

## Volunteer Spotlight - CMO Gerry Lynch



**Gerry Lynch, C.M.O.**

Bill Hamblin, Jr. photo

Gerry Lynch is LASTA's personable Chief Mechanical Officer. The CMO has a tremendous responsibility, and Gerry takes his seriously.

"SP #745 is an amazing piece of machinery," says Gerry. "The engine has a 'personality', and when you treat it good it runs well."

LASTA certainly treats SP #745 well; this takes an enormous amount of work and Gerry is right in the middle of it. "I enjoy doing things mechanical," he says. Yet when asked what his most memorable accomplishment was, his first reaction was simply, "when things need to be fixed, we fix them." Then it comes out: he "just happens" to have a lathe and milling machine at his home where he works on various parts. He "just happens" to take

things such as hydraulic jacks on the road, and they "just happen" to come in handy. He and the LASTA crew "just happen" to manufacture their own tools to deal with unique repair situations. "You don't just go down to the local steam engine replacement parts store," he reminds us. His most memorable repair was the permanent resolution of a pesky side rod bearing overheating problem. "We couldn't run over 30 miles an hour without the bearings overheating," he said.

"There was a lot of input and a lot of hard work on this particular problem, we ended up opening up clearances on the bearings and the problem has been solved," he recounts.

Gerry and his wife Trudy live in Lafitte. They have three grown daughters. Gerry is a native of New Orleans, and he spent his early years in the Ninth Ward. "We lived in a second-floor apartment; the building we had lived in took water on the first floor during both Hurricane Betsy and Hurricane Katrina," he said.

Gerry holds a B.A. degree from LSU-New Orleans, since renamed University of New Orleans. He worked many years for Union Carbide and retired about a year after the merger with Dow Chemical. He has operated ethylene plants both in the U.S. and abroad. "I was involved with many disciplines in the plants,"

he said, "including high pressure steam, turbines, and waste heat recovery."

Soon after his return from an overseas assignment, he read about LASTA in the newspaper. He was encouraged by Bill Morris, a years-long friend who he also knew from the experimental aviation club chapter. "My first trip I looked all over for the Yard, but I was up by where the main line crosses Jefferson Highway," he said. However, a short time later in November, 2003 he arranged to meet Bill and found the yard. He has been a regular crew member ever since.

At LASTA, Gerry started out with carpentry projects, and then electrical work. He points out that LASTA has a good rapport with the Federal Railroad Administration, saying "the FRA has a job to do." He easily talks about projects for SP 745 and other pieces of equipment, including Agnes, the possibility of getting the Amtrak switcher road-worthy, and refurbishing some of the passenger cars.

Conversation quickly focuses on the equipment, problems, solutions, and future projects, showing the passion with which Gerry approaches his work. The result of his efforts: the continued operation of "an amazing piece of machinery."

*Jonathan Sturges*

## SP #745 and Volunteers Focus of LPB Special

For its November 20<sup>th</sup> 2009 episode, Louisiana Public Broadcasting's *Louisiana: The State We're In*, visited the LASTA yard on Jefferson Highway. LPB featured SP #745 in its series *Louisiana's Railways*, and interviewed President Bill Morris, Marketing Director Barry Keegan, member Roger Brown and the Executive Director of The Louisiana Railroad Heritage Trust, Rich-

ard Jacobs.

Those who didn't see it the first time or who wish to see it again, can do so over the Internet by visiting [http://beta.lpb.org/index.php?news/la\\_swi/](http://beta.lpb.org/index.php?news/la_swi/) and selecting "Season 32: 745 Steam Train LSW13311" on the scroll on the right hand side of the screen.

Some of the segment consists of footage taken from SP #745's tour of

the state in 2005. One scene in the segment is not of 745, but is believed to be of SP #1744 in Belle Chase.

To clarify the movie statement in the segment, SP #745 was in two "big budget" movies, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, and *Jonah Hex* (to be released in 2010). SP #745 will also appear in an upcoming Hallmark movie.

*Lewis Dougherty*