

## SMVRR OPERATIONS UPDATE

By Rob Himoto, President of SMVRR

These are unprecedented times, the current situation is history in the making. There were many changes with the railroad along with changing situations and changes have happened quickly. Here is a synopsis of the last six months.

Traffic was strong out of the gate for the beginning of the year. On January 22, our director and my mother Betty Himoto passed away at the age of 95. Betty worked to the end asking questions about various maintenance of way projects and looking at pictures in the hospital. That has left a big void, which the railroad had to fill ranks. The wet weather played havoc on our tracks as traffic in the winter did not slow down.

On March 4 there was a discussion about the increasing problem with COVID-19 and what if it got worse? On March 11 it was determined that the railroad needed an emergency action plan to keep employees safe yet still operate trains as the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically spread throughout the nation. Railroads are deemed an essential business, needed to keep freight moving to keep other essential industries operating and the economy going. So plans were made to continue to safely operate trains and service customers. As COVID-19 quickly spread, the emergency action plan was implemented. All employees not essential to actual train operations were asked to work from home. Procedures were implemented to clean and sanitize the offices, locomotives, and vehicles and other high touch places. The railroad yard was closed to all visitors to limit exposure to the railroad employees.

Meanwhile, rail traffic grew as frozen vegetables were being shipped to restock supermarkets and inbound agricultural traffic such as fertilizer and tractors increased as local farmers rushed to replant fields.

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### UPCOMING EVENTS:

Online Virtual Photo Chat  
SMVRR History and Status  
July 11, 2020  
Saturday 10 to 11 am

Virtual Open House  
(In lieu of Annual BBQ)  
Live Online Video Chat  
Details will be announced

Friends Annual Dinner Gala  
Santa Maria Fairpark  
May 22, 2021



# RAILROAD SCHOLARSHIP FUND

## How To Apply For and Donate to the Scholarship

As previously announced, the Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad have established an annual scholarship for eligible students within Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties. We have established the Betty Himoto Memorial Scholarship Fund with charitable donations made to the Friends of SMVRR in memory of Betty Himoto, Director of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. An annual scholarship of \$1000 will be awarded to a qualifying student pursuing a degree or technical training in the Industrial Arts with a career goal in the rail industry. Additional information about qualifications and the application process will be available on the Friends website later this year.

### Applying for a Scholarship:

Applications will be accepted between January 1 and April 1, 2021. All materials, including reference letters and transcripts, must be postmarked or submitted on line by April 1, 2021 to be considered. Applications and additional information will be available through the Friends-SMVRR website later this year. For academic year 2021-2022, candidates will be notified of the Committee's decision by April 15, 2021 and honored at the Annual Dinner Gala on May 22, 2021.

### Donations to the Scholarship Fund:

We had planned for the 2020 Friends Dinner Gala and Silent Auction Fundraiser to be the primary funding source for this scholarship fund, but due to COVID-19, the Gala had to be cancelled. If you would like to donate to the scholarship fund, you can contribute with your credit card by going to [www.friends-smvrr.org/scholarship](http://www.friends-smvrr.org/scholarship) or mail your check to Friends of SMVRR, P.O. Box 1031 Santa Maria, CA 93456-1031. Please make your check payable to Friends of SMVRR and designate it for the "Betty Himoto Memorial Scholarship Fund".



(Photo National Academy of Railroad Science)



(Photo Hancock College)

## VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE

This year we are planning to hold a Virtual Open House to take the place of our annual Open House and BBQ at the Osburn Yard. Since the rail yard and facilities are closed to all visitors for the foreseeable future, we will give members a chance to see the inner workings of the rail facilities and latest developments on the railroad through a live video chat. Look for an upcoming announcement with time and date details.

## OUR SPONSORS:

We welcome new sponsors to expand our programs and tours and fund educational activities.



**G. A. Hancock  
Family**

# Where Are They Now?

## Diesel Locomotive No. 60 - GE U6B

Diesel locomotive No. 60 was the sixth and final purchase of a new locomotive from General Electric. Although similar in weight, size and power to the previously purchased GE 70 tonners it had distinct differences, most noticeable the low cab. It was a Model U6B originally designed for export to the South Vietnam Railways and the low cab would accommodate lower overhead clearances as in tunnels. Under the hood the unit was powered by a 12 cylinder Caterpillar engine, unlike the rest of the fleet of yellow diesels which used the Cooper-Bessemer 6 cylinder engine, giving it a distinctive sound. It was said to be a strong puller but was disliked by crew because of its' low cab ceiling. Sadly the unit was scrapped onsite after the discovery of cracks in the crank shaft and cylinder heads and deemed not cost effective to repair. SMVRR No. 60 gave 32 years of service, arriving in 1959 and being scrapped in Dec. 1991.

Details on SMVRR No. 60:

Builder: General Electric (GE) Model: U6B Builder#: 33494

HP: 640 Drivers: 36" Weight: 130,900 lbs.

Built: May 1959 Scrapped: 1991



SMVRR #60 in the Santa Maria Yard



SMVRR U6B #60 and a 70 tonner #40 at the Miller Street crossing in Santa Maria  
(Photo SMVHS)



SMVRR #60 on the point pulling a line of beet cars  
(Photo Train Watchers Journal)



SMVRR #60 as the lead loco followed by 70 tonners passing by with the beets  
(Photo Train Watchers Journal)

## Parlor Car Chat - Online Virtual Event - July 11, 2020

With your computer, tablet, or phone, join Rob Himoto and Nathan Paul on July 11, 2020 at 10:00am PDT for an online virtual photo sharing chat to learn about the history and current developments of this railroad that continues to make history even today. July 11th is the 109th birthday of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad.

For connection details, go to <https://friends-smvrr.org/activities.html> and click on "details" for the Parlor Car Chat on July 11.



The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum is presenting other Parlor Car Chats most every Saturday during the Covid-19 closures. For further information on attending others or watching recordings of past events, go to <https://slorrm.com/parlor-car-chats.html>.

## SMVRR Operations Update (continued from page 1)

Having the busiest winter and spring rail traffic in over 25 years we had to step up maintenance of way projects to maintain our railroad tracks. A maintenance of way crew was brought in from another railroad to catch up on rail projects. During the past two months, they performed tie projects near Green Canyon Trestle, Betteravia Storage, Stock Pass, Carr Scale, Midco Pass and at the Wye. Over 1000 ties have been installed on the main line along with over 200 switch ties.

The second week in May we coordinated with the City of Santa Maria and did a major cleanup of trash, vegetation, and homeless camps in the city. The clean up of the railroad right of way improved safety for our employees and made it easier for maintenance of way crews to work on the track.

Lately neighboring businesses and customers have experienced a dramatic increase in vandalism and theft. The Osburn Yard now has a presence 24 hours a day to ward off trespassers.

Our mechanical department has been hard at work repairing equipment and is finishing the repairs on our GP9 engine 1801. Keeping our fingers crossed, we should have 1801 back in service very soon. Our maintenance of way forces will be starting a heavy rail project on the main line. Soon a portion of the main line will be upgraded to the same size rail as used on the Union Pacific Railroad's main line. The project is slated to start next month.

We are very fortunate to be able to continue to serve our customers who are essential, keeping the economy in the Santa Maria Valley and the Central Coast going in these challenging times. The last several months have proven that the Santa Maria Valley Railroad is vital in keeping freight moving and contributing to the economy of the Central Coast.

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All photos are from the archives of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad unless otherwise noted.