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Padre says:

“If God had meant for us to fly, he wouldn't have given us the railways.”

Kansas Belle Dinner Train Brings Golden Era Of Cross Country Rail Travel To Life

Riding trains and partaking in meals from railroad diners while traveling cross country were a childhood fascination that never disappeared, but only continued to grow.

A Nebraska farm boy anticipated riding a train to the city and became cantankerous when arriving at destination, not wanting to get off.

When demise of cross country rail travel and train dining appeared eminent, that farm boy who had become college-age decided to take advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and experience before it became lost forever.

“I traveled cross country on several trains, each with its own unique dining cars, and got a final glimpse of the 1940s, which was the golden era of cross country railroad travel and dining,” reflected Bruce Eveland at his Baldwin City office of the Kansas Belle Dinner Train.

From his youth, train travel and railroad dining were never far from his mind, and, in 1988, Eveland and other investors bought two 1940s-era railroad dining cars in Oklahoma City. The Fremont Dinner Train out of Fremont, Nebraska, was born, and had been operating since that beginning.

However, when the eight-mile excursion line appeared it might not be properly maintained after changing ownership, Eveland looked to the Midland Railway at Baldwin City.

The Kansas Belle Dinner Train, advertised and promoted on The BIG 94.5 Country and 580 WIBW, is now operating on Midland Railway's 11-mile line from the Baldwin City Depot to Ottawa and back.

“This is a superior location,” Eveland claimed. “We hope to draw customers who we had been serving and add clientele from 250-miles in other directions: Missouri, Oklahoma and western Kansas.

“We moved five dining cars, a 75-foot-baggage car equipped with a generator that powers the dining car, and a caboose,” explained Eveland, who serves as conductor, host and all-around coordinator for operations; come rain, sleet, snow or beautiful sunshine.

Terri Lois Gregory, business development manager, said, “We are planning a year around weekend schedule. Friday and Saturday trips feature five-course meals, with formal attire encouraged. Sunday outings are more informal, geared for families.”



“Customers have the option of riding cars featuring mysteries, melodramas and other musical offerings. Special charter reservations are also available,” according to Jennifer Johanning, reservations manager.

Renovation of the dining cars has been a major heartfelt affair for Eveland, who said, “All together we have a potential capacity of 192 seats.” Twenty-Third Street Brewery of Lawrence caters the food.

“Dinner music from the Big Band era of the 1940s, coupled with live entertainment gives the Kansas Belle Dinner Train a true essence of rail travel,” Eveland evaluated.

