

Cattaraugus Shortline RR Marks First Run

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LITTLE VALLEY — The New York and Lake Erie (NY and LE) Shortline Railroad made its first run Sunday from Salamanca to Little Valley — and arrived on time at 2 p.m.

Its arrival was missed by many persons who anticipated that, like most trains, it would arrive late. Robert O. Dingman, NY and LE president, waved a hello to supporters as the rented Conrail locomotive chugged to a stop at the now abandoned depot.

The historic first run marks the opening of a shortline railroad system for the Cattaraugus and ends over two years of negotiations by county, state and federal officials who all joined together to save the rail operations.

Lines involved in the shortline system connect Salamanca to Cattaraugus to Gowanda and were abandoned by the Erie-Lackawanna Railroad several years ago. Later the lines were taken over by Conrail and it decided earlier this year to place the abandoned lines up for bid for salvage and permanent removal.

Action between the various agencies resulted in the purchase earlier this year of some of those lines by the Cattaraugus County Industrial Development Agency (IDA).

Acquisition of the lines by IDA included

Dayton to Cattaraugus, (9.2 miles); Cattaraugus to Salamanca, (14.2 miles); Gowanda to Dayton (5.9 miles); South Dayton to Dayton, (3.4 miles). The purchase package included \$79,000 of taxpayers' dollars extended by the Cattaraugus County Legislature; a \$315,000 Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant; and \$160,000 from the New York state Department of Transportation.

With an eye to the future, IDA has also filed an additional grant application with ARC for \$277,000 in funding that will permit further track purchases that would eventually bring the total operation to 32 miles.

The state has granted Dingman a designated operator status for a one-year demonstration project for the shortline railroad. Future state subsidizing after that period will be contingent on his successful operations during the next 12 months.

Restoration of the shortline railroad system in the western portion of Cattaraugus County has assured continued rail service to at least four major industries along the line.

They are Champion International and Agway in Cattaraugus; and Agway and Little Valley Materials and Supply Co. in Little Valley.

At least 600 jobs were saved by continuing the rail service to those industries who were otherwise considering termination of their operations.

Brisk winds whipped Sunday's temperatures into the 40s during the outside ceremonies, causing both Republican and Democratic dignitaries and candidates to shiver in unison while listening to the speeches.

Roy Campbell, director of the Southern Tier West Regional Planning and Development Board, gave a brief history of the railroad in Cattaraugus County.

STW was influential in the accomplishment of the shortline system.

Campbell told the crowd of about 100 railroad supporters that the first major railroad tracks in the county were chartered in 1832.

The first New York railroad line opened in the area in 1851 and brought President Millard Fillmore and famed orator Daniel Webster to the area, Campbell said.

Later, President Abraham Lincoln came to es via the railroad and slept overnight in the Rock City Hotel.

The first railroads, Campbell told, hauled coal and lumber but were later abandoned and merged into larger railroads with four major lines operating in the county in 1970.

NYS DOT Deputy Commissioner John Downing spoke briefly on behalf of "the governor and DOT," wishing the shortline success and "hopes of a celebration of continued service in one year."

Dingman said that "shippers are dependent on the railroad for their competitiveness for their services. The main reason we are here is to do a service for shippers."

Dingman's railroad is without an engine, and one was leased (on an hourly basis) from Conrail for the opening ceremonies. He said he is still negotiating for purchase of a locomotive and will continue the leasing arrangement for the first train, scheduled to leave Salamanca on Saturday morning. Dingman said that a train may run during the week, however, "to get some revenues going."

Dingman cited the other officers in the railroad whom, he noted, have been serving without compensation. They are Linda Landcastle, vice president and secretary; Michael Klass, vice president; and Otis Case of Allegany, superintendent and engineer of the shortline system.

Following the ceremonies, the newly-formed railroad hosted a reception for invited guests at the Rock City Hotel, followed by a railroad movie, and the 4:30 p.m. departure of NY and LE train number two, back to Salamanca.