

## The Florida Special ~ Recap and Photographic Journey

*By Elizabeth Guenzler, Convention Committee Member and Central Coast Chapter Representative*



### Setting the Scene

The "Florida Special" convention had been in the planning stages for many months and the Committee, led by John Goodman, worked hard to present a well-rounded and successful event. Despite some challenges along the way and last-minute changes that were beyond our control, those who attended enjoyed four days of events and a day of meetings.

Convention committee members are John Goodman, Walter Zullig, Al Weber, Tony White, Skip Waters, Elizabeth Guenzler, Dawn Holmberg, Dan Meyer and Mike Yuhas.

*Walter Zullig* was instrumental in suggesting Florida as a convention location and did much advance planning, as well as being in charge of the negotiations with U.S. Sugar, Brightline and Tri-Rail.

*Al Weber*, former NRHS President, joined the committee and took over from the late Steve Miller, with his main focus being coordination with the bus companies, selecting the charter bus operator and organizing the complex operations during the convention.

As in previous years, *Dawn Holmberg* and her husband *Dan Meyer*, along with *John Goodman*, tackled the immense task of writing the Convention Booklet (assisted by the rest of the committee during the editing and proofing stage), and single-handedly looked after the online posting of the Convention details.



At a pre-convention meeting, John Goodman, Dan Meyer, Al Weber and Tony White in conversation with the Sales Manager of the DoubleTree Hotel. Elizabeth Guenzler (almost hidden) taking notes. Photo by Dawn Holmberg.

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# NRHS NEWS – CONVENTION 2023

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## Announcements

### **Heritage Grants 2024**

- **Deadline: January 31, 2024**
- Application available on the NRHS web site at  
<https://nrhs.com/news/2024-heritage-grants-application-form-now-available/>

### **RailCamp 2024**

- **Dates: RailCamp East, June 23 – 29 & RailCamp Northwest, August 4 – 11**
- The application will be available on the NRHS web page January 1st.
- Be sure to check for any changes that may be needed for the dates.
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### **NRHS Convention & Conferences**

- **2024 NRHS Annual Convention - August 26<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024**

## NRHS News Deadlines

| <u>Issue</u>                     | <u>Submit by</u>  |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| February 2024 issue (online pdf) | January 20, 2024  |
| March 2024 (mailed issue)        | February 10, 2024 |



Dan excelled in looking after the audio-visual component for the meetings, seminars and banquet, coordinating with the hotel and using his own equipment to provide and produce superior sound and video quality.

*Elizabeth Guenzler*, who remained the Bus Host Coordinator (and a bus host), took over the position of Registration, as Eileen Weber had retired from that position after ten years.

*Mike Yuhas*, former advertising executive with Trains and Classic Trains, was also involved in the convention planning and arranged the seminar presentations. He set up and managed the automated registration process and assisted with IT issues as they arose.

*Skip Waters* worked with his local graphic designer on the convention logo, was also involved in the planning process and promoted the convention and its activities on Facebook, as he looks after the society's social media. During the convention, he was a bus host and led the photo runbys during the steam excursion.

### **Final Preparations and On To Florida**

After Eileen's retirement from the registration room, the position was offered to me and I readily accepted, albeit with a little trepidation, knowing I had large shoes to fill. But as I became familiar with the procedures and documents that Eileen passed on to me, things began to fall into place. Finding a suitable printing company and ordering tickets, banquet program and convention bags kept me busy in the weeks leading up to the convention, as well as printing manifests and other reports from the Neon database, which was not very intuitive at the outset.

The rest of the committee had their hands full with some unexpected last-minute changes to plans that caused some angst, but with several telephone calls, e-mails and negotiations, were able to offer unique experiences for our members.

On August 30<sup>th</sup>, my husband Chris and our friend, At-Large member, Robin Bowers, flew to Fort Lauderdale. Due to a delay in our stopover city of Nashville, we arrived mid-evening and took the shuttle bus to the Tri-Rail station and had to wait for the next train, so it was not until late evening that we arrived at the DoubleTree Hotel, trudging along with our heavy luggage. These included the convention bags, which were not ready in time to be sent ahead.



### **August 31<sup>st</sup> and September 1<sup>st</sup>:**

I was glad to have this day to get into "registration room mode" and did some preparatory work before the rest of the committee arrived later in the day.

