

# Students hop on board Amtrak to travel

BY LAURA PRATHER  
Features Editor

Darrell McDowell loves his trains. McDowell is the manager of the Amtrak station in La Plata and has worked there for more than 20 years. The way he talks about the Amtrak and trains makes it evident that McDowell is a rail enthusiast.

"I'm a railroader because my grandpa and uncle were railroaders, and it stayed with me," he said.

McDowell said that every day, at least 60 trains pass through La Plata, located about 10 miles south of Kirksville, on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe, BNSF, but only one Amtrak train intersects the town.

The legendary Southwest Chief runs from Los Angeles to Chicago and back again every day and briefly stops in La Plata in the morning and evening to pick up new passengers and say goodbye to others.

Although the station isn't well-known to some, many people, including Truman students, come and go through La Plata via Amtrak.

Tom Marshall, owner of the Depot Inn and Suites in La Plata, said the Amtrak is more popular than some might think.

"The Truman student population and their families make up a pretty good percentage of ridership on Amtrak," he said.

One reason the La Plata station has been around for so long is the presence of Truman and the other colleges nearby, Marshall said.

Junior Katie May began riding the Amtrak her senior year of high school to visit her sister at Truman. May said the Amtrak was the best option because her parents didn't want her to drive from her hometown of Peoria, Ill., to Kirksville by herself.

May said that once she came to Truman, she continued to take the Amtrak home three or four times each school year because it was more convenient than having a car here or having her parents make the drive to pick her up.

"I always kind of liked it more than driving because you just get to sit and maybe read, which you shouldn't do while you drive," May said. "... I just like the train experience. It was fun. Sometimes you got to meet people on the train and chat with them and stuff."

Junior Taelor Cash also began riding the Amtrak after her parents suggested that it would be the best way to get to and from school and home on breaks. But Cash said her experiences with the Amtrak were not as agreeable.

"I really hate riding it," she said. "But if you got to get home, you got to get home."

Cash said her biggest critique of the

travel by rail transportation is the delays.

"I've had a five-hour delay on it one time. And if you get dropped off at the train station at the time you're supposed to be there and it's five hours late, that makes for pretty grumpy passengers."

Her five-hour delay caused Cash to miss a concert and prompted her to find friends who lived nearby and could drive her home.

"I wouldn't choose a three-and-a-half hour ride with Amtrak over a six-hour drive with someone in a car when I know for sure when they were leaving," she said.

Cash said that despite her bad experiences, the Amtrak is beneficial because it is more affordable than driving. People are more likely to get inexpensive tickets if they buy them in advance, but this can be hard for students who go home around the holidays when traffic is busier, she said.

"Say there's only two seats left, you might be paying \$100 to get one of those two seats," Cash said. "But if you buy it months ahead and there's still a ton of seats open, you could maybe get it for \$25."

The reason students experience delays is caused by train priorities, Marshall said.

The Southwest Chief is one of the three long-distance Amtrak trains. Marshall said these trains are almost always on time.

"The long-distance trains have to stay on schedule or otherwise by the time they made it all the way across the United States, they would be two days behind," he said.

However, many students travel to cities that are off the main track and this is where the delays occur, Marshall said.

"On the transcontinental lines, on these long-distance trains, Amtrak has priority over most freight trains, whereas on the smaller lines, where they are shorter distances, a lot of times the freight companies take priority over the passenger trains," he said.

The Amtrak stop in La Plata is extremely significant on several levels, Marshall said. For the U.S., he said it is a prime location because it is in the center of the country and is well-traversed.

Marshall also said it has created a lot more interest in northeast Missouri. The individuality of the station initiated the only Amtrak historical museum in the world to move from Chicago to La Plata as well as the prompt relocation of Train Web, another considerable rail fan business, he said.

"For everybody that's lived here all their life, we don't think anything about that," he said. "But we are so fortunate to have this Amtrak stop because there's



Jackson Groves/Index

The Southwest Chief arrives at the La Plata Amtrak station Wed. Morning. The train runs from Los Angeles to Chicago and back every day on the BNSF.

## Amtrak rolls into La Plata



Hold on to your seats: Amtrak is on the move.

According to the Travel Industry Association's Industry Performance Indicators Report, Amtrak ridership increased 8.8 percent from July 2006 to July 2007. This increase surpassed that of any other mode of transportation.

Tom Marshall, owner of the Depot Inn and Suites in La Plata, said this is just the beginning of Amtrak's ascent as the most time-, cost- and energy-efficient way to travel.

"The Amtrak ridership is predicted to double in size within the next five years because rail travel is one of the only modes of transportation that can go to all green energy," he said. "Trains run on electricity and basically, they are just giant electric train sets."

Over time, this advantage will help people who once thought rail travel was an extinct approach real-

ize how valuable trains are, Marshall said.

"I think it's something everybody should experience once in their life because some people absolutely fall in love with the rails," he said. "There's something about feeling that train rocking back and forth and hearing the click-clack on the rails, it almost makes you feel like you've gone back in time."

Marshall said he is disappointed that it has taken the U.S. this long to figure out the importance and convenience of trains. He said European countries have been using them more and more in recent years as a basic means of travel.

