

Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad

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June 1, 2018

4th Annual Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad Dinner Gala honored Union Pacific Railroad's local Maintenance of Way Crew and Members of San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum

The 4th Annual Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad Dinner Gala was held on Saturday May 19, 2018 at the Santa Maria Fairpark to a packed house of supporters in the Fountain Pavilion.

The Santa Maria Valley Railroad awarded their annual Railroad Public Safety Award to the Union Pacific Railroad's local Maintenance of Way Crew for their efforts in keeping the Union Pacific Railroad's Coast Line open during the Thomas Fire and for quickly restoring the line after the Ventura Mudslides in January. The Union Pacific Railroad's Coast Line is the main north south rail artery serving local freight traffic including the Santa Maria Valley Railroad and passenger service including the Amtrak Coast Starlight and Pacific Surfliner.

The Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad awarded the annual G.A. Hancock History Preservation Award to Diane Marchetti and Gary See for their inspiration and efforts of their new exhibit, The Santa Maria Valley Railroad "Two Centuries, One Dream".

Rob Himoto, President of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad, and Al Sheff, General Manager, presented Javier Sanchez, Union Pacific Railroad's Local Manager of Track Maintenance based in Guadalupe with the Railroad Public Safety Award. Himoto commented that "In the past we awarded the Railroad Public Safety Award to individuals who directly promoted railroad safety, this year we have a slightly different take on it. This year the award will be going to a group who kept the railroad lines open during a time that highway traffic was cut off. By alleviating trucks and automobile traffic, the overall safety of the Central Coast Communities improved."

Mr. Sanchez's crew kept the Union Pacific Railroad's Coast Line open during the Thomas Fire, the largest fire in the history of California, last December. The crew fought the fire on the railroad right of way in the Ventura area and quickly restored the line within a day. In January the line was covered by the mudslide in Montecito, and the crew was called again to uncover and repaired the line and restored service within days. Their efforts were nothing short of heroic to remove mud, boulders, and debris particularly at the Olive Mill Road area.

As a result, there were only slight delays in railroad traffic. The customers on the Santa Maria Valley Railroad were able to continue to ship and receive by rail and did not have to divert

freight traffic by truck. Amtrak was able to operate over the line and was greeted with full trains as Highway 101 remained closed.

The efforts of UPRR's local Maintenance of Way crew lessened vehicular traffic along the 101 corridor as alternative vehicle traffic routes were congested. With Highway 101 closed, what would have been a 20-minute drive became an almost 4-hour drive between Santa Barbara and Ventura. Passenger rail became a valuable transportation alternative. Also, with minimal interruption in freight traffic, rail freight traffic was not diverted to trucks during this time.

Emcee and Friends Board Chairman Jeff Karsh along with Jane Brennan and Sydney McGovern, the Great Grand Daughter and Two Times Great Grand Daughter of Captain G. Allan Hancock, presented San Luis Obispo Museum Members Diane Marchetti and Gary See with the G.A. Hancock History Preservation Award for their efforts of their new exhibit Santa Maria Valley Railroad "Two Centuries, One Dream" at the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum.

The exhibit, opened in May of last year, talks about the history of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad and the work that G. Allan Hancock did in building the railroad and building industries around the railroad and the role the railroad played in building Santa Maria economically. The tale does not end there, the exhibit talks about the resurgence of the railroad after Coast Belle Rail Corp. purchased the railroad from the Hancock Family a dozen years ago. It is the museum's first interactive exhibit and has been a very popular exhibit the past year.

This year's fundraising efforts grossed almost \$10,000 and has been the most successful fundraiser to date for the Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. Part of the proceeds is for the construction of an exhibit for the Santa Maria Valley Historical Museum depicting the history of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad and its role in the economic development of the Santa Maria Valley.

Event sponsors included the Santa Maria Valley Railroad, G.A. Hancock Family, Tri-Cal, and Phillips 66. The Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation, acquisition, and interpretation of the history of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad and educating the public about the current railroad industry. For more information check out the Friends website at www.friends-smvrr.org.