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Showing their Colors



THE BLADE/DAVID PATCH

Norfolk Southern engine 8102, painted in honor of the Pennsylvania Railroad, leads a Detroit Edison coal train through Northwood two weeks ago on its first trip.

'Heritage Fleet' celebrates historic railroads

By DAVID PATCH
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Those who remember the railroads of Toledo's past may have recently observed tributes to history plying local rails, and there is more of that to come.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the merger that created it, Norfolk Southern is decorating 20 new locomotives in the paint schemes of historic railroads whose lines contributed significantly to the company's current-day system. Nine of the so-called "Heritage Fleet" have already been placed in service, with 11 more still to be built.

Among the "heritage" railroads already honored are Norfolk & Western and the Southern Railway, which merged in 1982 to create Norfolk Southern, and Conrail, which NS and CSX Transportation jointly acquired in 1998 and integrated into their networks the following year.

The Conrail locomotive has made at least six passes through northwest Ohio since its mid-March debut — the most recent on April 23 when it led a westbound automotive train through Williams County and onward to Chattanooga, Tenn.

So far, the N&W and Southern engines haven't been to this part of the system, but on April 22, the locomotive dressed up in the Pennsylvania Railroad's classic Tuscan red (don't call it brown) with yellow pinstriping made its first working trip on a coal train from Pittsburgh to Toledo.

Northwood police presumably are accustomed to seeing railroad fans loitering near Wales and Drouillard roads, close to the Vickers Crossing junction, but the legions who turned out that day to see the Pennsylvania engine were enough to prompt one patrol officer to inquire if something special was coming. The response was simple: a finger-point down the track as the coal train eased through a siding while high-priority container trains sailed by on the main tracks.

The Pennsylvania engine ended up spending two days in an East Toledo storage track with its train before being sent back east hauling a trainload of oil from North Dakota to the East Coast. But PRR fans could get another chance to see this engine in northwest Ohio before too long: it's scheduled to be on display in Chicago during that city's National Train Day event on May 12, and getting there (or back) could take it through Toledo.

On April 27, the Lehigh Valley Railroad's honoree in the fleet made its maiden trip through Bucyrus and Marion, Ohio, hauling western Pennsylvania coal to Virginia.

Eventually, seven railroads that once had lines in Toledo will be among those recognized by Norfolk Southern's anniversary party: the aforementioned Conrail, PRR, and N&W, plus the Wabash, Nickel Plate Road, New York Central, and Penn Central. The Nickel Plate engine is already out and about, but like the N&W loco, it hasn't been near Toledo yet. Other already finished engines honor the Interstate Railroad, the Central of Georgia, and the "original" Norfolk Southern.

Other engines still to appear are those for the Reading, Central of New Jersey, Lackawanna, Erie, Virginian, Savannah & Atlanta, Monongahela, and Illinois Terminal.

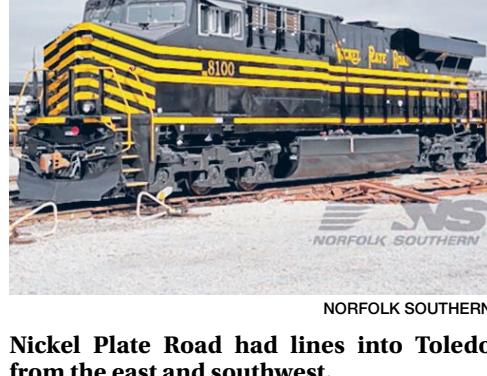
All 20 will be models designed for heavy hauling, so they're most likely to turn up on high-tonnage trains hauling coal, grain, stone, or steel. But NS locomotives of the same two models, dressed in the company's standard black and white, sometimes turn up on other trains, too, so it's possible the special ones will.

Norfolk Southern says it has no plans to do many special events with its special engines. But it runs scores of trains daily through Toledo, and dozens more on other tracks in the region. So there's a good chance a "Heritage Fleet" engine will be polishing the rails somewhere in the area at any given time, especially after all of them are out and about.



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Having passed through Williams County earlier in the day, 'Conrail' engine 8098 heads Chattanooga-bound freight at Grubill, Ind.



Nickel Plate Road had lines into Toledo from the east and southwest.



The 'New York Central' engine's colors may resemble this classic design.



Mergers brought Norfolk & Western to Toledo in 1964, but 8103 hasn't been here yet.



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Engine 8104, dressed up for Northeastern coal hauler Lehigh Valley, made its first run leading coal through Marion, Ohio, on April 27.