

Come with us to a celebration today.

Amtrak, You Are Here!

Today History is being made in Lynchburg, Virginia, and we are a part of it. Amtrak is starting a new train service between Lynchburg and Boston tomorrow but today (Sept. 30, 2009) is the inaugural run.

It is a glorious fall day; crisp breezes flutter the still-green leaves and the sun is bright but not too hot for "sitting". As we come across the street from the parking lot, a seemingly endless queue of band members files down the steep hill to Kemper Street Station. They look proud and tidy with black feathery plumes on their hats and their horns glisten in the sunlight.

Inside the station the "N-Scale" modelers have set up a nifty display of tiny trains and carefully-built scenery. Amtrak agents are lined up behind the ticket counter as a photographer records this moment in history.

Outside is a display of old blueprints of the station. A bevy of ladies from Lynchburg's Visitors' Center are giving out sturdy tote bags full of local tourist info and are giving away chances for a free Amtrak trip. Scads of chairs cover the area in front of the station and soon they are filled. An announcement is made that more chairs are on the way. Brown-paper bags of freshly-popped corn are distributed and folks are happily munching to the beat of the local high school band. One lady is busily doling out hand-lettered signs extolling Amtrak and Lynchburg. Another woman is passing out blue bags of biodegradable confetti in anticipation of the train's arrival. A cluster of college-age kids are carrying campaign signs. When a local TV reporter begins to interview one of the crowd, you can almost hear the air whoosh as those kids position themselves directly behind the interviewee so their signs appear on the 6:00 news. Ah, politics in motion!! Red, white, and blue buntings flutter from the railing of the upper balcony.

The PA tells us that the train is only a few minutes late and that still more chairs are coming soon to accommodate the much-larger-than-expected crowd. No wonder that train is running close to schedule; all those politicians on board should generate enough hot air to propel the train in fine style.

Excitement is building! A couple beside me makes plans to use the new service to connect to Dulles Airport near DC on their upcoming trip. One lady tells that she is going to ride the train tomorrow. Two men behind me discuss their memories from childhood of passenger trains so many years ago. Don't you just know, all this time Jim is cruising the area with his camera.

A roar and a deep-throated horn announce the arrival of the train and the crowd stands in unison. That eco-friendly, biodegradable confetti fills the air; wind catches the batch tossed by the lady in front of me and I get the whole load in my face. The band kicks up the volume a couple of notches. Folks cheer as dignitaries, Lynchburg's mayor, (below)



the Amtrak president, the railroad CEO, the governor (below)



and his father-in-law, a former governor of Virginia (below)



and numerous other politicians disembark. The usual “feel good, aren’t we great?, we did it!” speeches are given.



Honestly, this community can be proud of its achievements.

We are told that the train service is funded by the state of Virginia for three years. After that, the future depends on ridership --- truly a case of “use it or lose it”. The cost of all three years’ funding is less than building just one mile of new road. Such a good opportunity our

citizens have been given!

The hoopla is over, the sun is dipping behind tall trees west of the depot, crisp-white Amtrak vans are waiting for their influential passengers (the train will stay in Lynchburg tonight), wind is still rearranging that confetti, and we trudge up the steep cobblestone street to the parking lot. It has been a good, good afternoon.



The End (couldn't resist that one!)