

Volunteer Spotlight - Richard Jacobs



Richard Jacobs uses his cutting torch while aligning track during the rescue of the Bisso engine..
Bill Hamblin, Jr. photo

Richard Jacobs is an active LASTA volunteer who has been involved since the 1980s in the preservation of SP 745 and other historic railroad equipment. Recently he was instrumental in the Bisso engine move, and he currently is working on clearing the yard in preparation for installing new trackage.

His love for railroads started at a very young age: he can remember his family having an 8mm home movie of him playing with a train even before he was able to walk.

Richard became acquainted with SP 745 when the locomotive was on static display at Audubon Park. Sometime in 1983 or 1984, he heard a rumor that the locomotive was going to be scrapped. Of course he went straight to the park to protest. However, when he arrived he found a group that was actually working to move and save the engine! It was then that he was hooked, and his energies turned toward assisting with the restoration effort.

He volunteered as a member with the Old Kenner Railroad Museum (OKRA) and later became President

of the Louisiana Railroad Museum. He built a museum in the old Gretna Depot, where there were artifacts on display and an operational HO scale model railroad layout.

Richard is a self-employed welder and owner of R & R Train Company, Inc. R & R Train Company was formed in 1985 with one 16 inch gauge amusement park train. He restored the train and built a portable layout for it to run on. He would take this train and its portable layout to school fairs, corporate events, and fund-raisers. From there his company expanded by adding trackless trains, a miniature fire truck, inflatables, and other party rental items. Over the years, he has restored and run several park size trains including the trains at Kenner and Hammond city parks.

His mechanical expertise has provided valuable contributions to LASTA. He welded the problem stay bolt on SP 745, and also diagnosed what was originally believed to be a leaking flue but which turned out to be a much less serious leak in the super heater tube. Chief Me-

chanical Officer Gerry Lynch says, "he is a big help and works hard."

"I have been a welder for as long as I can remember," Richard says, "starting out at my Dad's company, Simplex Manufacturing Company, when I was 14 years old. Simplex manufactured go-karts; what a great job for a teenager to have! When I left Simplex I was doing product design and testing." From there he went on to work for MECO (Mechanical Equipment Company) as a welder on high pressure stainless steel vessels. "In 1996, I became my own boss after getting hit by the layoffs at MECO," he says. "That lay-off was a blessing in disguise as it forced me to move R & R Train Company into a full-time operation. Hurricane Katrina put a damper on rentals and I have since concentrated more on selling Accucraft trains. My friend Chris and I have also recently designed a new device for G-scale live steam engines called a 'bark box,' which creates the chuffing sound of a real steam engine. I have taken my hobby and love of trains, and turned it into my business." He adds, "what better way to make a living than doing what you love to do!"

Richard was born and raised in New Orleans, son of William and Thelma Jacobs. Richard's wife Robbie has, he notes, "put up with me and supported me in all this train stuff," throughout their 32 year of marriage. They have three children: Kristi, age 28; Zachary, age 22; and Mary, age 19.

When asked about his most memorable activity with LASTA, Richard says it has been, "the whole process of the restoration of SP 745, from the inception of the effort until today, and especially the ride on the Kansas City trip aboard the train."

Richard is a key member of the LASTA team that makes trips like that possible, all the while preserving and sharing our history.

Jonathan Sturges