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JJ Hill Days 50th Year Celebration Commemorative Issue

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Cover Image: Present day train, BNSF Railway

Right Image: Previous celebration catching the train coming down the tracks.

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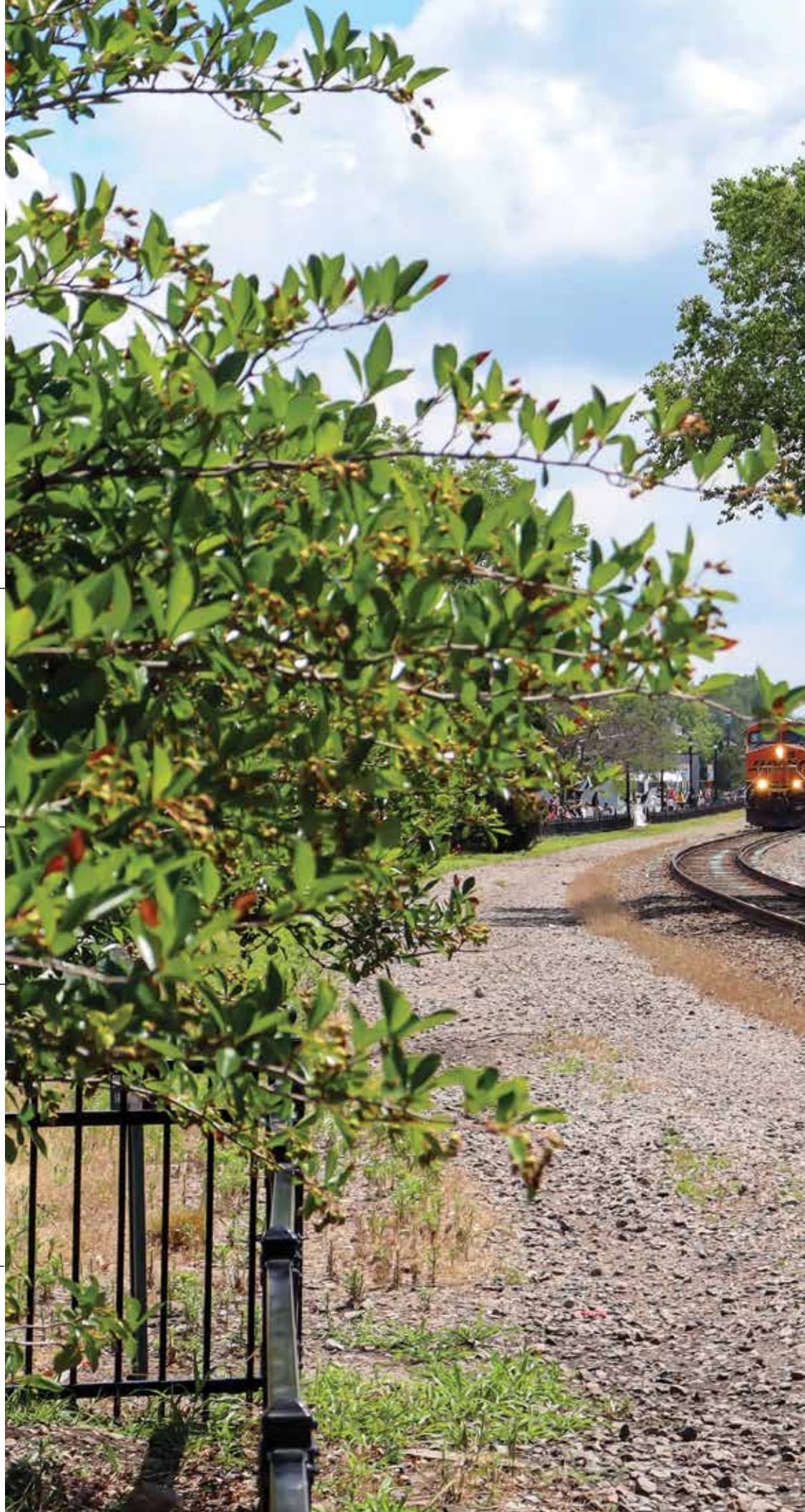
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From the Editor

