

Trail council realizes results of quest to restore boxcar

By Eric Slagle
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A once-abandoned boxcar from the old Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad has been delivered to a new home along a former rail bed in Boston.

The trip from Perryopolis where the 40-foot, 46-ton car had been abandoned for decades to the Elizabeth Township neighborhood didn't take that long by truck on Friday but it marks the end of a two-year project to restore the 81-year-old artifact.

Or nearly the end.

The Mon Yough Trail Council, which spearheaded the effort, says the final step will be painting the old logo of the P&LE Railroad on the side of the green car in white letters.

Trail council officials were beside themselves with excitement as equipment operators from Steffan Industries and Casturo Trucking unloaded and placed the car next to the trail visitors center in Elizabeth Township.

"I'm about to cry," said trail council president Judy Marshall as the car slowly descended into place. Marshall said she had long looked at the car when it was abandoned along Route 51 in Perryopolis and would think to herself, "Oh man, something needs to be done about this."

That something began happening when an anonymous donor gave \$20,000 to the council in memory of a late daughter who loved the bike trail. Marshall was reluctant to disclose the cost of purchasing, restoring and moving the car to Boston, but she said the donation went a significant way toward making it happen.

A lot of research and legwork by council volunteers went into the project, she said, noting that tracking down the owners of the car and creating an agreement to buy it took time. So did restoration. The car had to be tested for asbestos, sandblasted and painted.

Mihalek Painting Co. of Port Vue did much of that work.

The car itself was built in 1929 and is believed to have been out of use since the 1970s.

"It's a work of art," said Marshall, adding that the council plans to leave the car in a semi-restored state. The purpose of leaving the car in the partially-restored condition is to remind those who see it that it is part of history. Similarly, the rail platform the car now sits on was made from recovered pieces of track and

railroad spikes that once were P&LE property.

Trail council vice president Dan Piesik said the car, known as a "shorty" in railroad circles because of its size, had been used as a container for Agway when it was in service. It is believed to be the only remaining short P&LE boxcar.

Noting that "the little orphan" had been rescued from a rusty fate, Piesik watched the car being lowered onto its axles, which had arrived earlier in the morning, and said, "I'm as excited as a little kid."

Neighbors and trail users also watched the car being set into place.

Boston resident Regina Reynolds said the car looked like a good addition to the trail area though she wondered, "Could it have been a different color, maybe?"

Her father Ed Reynolds, also of Boston, joked that maybe it was in honor of the nearby neighborhood of Greenock.

It's quite likely that, in its day, the car rolled through Greenock as well as McKeesport, West Newton, Perryopolis, and other Youghiogheny River rail towns but trail council officials say green was chosen because it was probably the car's original color.

Marshall said the trail council will continue to raise funds to pay for the project at its upcoming That Dam Ride bike tour from Boston to Confluence in September and by reaching out to its 280 members.

Anyone interested in the ride or supporting the trail council should call the trail council at 412-754-1100.