

Roundhouse offers trip into past

Historic locomotives rest in Ohio museum

That spans nearly a century of railroad history, the museum plans to focus on what Poirier calls the "golden age of steam," roughly the 1920s to the 1940s.

Interstate highway system relegated steam trains to the rear view mirror. "It's a living history site more than anything else," said Poirier. "You've transported in time."

Among the vehicles on display:

- The 1942 Grand Trunk Western locomotive used to pull President Harry Truman's campaign train in 1948. Built by American Locomotive Co.'s Schenectady Works, the locomotive was purchased by Jacobson in 1993. Its last run was in 2005.

- A 1905 locomotive built by American Locomotive Co.'s Pittsburgh (no. 47) Works, which was still in use in the early 1960s on the Morehead and North Fork Railway in eastern Kentucky. Jacobson, a paratrooper in the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division, would occasionally take the bus from Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

They're housed in an immense, stuccoed roundhouse, with stalls for 18 locomotives and a working turntable, open to the public for regularly scheduled tours for the first time this month.

"It was kind of a playground for him," said Noel Poirier, who was hired last year as the facility's first executive director. "But the intention was always to open it up and share it with everybody."

of the millions of tourists who travel through the counties each year of Holmes and Jackson.

In particular, he is looking forward to welcoming young people to the facility, hoping to capitalize on kids' curiosity about trains. (Think Thomas the Tank Engine, the Polar Express, Steam Botter, and others.)

Currently, there are no plans to offer train rides at the facility, although Poirier said they may be added at some point. The facility maintains 3 miles of track on the 30-acre property.

"Someday I think we'd like to get out there and run them again," he said. Until then, it's enough to walk among these metal giants and hear their stories.



THE PLAIN DEALER VIA AP MARVIN POWERS
Noel Poirier, executive director of the Age of Steam Roundhouse, walks near one of the facility's locomotives in September on April 15.

Jacobson, an anesthesiologist by profession and an Army veteran, bought 90 miles of little-used railroad through east-central Ohio in 1988. He also purchased a steam locomotive and several passenger cars, and operated a steam-powered tourist train from his hometown of Sugar-creek for 15 years.

That small operation soon became considerably larger. Jacobson eventually owned 10 railroads operating across 455 miles of track in Ohio and Pennsylvania, carrying passengers and freight throughout the region.

He sold the operation in 2008 for more than \$200 million, according to news reports at the time.

And with the proceeds, he built the Age of Steam Roundhouse, the first fully operational roundhouse built in the United States since 1951, according to Poirier. On display inside is what is believed to be the largest private collection of steam locomotives in the world.

When Poirier and his staff dedicated a roundhouse, they want it to mean. I designed a roundhouse, said Chris, the architectural woodworker who designed the building.

himself. He took photos and drawings to come up with the design, which aims to replicate a pre-World War I roundhouse, before steel construction became the norm.

It's a massive, timber-framed building, 48,000 square feet, with 40-foot high ceilings, Belden Brick walls and heavy oak doors. Banks of windows flood the space with natural light.

In addition to the 22 steam locomotives, the facility is also home to a dozen diesel locomotives, passenger cars, freight cars and miscellaneous train equipment.

Although the collection includes vehicles

to see the locomotive in action. He bought it in 2011, restored it and it's now one of two steam locomotives certified by the Federal Railroad Administration to run.

■ A couple of movie stars, including a 1915-era locomotive by Baldwin Locomotive Works featured in the 1972 film, "The Emperor of the North"; and a 1948 Canadian Pacific locomotive used in the 1979 movie "Terror Train."

■ A rare compressed air locomotive, built by Pittsburgh's H.K. Porter Co. specifically for workplaces that couldn't handle the heat and sparks associated with burning coal. Built in 1915 for use on a Cuban sugar plantation, this locomotive made its way to Sugar-creek four years ago.

In addition to the roundhouse, visitors will find the maintenance area, where vehicles are brought back to life by a dozen or so workers skilled in restoration.

This month, a relatively primitive 1943 Baldwin Locomotive Works engine, commissioned by the U.S. Army and built at the Sugar-creek plant, is being restored for the museum's Steam to Victory program, which commemorates the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

In recent years, the roundhouse has been open for special events and private tours, usually for groups of railroad fans and history buffs. The entire operation is supported by the nonprofit Jerry and Laura Jacobson Foundation. Members of the family live nearby and sometimes give tours themselves.

The challenge facing Poirier, and his staff, is to broaden the appeal of the attraction beyond the enthusiasts. Poirier hopes to draw a mass