So, You Want to be a Train Crew Member

One of our key volunteer opportunities at the New Hope Valley Railway is to serve as a train crew member on a ride day. Being on the train crew is fun, but requires training as the safety of our riders depends on the knowledge and discipline of a qualified train crew. Also, the operations of the New Hope Valley Railway are regulated by the Federal Railway Administration (FRA) which requires that all operating personnel comply with a series of training standards. The structure of our training program is key to this.

There is a progression of responsibilities for train crew members. The three most numerous crew opportunities are Car Host, Car Brakeman and Train Brakeman. These positions also prepare members for even more skilled positions such as head-end brakeman, conductor or locomotive engineer.

Car Host

Car host is a good place to start on the train crew. It is a "non-operating" position, so it can be filled by a new member and is a good introduction to train operating procedures. Serving as a car host does not require passing a rules test (more on this later) and training is "on the job" under the supervision of the car or train brakeman. Duties performed by a car host essentially involve greeting riders, helping them get seated, and ensuring they have a safe and enjoyable train ride.

Each required task of a car host is taught by an experienced qualified brakeman, who is also stationed on the car. As the brakeman observes the car host's performance and understanding of these tasks, he/she "signs off" each task in the Crew Member Training and Qualification Record. This document is presented to each new train crew member and is a record and proof that a crew member has achieved proficiency on a task.

Brakeman

The next step up the ladder of train crew is brakeman. A member can be trained simultaneously as a car host and brakeman, but before becoming a qualified brakeman, the member must also attend an operating rules training session and pass a written (open book) test on the operating rules. Additionally, a brakeman in training works under the supervision of a qualified brakeman, whose "sign-off" that the crew member is proficient in each of the tasks is documented in the Training and Qualifications Record.

Once each skill has been signed off on, a Conductor must certify an individual as Car Host and/or Brakeman in the Training and Qualification Record. Then, as a final step, the Rules and

Safety Committee Chair (R&SCC) signs off on that qualification (and records such qualification in a separate record maintained by the R&SCC).

Train (Caboose) Brakeman

Additional qualifications must be met before a Brakeman can be assigned to a caboose because of their position adjacent to the locomotive. These skills are related to the need to couple and uncouple from the locomotive, testing of brakes and the need to master hand/arm signals and safety procedures related to being on the ground while the train is stopped and conducting a run-around procedure at the end of our line. These tasks are also signed-off in the Training and Qualification Record.

Once an individual has been signed off for all skills required for a position, he/she should notify the Rules and Safety Chairperson.

Other skilled train crew positions are available once a crew member is a fully-qualified and experienced Train Brakeman. Each of these involve training and apprenticeship under an experienced individual holding that position. Other positions requiring training and sign-off but which are not on the train are Track Inspector, Signalman and Dispatcher. If a member is interested in one of these positions, please consult the Superintendent.