September 1<sup>st</sup> saw the committee concentrate on their areas of responsibilities, including Dan Meyer who had to set up the registration room Internet and printer as well as prepare the seminar room with projector, screen, mixing board, et cetera. I would like to thank Dawn Holmberg, Eileen Weber

and Ellen Scott for assisting me with the registration room set-up, including making up the convention bags. Everything was ready in plenty of time for opening and Eileen and Ellen were on hand to help throughout the busy times. Klaus Michels and his wife Judy Fishel had volunteered to assist throughout the convention and their assistance was also appreciated.

That evening was the NRHS Fund meeting as well as a seminar on the history of the Florida East Coast Railway presented by noted FEC expert Seth Bramson.



Lanyards of the participants, organized in alphabetical order, awaiting pickup. Photo by Elizabeth Guenzler.



This year was the first that convention merchandise was offered for pre-purchase, which was a popular offering. Photo by Elizabeth Guenzler.



The registration room information board, as prepared by Ellen Scott. Photo by Elizabeth Guenzler.



## Saturday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>:

This day was set aside for the business meetings, namely Advisory Council, Board Meeting and Membership Meeting.

I changed hats to Advisory Council Secretary. Thirty-three members joined the meeting, either in person or via video conference, with Richard Shulby presiding as the Chairman.



A few of the assembled national representatives during the Advisory Council meeting; the table was in a U shape and some members joined by video conference. Left to right: Tom Gallagher (Champlain Valley), Elizabeth Guenzler (Central Coast, and Advisory Council Secretary), Ken Eddy (Arkansas-Boston Mountains), Carl Jensen (Roanoke), Robert Leslie (Blue Ridge) and R. Victor Varney (North Carolina Railway Museum). Photo by Dawn Holmberg.



The Board meeting.

Left to right: Jon Baake, Walter Zullig, John Goodman (barely visible), Scott Andes, John Fiorilla, Tony White, Ellen Scott, Kevin Feeney, Charles Webb and Skip Waters. Photo by Dawn Holmberg.



Eileen Weber (and in morning, Ellen Scott) took care of the registration room for me during the Council and Board meetings. I resumed my position that afternoon and evening, and for the early morning and evenings throughout the duration of the convention.

Three seminars were presented that evening, the first by Walter Zullig on the history of Amtrak and other passenger railroads in Florida. That was followed by Doug Scott, who had combined with music, his photographs from Trains Magazine's 2022 charter on the U.S. Sugar Railroad. The evening concluded with Mike Yuhas' "I Cover the Waterfront"; photos and videos with sound of BNSF and boats on the Upper Mississippi.

As is always necessary for a convention, bus hosts were required and I retained my position of Bus Host Coordinator, being a host for some of the events along with Skip Waters, Dan Meyer, Dawn Holmberg and Walter Zullig.

*Sunday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>:*

The convention's first event was a train ride on Brightline from West Palm Beach to Miami on Sunday. While it had been hoped that the line to Orlando would be open by the beginning of September, that was not the case. However, a self-guided tour of the outside Running Repair Facility in West Palm Beach was offered and two employees were happy to answer questions and talk. Then at the Miami station during the lunch layover, everyone had the opportunity to go behind the scenes and see the Operations Centre. These were unexpected, one-time occasions and would not have occurred if the full length of the line had been operating.



Brightline trainset sits outside their workshop b in West Palm Beach, Brightline's running repair facility. This Siemens SCB-40 "Charger" locomotive was delivered earlier in 2023, in anticipation of expanded service to Orlando. Photo by Mike Yuhas.



Brightline Smart Coach 2, built by Siemens in 2021. Photo by Christopher Guenzler.



Left: Jacks and drop pit in the Running Repair Facility. Photo by Robin Bowers.

Above: One of the Brightline employees who was happy to answer questions during the facility tour. Photo by Mike Yuhas.





Charger 114 will lead the NRHS convention delegates' regularly-scheduled Brightline train from West Palm Beach to Miami. This photo was taken at WPB, 13 minutes before the train's 11:00 am on-time departure. Photo by Mike Yuhas.



After going through security, there was some confusion regarding ticket collection, so not everyone saw the motive power of a Florida East Coast freight train from the waiting area. Photo by Robin Bowers.





Awaiting the boarding announcement at West Palm Beach station. Photo by Elizabeth Guenzler.



Convention delegates enjoying the ride from WPB to MIA in a “Smart” class coach. Siemens Venture coaches feature large windows, comfortable seats, wide aisles and short, but wide, video information displays. At foreground is Skip Waters, NRHS Board member and member of the Convention Committee. Photo by Mike Yuhas.

