



# ON TRACK

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Tehachapi Depot

Volume XVI, Issue I

March 2026

## American Freedom Train Revisited

Story by Marlan Woodside



American Freedom Train Revisited presentation by Larry Wines

**W**hat an opportunity we have at our March 2026 FOTD General Membership Meeting. One of our own members, Larry Wines will be sharing his experiences as a crew member on the American Freedom Train (AFT) when it made its run across the United States during the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the birth of our Nation. Larry has been the lead in designing and executing the various displays in the depot freight room, but after suffering a life altering auto accident, he has had to take some time off from volunteering

at the depot to get back on his feet. The accident did not slow down Larry's enthusiasm for sharing railroad adventures and his presentation is surely NOT going to disappoint! The train was a once in a lifetime event for those that staffed the crew as well as those that got a chance to visit the train as it displayed memorabilia reflecting key events in the 200 years of our country's existence. Please plan to attend Larry's presentation and catch up with fellow FOTD members as we enjoy lite snacks and drinks and take in an evening of enter-TRAIN-ment!

### FRIENDS OF THE TEHACHAPI DEPOT

#### Mark Your Calendars:

- An FOTD General Membership meeting is happening soon. I hope you will make plans to attend this event on Tuesday, the 10<sup>th</sup> of March at 6 PM.
- The time and effort you volunteers continue to provide is appreciated by the Board and our visitors. Call Diana (919) 397-9200 to get setup on the Sign-Up software program.
- Docent or Cashier slots are open, please recruit! I recently heard someone say that it gives them a great feeling to volunteer! So how about discussing this opportunity with family and friends!

#### What's in this Issue?

- AFT Revisited ....Page 1
- Honoring Susan..Page 2
- Hello Paul.....Page 3
- Gift Shop News..Page 4
- Message from the FOTD President.....Page 5
- Depot Info .....Page 6

# Honoring Our Dear Sweet Susan Mueller

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Tehachapi Depot

Volume XVI, Issue I

March 2026

If you were a cashier or docent volunteer at the Tehachapi Depot Museum you had the joyous opportunity to receive calls from Susan Mueller to schedule your volunteer day. Susan has had several health challenges over the past few months and had just this past November, let the Friends of the Tehachapi Depot board know that she felt she needed to resign, but wanted to keep on scheduling. Unfortunately, her last bout with illness took Susan away from us as she passed away Wednesday, 21 January. She was surrounded by her family. We will certainly miss her enthusiasm and dedication to ensuring that the depot always had volunteers scheduled and her passion for wanting to make sure those volunteers received well deserved recognition at her annual Volunteer Appreciation events. Susan started her volunteering on 29 March 2006 (Member 118) and was our longest active serving board member. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Susan's family and of course to HER FOTD family as we will certainly miss

those calls and her caring approach to each and every person, she called a friend. It was an honor to volunteer with her. Yesterday morning, I had the opportunity to participate in a zoom church service conducted by my departed Mother's old place of worship as the severe winter weather in that part of the country caused them to conduct an online service. As is their custom, they asked for any special prayers and I was able to include Susan's passing on their prayer list. I am convinced that she heard us and I am certain that made her smile. We will all miss her dearly and take solace in knowing that her earthly suffering has concluded. It is comforting to know that she is enjoying watching over us from above!

Susan's family has extended an open invitation to attend a celebration of Susan's wonderful life:

Saturday, 21 March, 11 AM  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
329 South Mill Street  
Tehachapi, CA 93561

What a joy it was that Susan chose to volunteer at the depot and serve on the FOTD Board for



Susan Mueller



(L to R) Randie McKenna (former FOTD Librarian) and Susan Mueller at the Volunteer Banquet

so many years. Her devotion to her FOTD family and her annual celebration of the FOTD volunteers was an event that every volunteer eagerly anticipated. The FOTD Event Committee has a challenge!

