

SPOTLight on: Mike Lorance Chugging along with steam engine trains

As the dairy department frozen foods manager at Shop 'n Save in Kirkwood, Mike Lorance finds himself in frigid areas more than most people, but in his free time, he's up to his elbows in steam — the steam of old train engines.

Lorance, a 32-year member of Local 655, has been an active volunteer with the Wabash, Frisco and Pacific Association for 23 years. The not-for-profit organization got its start in 1939, and has never seen a lack of volunteers in its long tradition of preserving live steam engines.

He and others in the organization restore, refurbish and bring back to life the old-time engines that once powered trains along rickety steel tracks.

"I enjoy it. It's fun; it's my hobby," said Lorance. "I enjoy running the engines, meeting the members and showing visitors something from a by-gone era."

The visitors he refers to are passengers, folks that visit their tract of land along the Meramec River in Glencoe to take a brief ride on a restored train, along an authentic 12-gauge track, adjacent to the Al Foster trail.

"The train at the Zoo is about half the size of the train we've built," said Lorance. "These engines were built by people years ago. We purchase them, refurbish them and reuse them."

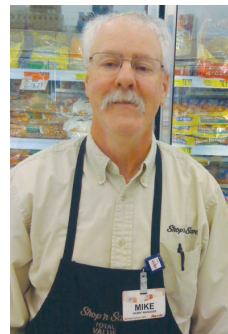
Lorance said he got involved with the club after his 10-year old son urged the two of them to check it out. He says his son eventually lost interest, but his interest and

learning never ended. He now serves as a board member, treasurer and superintendent of building and grounds.

"We all volunteer. Some work on the engines, some work on the track, but overall about 24 members do various phases of the refurbishing," Lorance said. "I started with American Flyer model trains as a kid, and when we built a home near the Wabash-Crystal Railroad, I guess it was the call of the train whistles."

Lorance said there's always a new train engine in progress. They require a lot of maintenance because of the moving parts. That's probably why they disappeared because diesel engines were easier and they didn't need as many people to maintain them.

"For ours, we use oil or coal to fire the engines, like they used to be fueled," Lorance said. "The big trains use diesel engines these days, so many people have no idea how a steam engine works. We tell visitors how they work and how we maintain them. It's more than just giving a ride."



LORANCE