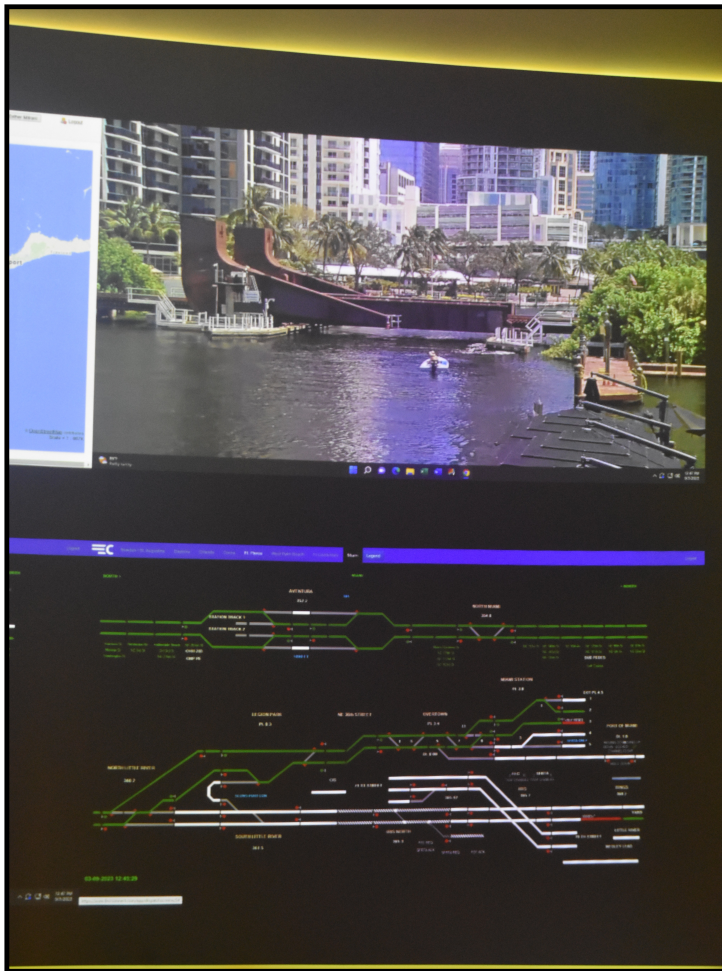




*Left:* Our tour guide for the Operations Center tour was Esther, a 10-year veteran of Brightline and predecessors. As Esther is one of employees with the greatest seniority, she proudly fulfills the role of company historian. Photo by Mike Yuhas.

*Below left:* A live video of the Fort Lauderdale drawbridge which has to be timed for crossing Brightline trains over the busy New River. Photo by Christopher Guenzler.

*Below right:* One of several large screens; this representing the public satisfaction with the company in real time. Photo by Christopher Guenzler.







The Brightline departure board, showing Aventura, Fort Lauderdale, Boca Raton and West Palm Beach stations. Photo by Christopher Guenzler.

Brightline is all about hospitality. In Premium class, food and beverages are complimentary; in Smart, refreshments may be purchased. The photographer paid \$2.14 for a 7.5 ounce can of ginger ale. Photo by Mike Yuhas.



Member Robin Bowers takes a photo of fellow NRHS members in the Brightline train. Judging by the wide smile, Preston Hamilton seems to be enjoying the trip. Photo by Mike Yuhas.



*Monday, September 4<sup>th</sup>*

Labor Day featured steam in the form of U.S. Sugar 4-6-2 148 on the U.S. Sugar Railroad from Clewiston to Lake Placid and return, a rare mileage trip of 55 miles on the former Atlantic Coast Line.

This locomotive was built by the American Locomotive Company in 1920 for the Florida East Coast Railway and was purchased by U.S. Sugar in 1952 and operated there until 1969. It was sold to the Black River and Western for two years then operated at several other New Jersey tourist lines before being donated to the Connecticut Valley Railroad Museum in 1982. Six years later, it was sold to a private individual, moved to Michigan and finally ended up in Monte Vista, Colorado, before being repatriated by U.S. Sugar in 2016. After going through a full restoration to operating condition over four years, it debuted in December 2020 and has been the subject of a few photo charters since then.