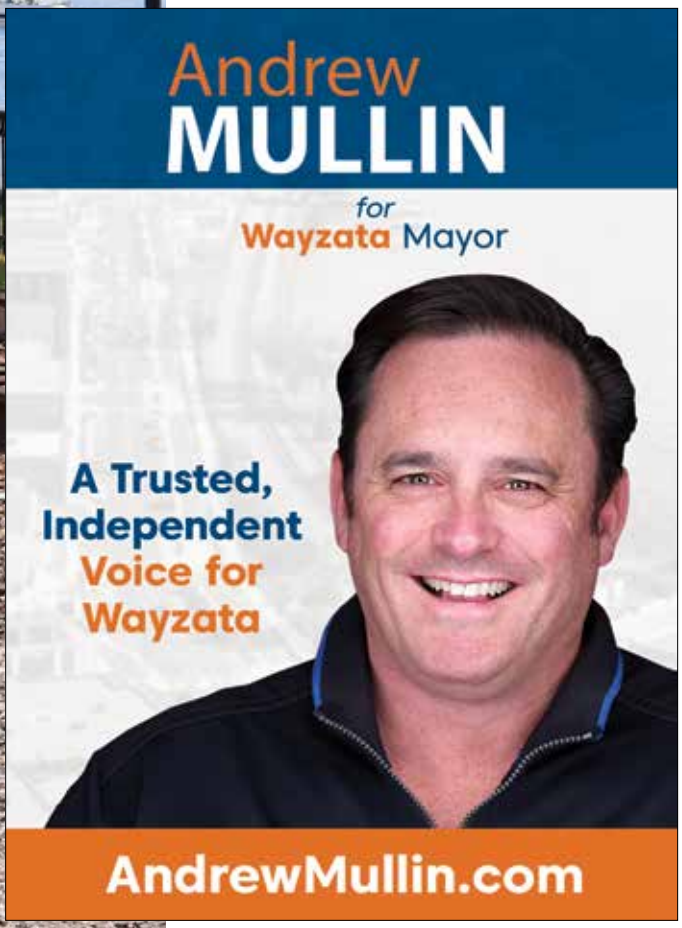
J J Hill Days is celebrating its 50th anniversary! That first event in 1975 didn't get a lot of attention in the local newspaper. Little did they know at that time that the celebration would turn into Wayzata's biggest annual event.

It's a testament to a small town to have a community celebration continue this long. In part, it's a source of identity. No doubt, it's a fun celebration, but at the root is a reminder of how important the railroad is to this town. Trains helped make Wayzata a destination. Other modes of transportation still make this community a must see.

I can't imagine Wayzata without the railroad and I can't imagine our community without JJ Hill Days, can you?

Nate Leding

Nate Leding, Editor in Chief



James J. Hill & Wayzata: A Railway Heritage



Above: James J. Hill (pictured center, facing camera) with a group of men in Kandiyohi County, MN (1890-1910)
Courtesy of Kandiyohi County Historical Society
Below: August 24, 1867 Saint Cloud #7 steam locomotive meets the Lady of the Lake.
Courtesy Lake Minnetonka Historical Society



James J. Hill was a railroad magnate with an "empire" stretching from Minnesota to the Pacific Northwest. The train tracks through Wayzata became part of his mainline between Saint Paul and Seattle when the final western sections were completed in 1893. However, many would be surprised to learn that James J. Hill didn't actually build the tracks in Wayzata – that came much earlier.

On August 24, 1867, the Saint Paul & Pacific Railroad reached Wayzata and connected all of Lake Minnetonka to the Twin Cities. Led by the Saint Cloud #7 steam locomotive, the train consisted of one passenger car. The train was met by a small sidewheeler called the Lady of the Lake (previously called the Governor Ramsey), the first steamboat on Lake Minnetonka. Later that day, the train was turned around on a horse-drawn turntable and headed back to the city.

