

LaPlata rail resort plans remain on track

Developers purchase land and finalize preliminary drawings for resort

BY JULIE WILLIAMS
News Editor

For now, the future of northern Missouri is neatly packed into Thomas Marshall's briefcase, waiting to emerge.

Marshall and his wife Kelly – together with TrainWeb, the world's largest train information Web site – are making plans to build a 170-acre railroad-themed resort in LaPlata that would create an estimated 400 to 500 jobs in northeast Missouri. As he produced a seemingly endless stream of studies, figures and national newspaper clippings, Marshall explained why the project is exactly what northern Missouri needs.

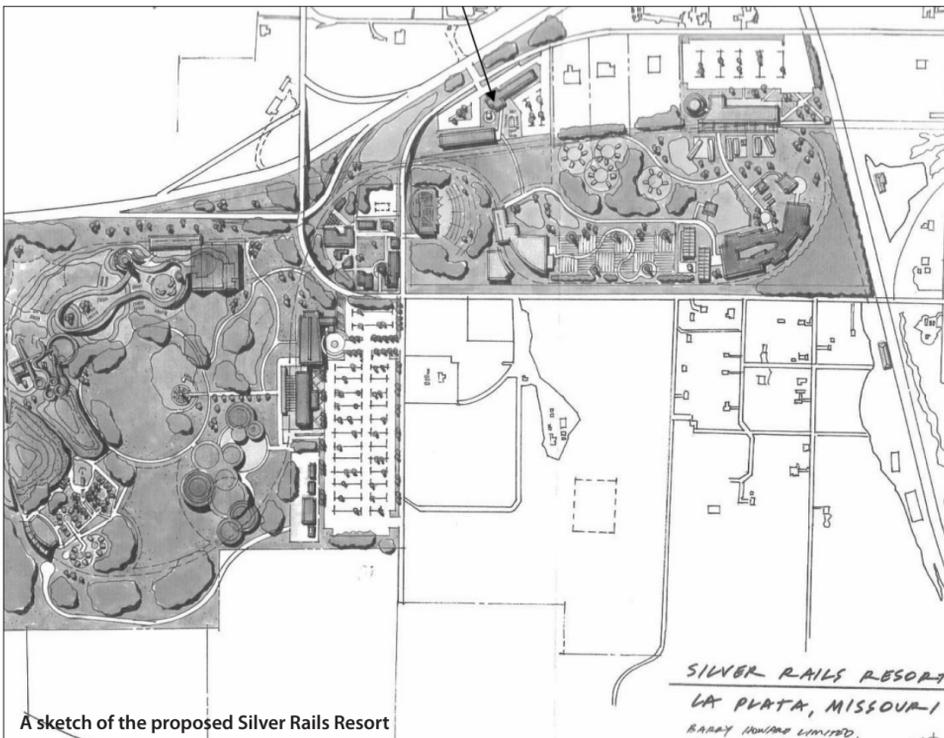
"When you look at tourism reports of the state of Missouri, in 2005 there were 34.5 million tourists that came to Missouri," he said. "... Missouri is the gateway to the West, and the vast majority of the cultural heritage that we have north of I-70 – it's right in our backyards."

The goal for the resort is to create an international tourist attraction to generate interest from railroad enthusiasts as well as people interested in Missouri culture and history, Marshall said.

Current plans for the attraction, which will be named the Silver Rails Resort, feature a resort hotel with between 500 and 700 rooms, a 60,000-square-foot convention space, a health and wellness center, an indoor water park, secluded cabins with a camping area, a shopping district, restaurants, a rail museum and a Missouri Arts and Cultural History museum.

The resort also will offer day trips to other points of interest in Missouri, such as Hannibal, Mo., Marcelline, Mo., and nearby Amish communities.

Marshall said an atrium will cover each area of the resort so guests will



A sketch of the proposed Silver Rails Resort

not have to battle the elements during winter visits. He also said a train that runs through the resort will pick up guests from the Amtrak station and take them to their hotel rooms, making Silver Rails the only major attraction in the United States at which visitors can get on a public mode of transportation and get off at the doorstep of a tourist attraction. The addition of a wind farm and solar panels also may add to Silver Rails' appeal.

"The project will be totally green energy," Marshall said. "If everything goes the way we plan, the whole town of LaPlata will be green energy."

Marshall said the project is a lot

closer to reality than most people realize.

"Without giving the dollar amount, there has already been several million dollars spent on this project," Marshall said. "A substantial amount of money has been spent, real estate has been purchased, the master plan is being done."

Ray Burns, president of TrainWeb, said he and one of his partners saw potential in the rail resort and then persuaded their other two partners to sign on.

"It took a lot of work to convince our partners ... that the resort is viable," he said. "Eventually we got

them to see the light, so we bought the property around the hotel."

Burns said the company's headquarters used to be in Fullerton, Calif., but that he and a partner have since moved to LaPlata. He said the company was considering moving to a more central location to cut shipping costs and had picked Liberty, Mo., when he received a phone call from Marshall asking him to consider LaPlata. Burns said he and one of his partners fell in love with the area and decided to set up their business in an old fertilizer warehouse.