## FOTD Newest Board Member



**Straight "outa of" Wisconsin!**

**T**he FOTD Board has certainly been on a lucky streak of late as we have been blessed to bring onto the board another "gem" of a board member. Paul Thomas responded to a Facebook posting made by FOTD member and curator committee member, Mark McGowan. Paul attended a docent training session and was intrigued by the opportunity to share the railroad history with our visitors. That alone would have been enough, but **ALSO** in Paul's tool bag is his expertise in all things of the computer world as well as having been a wood shop teacher. Our only challenge with Paul is for the board to quit

adding to Paul's "to-do" list! Here is how Paul describes what he brings to the FOTD table: As a resident of Tehachapi, I have a deep appreciation for the historical significance of the Tehachapi Depot and the dedicated volunteers who serve as the face of our community. I am writing to express my interest in the Volunteer Coordinator position. With a career built on leadership, project management, and staff development, I am prepared to offer the Friends of the Tehachapi Depot the structure and support necessary to manage the depot's volunteer programs.

Needless to say, your FOTD Board was extremely impressed with the talents that Paul brought to the FOTD family and quickly accepted his application for FOTD membership. Placed him on several mentoring docenting tours and then added him to fill the vacancy left by Susan Mueller on the FOTD Board.

That was at the January 2026 FOTD Board meeting and Paul has been busy ever sense tackling the Information Technology (IT) side of the FOTD email system, Facebook and Website. He has started a priority list and has stated that he will spend as many hours as he can, but we will need to be patient as he has to balance his time with consulting for his other activities and home life. Believe you me, the Board is willing to wait as everything Paul has taken on so far has greatly enhanced the efficiency of our processes and his resourcefulness has proven to be very effective in strengthen depot operations. Paul will be developing some process standards in our docent training and be working with scheduling volunteers in the near future. Your FOTD President will certainly appreciate that! Welcome aboard Paul!

# All Aboard the Gift Shop Express . . . For the Last Time!

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Tehachapi Depot

Volume XVI, Issue I

March 2026

I will just get out with it, I am stepping down as Gift Shop Manager. Just over two years ago I took over as Gift Shop Manager, although somewhat reluctantly. Back then, Diana was taking over as President of FOTD, and I personally know what a demanding task that is to take on, having been President of the museum in Big Bear before moving to Tehachapi.

*We are chugging along up the Tehachapi grade.*

Taking on both the Presidency and running the gift shop would have been very taxing. I had hoped that someone would have volunteered for the job, but... anyway, I am stepping down at the end of the fiscal year on March 31. My intentions two and a half years ago, was to just volunteer to be a cashier once or twice a month, and that is what I'll continue to do.

*The view from the observation car of the train going over itself through the loop is incredible.*

I had never run a gift shop before. I was the buyer for the Book Store up in Big Bear, this being my only experience. But reluctantly or not, I dove right in and gave it everything I



Folding T-Shirts for Display, one of the many tasks

had. With the support of the FOTD Board, I was able to increase sales by 33% in the first year. This year has been somewhat trying with tariffs and over-all price increases on almost everything we buy, and I believe a drop in attendance for a few months. I was unable to build on that success this year, but I do expect we will equal or come close to what we did last year. I am hopeful for a good Bakersfield train show in March.

*The train is slowing and the whistle is so very loud as we approach the Tehachapi Depot.*

I don't know if there is a replacement for me as of yet, so if you are interested, please let Diana know. I will do everything to help make a smooth transition. I would love to see what someone else can do. Trust

me, you don't need experience, I didn't have any. If you have any questions about the job, please reach out to me. I will be available to my replacement for as long as they feel necessary.

*The conductor is standing by on the depot platform as we disembark from the train. I look back one last time, wondering who will be replacing me on the journey. I reflect on the past two years and know the job isn't done, but I know I am just not up to the task anymore.*

*"All Aboard!!" I hear as I enter the depot. The whistle blows and the wheels screeches as the train inches forward.*

(Editor's Note: Job well done, Greg. Your performance was outstanding. Enjoy those camping trips.)