While the company operates the Sugar Express at certain times of the year, this was a railfan event and two photo runbys were performed on the return trip. Members of the Lake Placid Historical Society opened the station and several of our members browsed the displays after going for lunch at nearby restaurants or taking advantage of the food truck outside the station.

The Convention Committee had invited the public to attend and 36 people took advantage of this opportunity and were introduced to the NRHS, including a young man who was interested in the RailCamp program.

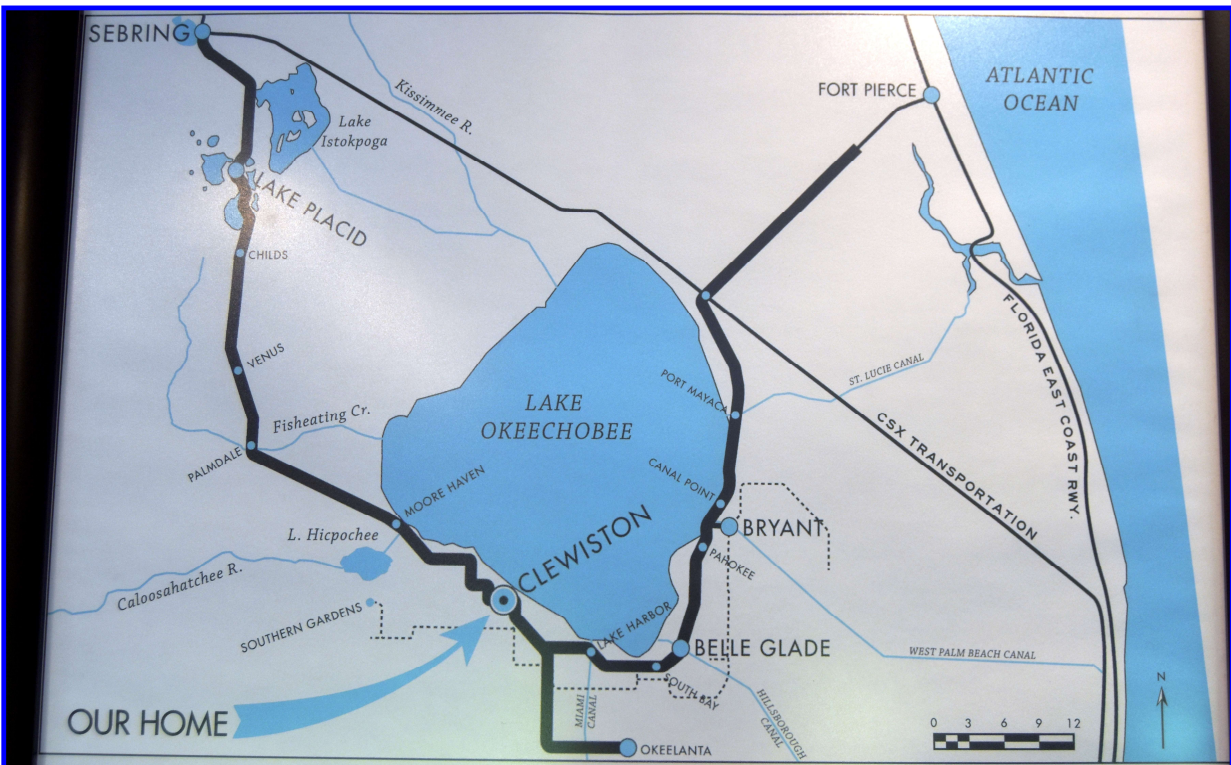


The steam train at Clewiston before departure, which consisted of US Sugar 4-6-2 148, dining car "Palmdale", coach 1137, baggage car 333 "Miami Locks", coach 1002 "Lake Okeechobee", coach 644 "Fort Oglethorpe", power car 5758 and GP11 310. Photo taken with a drone by Mike Yuhas.





The steam train rounding a curve as it departs Clewiston, bound for Lake Placid. Photo by Christopher Guenzler.



The map in one of the coaches showing U.S. Sugar's three lines. Photo by Christopher Guenzler.





Some of our members enjoying the baggage car. Photo by Elizabeth Guenzler



U.S. Sugar baggage car 333 "Miami Locks", ex. United Railroad Historical Society of New Jersey, exx. New Jersey Transit 5333, exxx. Central of New Jersey 123, exxxx. Great Northern 1002, nee Union Pacific 4571, built by American Car and Foundry in 1954. Photo by Elizabeth Guenzler





U.S. Sugar 4-6-2 148 at Lake Placid during the layover, in which the steam engine was serviced and watered. Photo by Robin Bowers.