The first train station in Wayzata was built near the present day intersection of Lake Street and Broadway Avenue. From here, passengers from the Twin Cities and indeed all over the United States transferred onto steamboats that were waiting for them at the adjacent docks. After departing Wayzata, the steamboats would take them to hotels, inns, and boarding houses all around the lake and to communities such as Excelsior and Mound. On the flipside, the railroad also allowed farmers who lived in the area to easily send produce to big markets in the city.

However, by 1873 the Saint Paul & Pacific was suffering financially and went into receivership. Hill purchased the railroad in 1878 and renamed it the Saint Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway. When a legal battle between Hill and the village of Wayzata arose over the location of the tracks in 1883, the train station at the foot of Broadway Avenue was demolished and a new one was built east of town near Bushaway Road. The "feud" between Wayzata and Hill finally ended in 1906 when Hill commissioned the construction of a new depot near the intersection of Lake Street and Barry Avenue. He declared it to be the "handsomest" depot on the entire line. It still stands today as an iconic reminder of Wayzata's railway heritage.

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JAMES J. HILL DAYS
WAYZATA, MN

FRIDAY 9/6

Panoway on Wayzata Bay

5 PM–9 PM	Logrolling

Along Lake Street in Wayzata

5 PM–9 PM	Street Market
5 PM–10 PM	Lake Minnetonka Carnival Food + Drink
6 PM–10 PM	Live Music

Wayzata Depot

5 PM–9 PM	Rails & Ales Craft Beer Festival

SATURDAY 9/7

Panoway on Wayzata Bay

10 AM–2 PM	Dachshund Races & Doggy Olympics
10 AM–7 PM	Logrolling

Along Lake Street in Wayzata

10 AM–7 PM	Street Market
10 AM–10 PM	Lake Minnetonka Carnival Live Music Food + Drink

Wayzata Depot

11 AM–12 PM	Guided Historical Walking Tour
12 PM–4 PM	Llama Llovin' Experience

Wayzata Bay

8:45 PM–9 PM	Fireworks

SUNDAY 9/8

Panoway on Wayzata Bay

10 AM–2 PM	Dachshund Races & Doggy Olympics
10 AM–4 PM	Logrolling

Along Lake Street in Wayzata

10 AM–4 PM	Lake Minnetonka Carnival Street Market Live Music Food + Drink
2:45 PM–3 PM	T-6 Thunder Airshow
3 PM–4 PM	Parade

Wayzata Depot

11 AM–12 PM	Guided Historical Walking Tour

For more info use QR code or visit jamesjhilldays.wayzatachamber.com



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This will be the first JJ Hill Days in a long, long time without a familiar face greeting visitors at the Wayzata Depot. The community lost a friend earlier this year when Terry Middlekauff passed away. In a way, he was the depot. He knew everything about it and even dressed the part.

He grew up in Peru, Indiana where both his grandfathers and his father worked on the railroad. He later took a job with Control Data which brought him to the Twin Cities. While his career introduced him to the latest in computer technology, his heart was still with the railroad. Middlekauff worked with the Wayzata Historical Society to open the Depot to the public. That was more than 20 years ago.

There was nobody more knowledgeable about the Wayzata-railroad connection than Middlekauff. We will all miss that twinkle in his eye when youngsters came into the depot wanting to know about trains.





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Fishing Report & Information:

RĒL FISHING

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Lake Minnetonka Fishing Guide • Mound, MN

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Fish will be falling back into their spring pattern. Panfish will be in weeds close to deep basins. Musky will have moved back up shallow inside weed beds or hanging on the outside suspended in deeper waters. The window for the best walleye bite will again be during low light hours. Targeting them outside of weedlines with live bait. The bass are either hanging up in shallow weed beds or on the breaklines. Northern pike can be found almost anywhere there are weeds and bait fish. Target them with more aggressive baits this time of year such as crankbaits, chatterbaits and small blade baits.