Burns said he thinks Silver Rails will be positive for the community

but that it might change the face of LaPlata.

"It's a great area for this kind of business," he said. "The city, of course, wants the business, the county wants the business, the state wants the business – it would help the local people. ... I don't [want] to ruin the serenity of the area, but I guess the jobs are more important."

The first project, the creation of the Silver Rails Conference and Events Center in the old Wheatcraft Motor Company Building in downtown LaPlata, is scheduled to be completed by spring 2008.

LaPlata City Administrator Ray Ivy said that so far, all Silver Rails projects brought to the city council have been outside of its control because all have been privately funded. He said he supports the renovation of the Wheatcraft Motor Company building and that he hopes to see downtown LaPlata restored to the way it looked in the past.

Although job creation is an advantage to the project, Ivy also said the possibility of changing the nature of LaPlata is a potential negative.

"It's going to change the face of our small city," he said. "It could change it to look like a big city."

The consultant for Silver Rails will visit LaPlata at the beginning of November to create a final plan so that the project can enter the funding stage.

Thomas Marshall said the estimated cost for the project is between \$150 and \$200 million but that a majority of funds will come from investors and corporate sponsorship.

Kelly Marshall said many companies already have contacted her and her husband expressing interest in bringing their businesses to Silver Rails and the LaPlata area.

"Every single day we get a phone call from a business that wants to move here, wants to be involved," she said. "We really believe it's just one of those things that's kind of meant to happen."

Homecoming organizers strive to increase diversity

Committee wants to include more groups, individuals in events

BY DIANE POELKER
Assistant News Editor

Renovations to Truman's annual school-spirit celebration could make more students feel at home.

The 2007 Homecoming committee has been working to refocus the week-long celebration to make it more inclusive. Homecoming chairwoman Bonnie Treichel, a senior, said this year's approach is more holistic than in years past.

"One of the biggest goals of Homecoming 2007 is to be inclusive of everyone, not just Greek organizations, not just students in organizations, but all students," Treichel said. "... We want to include everyone in some aspect of Homecoming and give everyone the opportunity to celebrate school spirit."

Treichel said the Homecoming committee's goal for 2007 is to incorporate into Homecoming all groups that contribute to the Truman community: students, faculty and staff, alumni and Kirksville citizens.

She said the inclusion theme has driven all aspects of planning from events and apparel to encouraging students who are not affiliated with a campus organization to apply

for Homecoming court.

"We saw [the diversity theme] reflected in the [court] applications we got this year," Treichel said. "We had a much greater pool of applicants. ... We had students from athletic training and independents. ... We also had a great pull from traditionally African-American Greek organizations."

Although organizers have tried to be inclusive, some students still feel alienated by Homecoming festivities.

Junior Gemmicka Piper said she didn't see much diversity in the court candidates this year.

"As far as the 'face' of Homecoming, there are no minority faces," Piper said. "I don't think it has changed that much."

Junior Risa Suzuki said activities still are mostly organization-focused.

"This is my first experience of Homecoming because I transferred here," Suzuki said. "I went to kickoff, and I feel like it's more for sorority and fraternity groups. If I wasn't involved in anything, I

wouldn't go."

Treichel said the Homecoming committee has been working closely with the University alumni office and the National Pan-Hellenic Council to create a cohesive Homecoming experience. She said the groups collaborated to create events that would appeal to all students, past and present.

"Typically it seemed like [the alumni office] had their own homecoming, and we had our own homecoming, and NPHC had their own homecoming," Treichel said. "I feel like we've really merged the three this year."

Treichel said that in past years, the NPHC has submitted a list of its own homecoming events to the CSI. This year, NPHC has worked more closely with the Homecoming committee and has not indicated that it will provide separate events for students.

"We have the Ball that we're working on with the Association of Black Collegians," Treichel said. "On Saturday we're having a chili cook-off, and NPHC is sponsoring a kids' corner."

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Bonnie Treichel
Homecoming Chairwoman



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Senior Joe Tullman, senior Ryan Kroeger, senior Emily Pufall, sophomore Nick Chitwood and junior Ian Arndt take part in the Homecoming trivia night in the Student Union Building on Tuesday night.

Laura Bates, program coordinator for the Multicultural Affairs Center, said groups like the NPHC, ABC and the Coalition of African-American Women always have participated in Homecoming but in some years the number of participants might have seemed lower than in other years because of the demands of Black Alumni Reunion Weekend, celebrated biannually.

"We typically have much larger-scale events [in years the reunion takes place] ... that we usually get our student organi-

zations involved in," Bates said. "This year is an off-year for that event, so obviously we don't have that programming on our part, so therefore we were able to work with campus."

Bates said the Homecoming committee's focus on inclusion highlights the contributions of traditionally underrepresented groups.

"They were always doing the activities, they're just in a place where more people are noticing that they're doing the activities," Bates said.

The theme of student inclusion isn't just limited to organizations.

Events coordinator senior Brandt Bell said events like Thursday's Block Party focus on individual student participation.

"We've tried to incorporate the entire student body ... by getting outside of the competition aspect," Bell said. "It's a big part of Homecoming, but this year we've had several events that are not for any points for the competing teams but for the whole student body."

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