been seen little use in the past ten years until recent restoration efforts.*

Now, instead of hearing stereo carousel music out of a CD player, fans of the carousel will instead enjoy the pleasant mix of bells and pipes; the way carousel music was meant to be enjoyed. ♠

## In Memoriam

*BJWRR Volunteer Kenneth Woo*

Kenneth Woo, a volunteer of the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad, recently passed away on January 13<sup>th</sup> from heart complications. Ken was a dedicated volunteer who assisted the railroad in numerous ways. He often would be found working with the Tuesday crew on various projects. In addition, he would also frequently assist with weekend barbecues for the concession stand. Ken loved trains and was learning how to be an engineer.

After Ken's passing, there was an outpouring of support from his friends and family. Numerous donations were given to the railroad in memory of Ken and his services. In recognition, a small plaque shall be placed at the railroad inside the carousel building honoring his memory along with others who have been so beneficial in ensuring BJWRR continues.

Ken was laid to rest at Silveyville Cemetery in Dixon. He is survived by his brother Ron and sister Shirley. ♠

## In Memoriam

*BJWRR Volunteer & Board Member Henry De Guc*

Henry "Hank" De Guc, a long-time volunteer and member of the BJWRR Board of Directors passed away on March 20<sup>th</sup> after a brief illness. He was 88 years old.

Most people will remember Hank as the friendly volunteer who could be found at the railroad every Monday and Tuesday, cleaning up the depot, polishing the locomotives, or working on the passenger cars. They will remember how he always wore short-sleeves, even in the cold of winter.

Hank was a perennial donor to the railroad, in addition to being a regular volunteer and board member.

Hank loved the railroad and carousel and dedicated so much of his time to the organization. His services will be greatly missed by the entire BJWRR family.

His family is making a contribution to the railroad in Hank's name. In addition, a plaque will be placed at the railroad, commemorating Hank's service and memory. ♠

## Some Thoughts about BJWRR Being a Non-Profit

J.P. Sheehan  
Vice President, Board of Directors

Those of you who have been riders on the BJWRR have likely seen the sign on the wall outside our ticket booth:

*THE BILLY JONES WILDCAT RAILROAD HAS BEEN A  
NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION SINCE 1968*

You probably looked at the sign and thought "That's nice" and likely not much about what it means.

The schoolroom definition of a nonprofit is an organization or corporation that uses surplus revenues to achieve its goals rather than distributing them as profits, or like some large corporations, as dividends. We are organized with two full time employees serving at the discretion of a Board of Directors. The directors are all volunteers as are the individuals who maintain the locomotives, passenger cars, carousel, buildings and the grounds surrounding the station and carousel. The BJWRR's goals are to operate and maintain the railroad and carousel as memorials to Billy Jones and William E. Mason and for the benefit, recreation, education and pleasure of the children and adults in the Town of Los Gatos and its surrounding area.

Most of our seasonal hourly employees are high school and young adult college students. For some of our employees it's their first job. We have been told we hire more summer students than any other entity in the valley with perhaps the exception of a large, local amusement park. Our employees are given responsibilities that reflect those of much more mature individuals. Three examples are fiscal responsibility: our cashiers at the ticket booth and refreshment stand; individual safety responsibility: our train conductors are responsible for the safety of the train and its passengers; the carousel operator insures that all small children are correctly strapped onto the horses. These examples are just a few of the life lessons we hope to teach to our young employees.

Our steam engine is a chance for children and parents to see, in smaller scale, the representation of the workhorses that were responsible for hauling the goods that built the Western United States. I remember, as a child, watching the railroad yard in Indio, adding five or six giant steam engines to freight trains so they could get over Beaumont-Banning pass into the Los Angeles Basin. The noise, the steam, the smoke, the whistles and the size of the locomotives are indelibly etched in my mind.

I truly believe we meet the educational goal set out in our nonprofit corporate articles. ♠

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### **APRIL 6<sup>TH</sup> - - STEAM OPERATIONS RESUME**

The BJWRR #2, and soon-to-arrive BJWRR #5, will take over the majority of weekend railroad operations.

### **MAY 16<sup>TH</sup> - - C.B. HANNEGANS' 1<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL WINE TRAIN**

Local restaurant C.B. Hannegans and BJWRR partner up with local wineries to provide a fun-filled evening of wine and train rides. Limited tickets are available by contacting C.B. Hannegans at (408) 395-1233.

### **MAY 27<sup>TH</sup> - - MEMORIAL DAY**

The BJWRR and WEMC will be open 10:30am to 4:30pm in observance of Memorial Day.

### **JUNE 15<sup>TH</sup> - - FLAPJACKS & RAILROAD TRACKS PANCAKE BREAKFAST**

Celebrate the start of summer with a pancake breakfast at the railroad. Breakfast is served from 8:00am until 10:30am. Food tickets are \$7.00. Train and carousel will also be open.

### **JUNE 15<sup>TH</sup> - - START OF DAILY OPERATION**

From June 15<sup>th</sup> through Labor Day, the train and carousel shall be open daily from 10:30am until 4:30pm, weather permitting.

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

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

## **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](http://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.

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