

# Rail museum, event center: The Depot sort of morphed into being

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THISWEEKNEWS.COM

Posted Aug 14, 2017 at 6:05pm Updated Aug 14, 2017 at 7:58pm



Barry Fromm didn't set out to have a nonprofit rail museum and event facility in northwest Columbus.

It just kind of happened, he said of The Depot, 921 Old Henderson Road.

Fromm said what grew into the museum started as a marketing maneuver to attract tenants to the Info Depot Business Center office building he owns on the same property. Old Henderson dead-ends there due to the presence of railroad tracks, so in June 2000, Fromm naturally bought a 1909 caboose from a Michigan couple who had owned it for 28 years.

Shipping the Central Vermont CV-4007 caboose required considerable “art and skill,” as did convincing city officials to allow it to be placed on the site, Fromm said Aug. 9.

“I should have stopped there,” he said.

He did not.



Fromm next hit upon the idea of finding an old train depot to provide a venue for meetings of a best-business-practices club he had established at the property. He did, too -- a decrepit old building dating to the 1880s and located in the village of Brice.

“It was a mess,” Fromm said. “People came in, looked at it and said, ‘I don’t see it.’ I had a vision.”

The website, [the-depot.org](http://the-depot.org), describes it:

“It was disassembled and brought to our property (and) then reassembled and modernized as a modern conference room with the best of amenities while maintaining every bit of the historical detail.”

Wood from a Quaker barn in Ravenna that dated to 1800 was used to supplement the reconstruction of the Brice depot, which arrived on site in 2003, Fromm said.

Next, of course, what had been a depot but was transformed into The Depot had to be outfitted with authentic railroad memorabilia.

“Then I just got on eBay,” Fromm said. “I think I won the award for most transactions spent on eBay.”

As things stand now, The Depot Rail Museum and Event Center can accommodate groups of up to 150 people, according to Tim Baltzell, operations manager since 2011.

But the relocated Depot could handle only 30 to 35 people. Obviously, Fromm was not done.

Next came what he termed the “harebrained idea” of obtaining a vintage rail car to be added to the growing complex. By far the most popular and historic of these was the “Empire Builder”

flagship passenger cars built for the Great Northern Railway starting in 1929. Fromm found one of the “ranch dining car” versions of this in Biddeford, Maine, where the owner had planned to open a restaurant that never materialized.

“It was an amazing feat to get it on a rail line,” Fromm said. “It was a major feat to get it here.”

The Great Northern ranch dining car arrived in Columbus on Nov. 17, 2006.

“I didn’t stop at that point,” Fromm said. “I unfortunately continued.”

Next up was a locomotive that had been used at a limestone quarry in Marble Cliff. It was loaned to The Depot by the Ohio Railway Museum in Worthington.

“And I didn’t stop there,” Fromm said. “Another theme car came up.”

And what a theme car it was.

Probably.

Car 100, which arrived at The Depot on Nov. 3, 2007, maybe was built for the Ringling brothers in 1886. Then again, maybe it wasn’t.

“The records are very difficult to determine who owned what when,” Fromm said. “I have no direct evidence from my research at the Smithsonian (Institution) that it was (built for Ringling Bros.), but it very well could have been.”

Today, groups such as the local Goddard Schools and the North Broadway Children’s Center in Clintonville make field trips to the rail museum, according to Baltzell, who said the event-center aspects of the organization occupy the bulk of his time.

“It’s probably the most gratifying,” Fromm said. “They see things about the lives their grandparents lived.

“What started off as just a frivolous, crazy thing to do turned out to be a multimillion-dollar investment.”

By the way, Car 100 is the last thing Fromm plans to add to The Depot.

“I know when to say uncle,” he said.

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