One of the many murals in Lake Placid, this one was painted by a father and son team from Chemainus, British Columbia, Canada, the town that originally inspired the Lake Placid mural project. Dan and Peter Sawatsky replicated pen and ink style to create an oncoming engine that bears down on you as you walk past, complete with authentic sound. Photo by Christopher Guenzler.



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U.S. Sugar 4-6-2 148 performs the second of two photo runbys for the conventioners, this one at Milepost 942. Drone photograph by Mike Yuhas.



A ground view of the photo runby, led by U.S. Sugar 4-6-2 148. Photo by Christopher Guenzler.



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## Tuesday, September 5<sup>th</sup> - Transit Tour

Two concurrent events were offered as part of today's NRHS convention activities. The first was a Transit Tour and the second was a visit to the Henry Flagler Museum.

This article was written by Convention Committee member Walter Zullig, who organized and led the Transit Tour.



The concept was to allow everyone to cover the entire routes of Tri-Rail, Miami MetroRail and to the extent possible, the downtown Miami Metromover.

We started at the Deerfield Beach Amtrak/Tri-Rail station where we met David Dech, Tri-Rail's Executive Director, who gave us a talk on the past, present and future of Tri-Rail. Mr. Dech then joined us on a northbound train to the last stop at Mangonia Park. There we had about 25 minutes for photographs, including Amtrak #98, the *Silver Meteor*, enroute from Miami to New York. We then boarded Tri-Rail Train #621 for its 10:00 am departure which we rode to the Tri-Rail/MetroRail transfer station, arriving at 11:48. There we boarded a westbound MetroRail Green Line train to the west end of the line at Palmetto Station. On the way we saw the MetroRail yard and shop facilities, as well as the FEC Railway's yard and LPG fueling station at Hialeah.



Tri-Rail and MetroRail at Metrorail's Transfer Station. Photo by Walter Zullig.

Next was the 12:20 Green Line train from Palmetto east and south to the Government Center station in Downtown Miami, where the group had lunch in the station's cafeteria. Following lunch we rode MetroRail to the south end of the line at Dadeland South, followed by a northbound train to Brickell station. There we exited MetroRail and walked into the adjacent MetroMover station to ride this rubber tired system of driverless small cars that circulate around Downtown Miami on three routes. Due to some lunch delays, we were behind schedule so cut the Mover trip a little short by changing from the outer loop to the inner loop at Knight

Center station. Then from Government Center, we rode the 3:12 pm Orange Line departure to Miami Intermodal Center (at the airport) where we changed to Tri-Rail Train #632 leaving MIC at 3:50 pm and reaching Deerfield Beach at 5:06.

One point of interest along the way was the yet-unused connecting track between the FEC's freight trackage and Tri-Rail at IRIS Interlocking in Hialeah.



In the parking lot of the Tri-Rail Deerfield Beach station, NRHS member Tom Dupee shares a moment with his old friend David Dech, executive director of the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority. Mr. Dupee is a retired CSX Transportation employee; Mr. Dech began his railroad career on CSX as a switchman working with Mr. Dupee. Photo by Mike Yuhas.



SFRTA executive director David Dech speaks to NRHS convention attendees about the many improvements underway at Tri-Rail. He's flanked by Transit Tour organizer Walter Zullig. Photo by Mike Yuhas.





The Tuesday Transit Tour group rode Tri-Rail to its northern terminus. The visit was timed perfectly to view Amtrak train 98, the on-time northbound Silver Meteor, as it passed through Tri-Rail's Mangonia Park station. Photo by Mike Yuhas.



Opened in 1984, Metrorail is Florida's only rapid transit metro system, currently composed of two lines of 23 stations on 24.4 miles. Metrorail serves the urban core of Miami, connecting Miami International Airport, the Health District, Downtown Miami and Brickell with the northern-developed neighborhoods of Hialeah and Medley to the northwest, and to suburban The Roads, Coconut Grove, Coral Gables and South Miami, ending at urban Dadeland in Kendall. Photo by Walter Zullig.





Convention delegates experienced the downtown Miami Metro Mover, a rubber-tired automated people mover. While on a stopover at the Metro Mover Knight Center station, Doug Scott photographs passing two such conveyances. Photo by Mike Yuhás.



NRHS convention delegates mingle with the general public on downtown Miami's automated Metro Mover. Photo by Mike Yuhás.