



Many similarities in historic depots

Both Lee Hall Depot and Norge Train Depot were moved, are being restored for use by the public



The Lee Hall Depot, built in the 1890s, was moved across the railroad tracks from Warwick Boulevard to Elmhurst Street in Newport News in June 2009. It is being restored.

By Joe Lawlor
jlawlor@dailypress.com | 757-243-7674

NEWPORT NEWS — Only about 20 miles apart, two historic train depots, the Norge Train Depot and Lee Hall Depot, share much in common.

Shawn Gordon, a James City County engineer who spearheaded the Norge Train Depot project, spoke to the Friends of the Lee Hall Depot group at the 1884 Warwick Courthouse in Newport News last week.

From Gordon's presentation, many similarities between the two projects became apparent:

- They are historic train stations moved because their original locations were too close to CSX rail lines. The Norge Train Depot was moved in 2006 about 0.75 miles from its Peach Street location in James City County to the new site off of Croaker Road near the library. Meanwhile, the Lee Hall Depot in Newport News moved 165 feet across the railroad tracks to Elmhurst Street in 2009.

The Norge move was a farther distance, but the Lee Hall move was more complicated due to crossing CSX railroad tracks, a local historian said.

"You didn't want to have to stop on the railroad tracks," said Mary Kayasekuk of Newport News Historic Services.

■ Both have similar aims to restore the depots and turn them into museums combined with community meeting rooms. Both plan to allow local model railroad clubs to use the depot for meetings.

"We're focusing on how we might use the space to generate revenue," said Kayasekuk, regarding the Lee Hall Depot.

■ The Norge Train Depot is farther along, with exterior renovation completed and the depot slated to open this summer. Meanwhile, the Lee Hall Depot still has to secure funding for interior renovations and will not be completed for about another two years.



Norge Train Depot in James City County was moved in 2006 and is being restored.

Historic train stations

Norge Train Depot: James City County. Built in 1908. Cost of renovations: \$1 million. Moved 0.75 miles to Croaker Road, near the library. Will open this summer.

Lee Hall Depot: Newport News. Original structure built in early 1890s. There were later additions. Cost of renovations: more than \$2.5 million. Moved across the railroad tracks to Elmhurst Street. Will open in two or more years.

■ Both restoration projects, paid for largely by federal grants, are costly. The Norge project cost \$1 million, while Lee Hall Depot, which is about twice as spacious as Norge, is expected to cost more than \$2.5 million by the time all of the renovations are completed.

■ Both boast historic roots, with the Lee Hall train station carrying passengers to the Yorktown battlefield in time for the 100th anniversary of the British surrender at Yorktown. Additions were made to the actual depot building over the years, but the initial building was constructed in the 1890s. The Norge Train Depot, constructed in 1908, was

the railroad station for Norwegian immigrants who settled in Norge. It's the only remaining train station in James City County.

Gordon, a model train buff, said that the late local historian Frances Hamilton should take much of the credit for getting the Norge project off the ground. Hamilton died a few years ago but lived long enough to witness the train station's move to the new location and to know that it would be saved and restored.

"It made it more than just a project," Gordon said. "Every time I talked to (Hamilton), the history became that much more interesting."

NOTEBOOK

Unique business is a hidden gem here

It's amazing what businesses are hidden in plain sight in Newport News. In the nooks and crannies of the city's numerous office and industrial parks reside small businesses building products that help round out the U.S. economy.

Case in point: Applied Electronics in Oyster Point. The company's indistinct sign in front of its building doesn't let on that Applied is anything other than a typical business in the sprawling office park.

But Applied Electronics is a client for some of the biggest names in the entertainment industry. I toured the plant this week for Tuesday's front-page story about the unique business.

Applied builds trusses, stages and lighting for the entertainment industry, and has been involved in such diverse events as the Super Bowl, the Daytona 500, the Indianapolis 500, the movie "Titanic," the upcoming Steven Spielberg film "Lincoln," the U.S. Open tennis tournament and extreme sports. And that's just a partial list.

Basically, the company builds the guts of the structures that you see on television, such as the stage for awards ceremonies for NASCAR.

Mike Rampneyer, chief operating officer for Applied, came to the company from the music business, where he was a concert promoter and producer. But Rampneyer said he tired of life on the road, so the accountant jumped at the opportunity five years ago to work at Applied.

Applied, which moved from North Carolina to Newport News in 1996, also does local work, including at Busch Gardens, the Ferguson Center for the Performing Arts and entertainment venues in South Hampton Roads.

I asked Rampneyer and sales manager Jack Brown whether the company has plans to expand. They said if all goes well, in a few years they could grow from 50 to 75 employees.

Studying the Southeast

Newport News resident Erica Holloman will be studying environmental issues in the Southeast Community, thanks to a \$800,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that was awarded last fall.

Holloman, who recently earned her doctorate from the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences, is part of the Southeast CARE Coalition, which will be examining a number of possible toxic pollutants in the Southeast.

Holloman said one of the focal points of the work will be air quality. Residents have long complained about the air quality, with many blaming the nearby coal piles. However, there's no scientific proof the coal piles are causing adverse health effects, and air monitoring shows the plants are complying with environmental laws.

Can Your Fines result

Library patrons donated 3,880 pounds of food and other items to the local food bank in the library's Can Your Fines program. The long-running program allowed patrons to avoid overdue fines by donating a nonperishable food item between Nov. 26 and Dec. 29.

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