# President's Message

**I**t has certainly been a few exciting months of late at the depot! In December we hosted the annual 'Santa at the Depot' event on December 6th, 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>.



Although the photographer had to cancel for logistical reasons, we re-grouped and decided to let families use their own cameras or cell phone cameras to take their pictures with Santa. They could take them themselves or one of Santa's helpers would take them so that all could be included. Normally the cost to visitors is \$20 for the photo that the photographer took. This time we decided instead of charging a fee, we had a box for donations, and a fee was not required.

Overall, because we did not have to pay for the photographer, we ended up with a few dollars more than last year and families got

several shots of their choosing. It was fun and stress-free for all involved.

We had to say goodbye to Susan Mueller this year and it's left a huge hole in our hearts and board. She was such a positive part of our depot family; her devotion and hard work will be sorely missed and was certainly appreciated beyond words.

A new FOTD member came from Mark McGowan's Facebook posting asking for readers to volunteer at the depot. Paul Thomas of Stallion Springs answered the call, received docent training and has joined the FOTD board. He has taken over the position of Volunteer Coordinator and Scheduler.

If you are volunteering as a Cashier or Docent (we appreciate your valuable time), you will have noticed that we have a new sign-up program for volunteers to schedule their shifts - It's working out well - thank you all!

Board members, Jaimie Papsadore and Paul Thomas, have been working to improve the website that was developed two years ago. The improvements project a professional image for the depot and will aide in future project

fundraising efforts. A big THANK YOU goes out to both!

We have a new Events Team! Rather than having one person try to handle all the events and activities that we have planned, we now have a team of six energetic volunteers to take command of it all! You will see some changes, like tonight's food offerings. We hope you like it! Event Team Members are:

Jaimie Papsadore, Dayna Wells, Janet Wilson, Lisa Meredith, Wilma Paddock and myself - Talk about a dynamic team! If you are interested in doing this or have ideas for events, please let any team member know.

Our current Gift Shop Manager, Greg Martin, has decided to take a step back at the end of this month. He has brought the gift shop to a new level, and it shows! We are looking for someone to fill in his shoes, so please consider this opportunity to serve the depot. Greg will still be available to teach, guide and help when needed.

WE RECEIVED THE PERMIT TO BUILD THE ANNEX!! Now, On to fundraising!

*Stay on Track!*

*Diana*

# Depot Information You Might Want to Know

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Tehachapi Depot

Volume XVI, Issue I

March 2026

## Board of Directors

Diana Buerge - President

Marlan Woodside - Vice President, Membership,  
Newsletter and Education  
Coordinator

LaDawna Tigard - Secretary

Wilma Paddock - Treasurer

Greg Martin - Gift Shop

Paul Thomas - Volunteer Coordinator and Scheduler

Jaimie Papsadore - Social Media, Marketing and  
Publicity

## Depot Staff

Annex Project - FOTD Board

Archivist/Photographer - Nick Smirnoff

Caboose Project - TBD

Volunteer Coordinator and Scheduler - Paul Thomas

Curator - TBD

**Event Committee** - Jaimie Papsadore, Dayna Wells, Janet  
Wilson, Lisa Meredith, Wilma Paddock and Diana Buerge

Registrar and Brick Installer - Ken Williams

Gift Shop - Greg Martin

Librarian - Sid Amonchomchupong

Social Media, Marketing & Publicity - Jaimie Papsadore

Tuesday Crew - Reuben Cortez

## Board Advisors

Doug Pickard

Steve Smith

Don Stephens

Tim Trujillo

## Depot Information

Hours: Thursday thru Monday 11AM to 4PM

Closed on Tuesday and Wednesday

Address: 101 West Tehachapi Boulevard,  
Tehachapi, CA 93561

Phone Number: (661) 823-1100

Website: [www.tehachapidepot.com](http://www.tehachapidepot.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/tehachapi.com](http://www.facebook.com/tehachapi.com)



## Return Address:

Friends of the Tehachapi Depot  
101 West Tehachapi Blvd.  
Tehachapi, CA 93561

Valued FOTD Member