

CHESTER ON TRACK RETURNS FOR A 33rd SEASON

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 18, 2024, CHESTER, MASSACHUSETTS. The 33rd anniversary Chester On Track marks the 183rd year since the Western Railroad was opened. It was the world's first mountain and wilderness railroad and includes the Keystone Arches, the first cluster of stone arch railroad bridges built in America, 2 miles outside of Chester.

There will be a massive parade, A large craft fair, face painting and 'one-lung' steam & gas engine demos along Main St and on the lawns of the Riverside Inn with live music throughout the day by the group, 'Just Us' and members of The Pioneer Valley Fiddlers. The Inn property will also host Jacob Ladder Business Association's Home Show, with a number of local services and businesses. A new art gallery, A Reason To Pause, now occupies the former A&L Market on Main St.

A train show will be in the Railroad Station on Prospect St, Antique woodworking, Revolutionary War re-enactors, Wild & Scenic Westfield River, making fish prints with the kids, Large scale live steam, and a CCC Camp info booth will be on the north lawn of the station and a ham radio base camp will be on hand to contact enthusiasts around the globe and doing Morse code demos.

The Chester Postmaster will be on hand to personally cancel the commemorative envelopes or your own mail, with a special postal cancellation commemorating the Western Railroad for one day only. The design, as well as T-shirts available at the Station will celebrate the original, little-known, elaborate Egyptian Station in Chester before the present National Historic Landmark was built in 1862.

A special feature this year will be a 'Visit with Leonard' table at the Railroad Station, featuring this year's Parade Marshall, who will share memories of working at the Chester Roundhouse as a callboy when he was in High School and tell of his experience changing the teeth on the Chester Granite Saw across the street. The Granite Saw, an outdoor interpretive museum on Emery St., will have a soft opening during Chester On Track.

The Chester Historical Commission will be on hand for tours at the Old Jail and Chester History Museum from 9:30 AM to 3:30 PM.

Chester Theatre Company presents a 30-minute excerpt of *Last Train to Nibroc* by Arlene Hutton, directed by Chris Rohmann, starring Abuzar Farrukh and Hero Marguerite at 11:30 am in the Town Hall on Middlefield St. The Chester Council On Aging and the Hamilton Memorial Library will have a presence at the Town Hall and former Elementary School lawns on Rte. 20 and Middlefield St with books, food and displays.

Classic cars from Model 'T's to the newest Corvettes will line up on Maple and Main St. after the parade, where kids can also be entertained by Maggie the Railroad Clown, formerly of Ringling Bros. Circus. Chester/ Blandford Police Dept., Hilltown Ambulance and Sheriff's Dept will be on hand to introduce and explain new community programs. The Fire Dept. will hold their annual Duck Race on the Westfield River beginning at 3:00 PM. Their booth will be on River Front Dr.

The railroad station outdoor stage will host more live music beginning at 11 AM with Mark Franklin, Baird Souls, Derrick Rodgers Band and Steve Pitoniak. Musical acts can be accessed remotely on the Chester Station webcam (Chester Station LIVE on YouTube) or Chester Railway Station Facebook page. The Pioneer Valley Live Steamers will display their large-scale operating steam and diesel locomotives and a selection of rolling stock on the station's south lawn.

Chester Station's own Blue Caboose on Prospect St., will open at 8 AM for breakfast and have a hearty railroad man's menu throughout the day, where you can eat 'hobo style' in an antique wooden boxcar. Carm's and Classic Pizza will be open all day as well as The Village Market for take-out. There will also be a number of specialty food items available around town from visiting vendors.

The ballfield on Emery Street will have mounted and K-9 Units from MA State Police as well as Hampden Co. Sheriff's Dept. There will be a *Little Engine That Could* Story Walk a Bounce House, Donkey rides, and BSA America will have an archery booth and other diversions.

For those who are thinking 'all those attractions, all those streets, oh, my!' you will be pleased to hear the Gateway School District is generously supplying a shuttle bus for the day to be sure our patrons miss none of the fun.

A number of 1920's-era freight cars, including a 105-year-old wooden caboose and 'Children's Boxcar' will be open to the public. Call 413 354 7878 or email Dave@chesterrailwaystation.net for more information.

This event was funded in part by a generous MA Local Cultural Council Grant.