

An old passenger car now sits outside the current train depot in Rocky Mount.

Rocky Mount preserves rich railroad tradition

Rocky Mount was once the summer home for sports legend Jim Thorpe, who laced up his cleats to play professional baseball for the Rocky Mount Railroaders.

However, long before he stepped into the batter's box, Rocky Mount already had a railroad history that still impresses today.

Preserving that history is Joyce Edwards Dantzer, president of the Rocky Mount Railroad Museum. She is the daughter of longtime railroader Thomas Edwards Jr., Rocky Mount's last fireman. He retired with more than 40 years of railroad service with Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, Seaboard Coast Line Railroad and Amtrak.

He died in 1996.

Dantzer recalls her childhood when she admired her father's passion for the railroad, going as far as building his own model railroad in his home. She used to sneak into the room to play with the trains, kick-starting her own passion for the industry.

After returning to Rocky Mount from New Jersey, she gained a desire to learn more about her father's career and the town's railroad history. She and others established the museum in 2009.

"My father always wanted to share his love for trains,

so I know I couldn't just let his trains sit in a box," Dantzer said. "I wanted them to be in a museum where people could appreciate and admire them."

She approached Rocky Mount officials about giving the museum a physical location where train enthusiasts could gather to appreciate its history. The goal, she said, is to take ownership of the old bus depot across the tracks from the current train station.

In the meantime, the group meets monthly at Hunter Hill Cafe the second Thursday of each month.

"We're small in number, but we're mighty in our determination," Dantzer said. "I've always told myself that nothing comes easy, but we're dedicated to preserve Rocky Mount's railroad history."

She said the group is seeking members to grow the organization. Interested people may email her at president@rmrailroad.org. She hopes to recruit someone who can help write grants to fund the organization and its mission.



A 1964 Atlantic Coast Line hopper car educates the public on Rocky Mount's railroad history.



Joyce Edwards Dantzer