Events

9/2.....Labor Day

9/3.....Quarter 1 begins

First Day of School: Grades 1-5

Grades 6&9: In-Person Orientation Day

Grades 7-8, 10-12: At-Home Learning Day

9/4.....1st Day of School - Kindergarten & Middle School

9/6-9/8.....JJ Hill Days, Wayzata

9/6 & 9/13.....Entertainment in the Park • minnetonkamn.gov

9/9.....First Responders Dinner • wayzata205.org

9/13-9/15.....Incredible Festival • Our Lady of the Lake, Mound

9/15.....Wayzata Charity Car Show • wayzata205.org

9/20-9/22.....Apple Days, Excelsior

9/23.....Fire Department Community Open House, Victoria

9/28.....Oktoberfest, Shorewood

9/29.....Fall De Tonka, Excelsior

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50 Years of Celebrating

Left: Runners take off in one of two races featured during the 1976 JJ Hill Days. Courtesy Peter Herfurth.
Below: The steam locomotive for the 1981 celebration. Courtesy Lake Minnetonka Historical Society
Bottom: A beautiful night at JJ Hill Days 2022



JJ Hill Days first came down the tracks in 1975. We're now accustomed to it happening mid-September, but the first celebration was Oct. 2-4. The Minnetonka Sun Newspaper chronicled those early days. That year the Minnetonka steam engine was stationed near the Depot. Old farm equipment and steam tractors were on display at Lake Street and Broadway Avenue. One could visit Colonial Square to see antique cars and take advantage of JJ Hill Days specials offered by businesses like Rexall Drug and Ben Franklin. And down the hill at the Wayzata Bay Center shopping mall (where the Promenade currently stands) Casey Jones, a popular Twin Cities television personality, judged a kids art contest. A model railroad was on display as well as Guthrie actors in early 1900s clothing. There was a six-mile race and a two-mile race for folks to take part in too.

In 1977, the festival was held Sept. 24-25 and featured an amateur photography contest, a youth tennis tournament, and a volleyball tournament. According to the Lake Minnetonka Sun newspaper, "the names of the teams must be suitable for publication". Despite the rain that weekend, Governor Rudy Perpich attended and lost his bocce ball match with future U.S. Senator Rudy Boshwitz. Folks had great weather for the 1978 event. A couple new additions included a blacksmith making railroad spikes, gunny sack races for the little ones, and paddle wheel rides aboard the Lady of the Lake. The boat ride cost $2 for adults and $1 for children.

The annual event continued to add things to keep it interesting. Pony cart rides, a turn of the century parade featuring Governor Al Quie leading the way on horseback, locomotive rides, and a square dance were added in 1979. That year's JJ Hill Days was highlighted by hot air balloon races over Lake Minnetonka. The event was sponsored by nine area realtors. Lift off of the balloons took place at Wayzata West Middle School. JJ Hill Days celebrated the Wayzata Depot's 75th anniversary in 1981. A steam locomotive was brought in and folks were decked out in early 1900s clothing. Olson's Bakery made a 1,600-pound Depot replica cake too. Windsurfing sponsored by Ski Hut was a big hit 1982. So was the music provided by the Wayzata Depot Brass Band. In 1983, JJ Hill Days added miniature mule rides, beach lagoon raft faces, and an old-time sock hop was held at Wayzata West Junior High.



Wayzata's biggest celebration continued to evolve through the decades. In the years to come - steak frys at the Wayzata American Legion and a Fall Fireman's Dance at the fire station were added. As were dachshund races, lumberjack shows, an historic trolley ride around the lake, skateboarder exhibits, a "Wayzata Idol" talent contest, excursions on a steam train, a craft beer festival, and live music. Since 1975, JJ Hill Days has been a must-attend event.



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