"It's something that people really need to keep an eye on because it's going to change drastically in the next five to 10 years," he said.

Reporting by Laura Prather  
Design by Jessica Rapp/Index

only three transcontinental Amtrak trains, to have one of them stop in our backyard is absolutely amazing."

On the local level, Marshall said it is a convenient, safe and affordable way for students and their parents to travel. The Amtrak also is more relaxing and

allows students to get more things accomplished with their time than if they were to travel via airplane or passenger car, he said.

Without students, the Amtrak station in La Plata would not be as busy.

McDowell said students not only in-

crease ridership but also help by continuing the tradition of trains.

"It keeps the ridership up, and that's what we need to keep this train on the tracks," he said. "If we can get more people to use it, the longer it's going to be around."

# Rare tumor prompts student to embrace life

BY ALEX BOLES  
Index Staff

She might not have had to climb a literal mountain, but junior Jenni Mattingly did leap over a few metaphorical ones before entering college.

In July 2004, news of Mattingly's brain tumor devastated her family. She was faced with brain surgery and a three-month recovery, which caused her to miss her first semester at Truman.

"I had been having headaches for about three years," she said. "They increased from once a month to once a week to every day. I was really starting to get worried about them."

Finally, one of her headaches caused Mattingly to lose vision for about five hours. She underwent an MRI to assess the problem fully. Three days later, she and her family received the shocking news - she was diagnosed with a level-four anaplastic ependymoma brain tumor.

"I didn't cry at all," she said. "I was more worried about my parents, and I was like, 'Oh my

God, another thing went wrong with me.'"

Mattingly also suffers from diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis.

Robert Ligorski, professor of internal medicine and the Associate Dean of the Arizona region of the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine, specializes in oncology and said the adult variety of this tumor occurs between the ages 15 and 40.

"Ependymoma is a rare form of cancer in the physical population," he said. "When it does occur, it involves the spine, and if it becomes anaplastic, the diagnosis is quite grave."

Ligorski said the spinal canal is the most common place the tumor is found and that growth within the spine is not uncommon in these cases.

Mattingly said the problem was the aggressiveness and location of the tumor.

"Part of the problem is the exponential growth with this tumor, so you don't notice it until all of a sudden it starts to get big, and then it gets big fast, really fast," she said.

The doctors in Macon, her hometown, referred her to the University of Arkansas Medical Center in Little Rock, Ark. She drove there with her parents the Monday she was diagnosed and underwent surgery the following Thursday.

Her family stayed in a designated house for cancer patient families. Mattingly said the worst part of the process was staying alone at night, preparing herself for the life-altering surgery.

"I was a little scared, but I just wouldn't let myself admit it because I knew that I would be OK," Mattingly said. "And I was happy. If anything did happen to me, I kept thinking, I'd been happy, I'd been in love, I have great parents and my brother loves me. I'm OK."

Mattingly spent a week in the hospital, and her recovery lasted three months. Some side effects included loss of peripheral vision and inability to drive. She also said she had to relearn English and adjust to a lack of coordination.

By her side to help her deal with these side effects is her roommate, senior Audrey Kerr. As a part of

the Alpha Sigma Gamma service sorority, Kerr nominated Mattingly in 2006 for the annual run-walk it hosts every spring to help her pay for tuition and medical bills.

"We basically raise a lot of money and give it to a cause," Kerr said. "That year we gave half the money to Jenni and half to the disabilities office to get a disabled door. We gave Jenni a little over \$1,000."

Mattingly said she still never wakes up without a headache. She said the tumor pushed her brain so far forward that it became compressed, and now there is fluid where the tumor was.

Mattingly said she has learned to appreciate life. She said when people talk to her, they also realize how important things are.

"I value everything," Mattingly said. "I think one thing that [having a brain tumor] has done ... is that I value every moment that I have because I know that it could have been my last. I never know for sure if the tumor will come back, so I have to make as much out of life as possible."

Mattingly said that despite

doctors' predictions and the fact that 50 percent of people with this specific tumor don't survive two years the diagnosis, she is optimistic about her future.

"There's been times when I questioned whether or not I'm still going to be here," she said. "... I've always been told not to expect too much, but I've always been, 'Nothing is going to stand in my way.' I'm going to do it because I want to do it so it's going to get done."

Mattingly said she would like to work with public relations in the medical field someday so that

she can help people in similar situations. She has beaten the odds for three years, and she said she and her family appreciate every moment.

"We're all dealing with it," she said. "Every year we have a mini-celebration for another year I have survived."

Mattingly said she does not have time to be scared. With each headache, she said she sometimes wonders if the tumor could be coming back but that she tries not to dwell on it.

For now, she is just living life.

### Brain Waves

An anaplastic ependymoma is a malignant glioma with accelerated growth. It accounts for 3% to 5% of all neuroepithelial tumors and 30% of those in children three years and younger.

Survival rates for adult patients with ependymoma at five and 10 years after diagnosis, respectively.

5 years	57%
10 years	45%

Source: Cancer.gov

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