

# 2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Fairfax County

Program Title: Engine #62 of the Resources Railroad

Program Category: 7. Parks & Recreation

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Kirk Kincannon

Title: Executive Director - Fairfax County Park Authority

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

## **Engine #62 of Resources Railroad**

**Fairfax County Park Authority  
Fairfax, Va.**

### **Nomination for 2015 VACo Achievement Award**

#### **Overview**

The Fairfax County Park Authority was looking for new ways to bring county residents closer to their resources and to develop their understanding of the value of those resources. One proposal from an FCPA manager was to use a trackless train that could double as both an amusement ride and an interpretive tool.

It proved to be a successful, colorful, and effective tool.

Put into service in the summer of 2013, Engine #62 of the Resources Railroad carries about a dozen people at a time into park areas that often aren't comfortable accessible to families. The train is transportable, so it can be used in any park. Drivers double as interpreters, and they can tailor their presentations to the park in which they are guiding county residents.

Once the initial purchase was made, the train to date has produced revenue at a 17-to-1 ratio over its maintenance costs.

It has become a popular interpretation tool, has had sellout appearances, and has been requested at birthdays and other private events.

## Problem/Issue

Because of its location next to Washington and federal government offices, Fairfax County is heavily populated with people who think in broad national or international terms. It is an urbanized community of concerned people who need opportunities for understanding conservation and stewardship of their immediate area's natural and cultural resources. These opportunities protect local resources, which then serve as examples of their value on a larger scale.

The question was which methods were available to bring county residents closer to their resources and to develop their understanding of the value of those resources. One proposal was a trackless train, designed from the beginning to be an interpretive tool rather than just another amusement ride.



The train was designed to:

- Provide interpretive rides at Fairfax County parks
- Add to park experiences
- Draw visitors to park functions
- Generate revenue

## Description/ Execution

The Fairfax County Park Authority purchased a trackless train in order to combine entertainment and fun with resource interpretation. The train was delivered to Frying Pan Farm Park on June 26, 2013 and, after a test ride, put into public service shortly thereafter.

The attraction consists of three brightly colored cars, one of which is fully accessible. The cars are pulled by a lawn tractor transformed by a wooden cover into a train engine named Engine #62 of the Resources Railroad.



The train can carry about 12 people at a time. Each car comfortably seats two adults with two children or four to five youngsters. ADA compliance is accomplished through a ramp/gate on the caboose that can fold down to admit a wheelchair. When the gate is folded up, a removable bench fits in front of it. The caboose also has a side door so that when the gate is in its upright position the car functions as a normal passenger vehicle.

To enhance its efficiency both as an interpretive tool and as a financial investment, the train can be transported by a small truck from site to site. It has its own closed trailer for protection from weather elements while en route from park to park.

The train is driven on a hill grade of 7% or less to accommodate the power of the lawn tractor pulling it, and the three cars can be pulled on grass, gravel or pavement. The train travels at about four miles per hour.

The cars that comprise the train – the 62<sup>nd</sup> one built by at the Roundhouse Company in Sioux Falls, South Dakota – are being used by the park agency's Resource Management Division to interpret park resources and the history of trains in Fairfax County.



## **Financing/Staffing**

Because the train is transportable, it can be used for multiple programs at multiple parks, whether a water park or playground, historic site or nature center, farm or garden. Drivers are cross-trained as interpreters, and they are able to highlight specific cultural and natural resources of individual sites during tours.

Some of Engine #62's train drivers are National Association for Interpretation Certified Interpretive Guides, so their knowledge and skilled methods instill in train riders a deep appreciation for county resources.

The schedule is efficiently arranged so that the train remains in a particular area of the county for a week at a time. All maintenance needs are addressed by park staff. The program is adaptable to any park, any environment and any group of people.

Promotions for train-related programs and sponsors can be done on site.

Promotions are executed through word of mouth, through signs that can be mounted on the train, and through in-house-produced signs near the train. The signs that are mounted on the train can be used for event promotion or sponsorship.

The train carried 4,389 passengers and generated \$17,841 in revenue through April 2015 while accumulating \$1,050 in expenses. Expenses for gas are minimal because the train runs for hours on two gallons of fuel. Passenger fees are generally \$3/person. The largest expense so far was for new waterproof tops for each of the train cars.

## **Program Results**

The train's popularity is almost overwhelming. Residents have requested it to appear at programs in both summer and winter, and in places where the audience is primarily adult. At the end of events, because of time restraints, there are invariably people who did not get to ride and who ask the driver to do "just one more."

It is a safe, fun and easy way to view the county's natural and cultural resources. On their train rides, residents learn why invasive plants need removal from county yards and community parks. They learn what comprises a healthy environment for animals and birds. They become aware of why historic buildings, battlefields and artifacts are being preserved for future generations.

The train has been used to illustrate bodies of water and their aquatic life, storm water management, invasive management, animal habitat, historic landscape features, and local economics through farm and dairy programs. The quality of each program is reinforced by residents who have become repeat riders in different locations so they can learn about different topics.

In its debut year, Engine #62 appeared at:

- *Frying Pan Farm Park for camps and a family program*
- *Sully Historic Site for birthday parties, a farm-to-market program and a recruitment of a Civil War soldier program*
- *Lake Fairfax Park for camps and weekend rides*

- *South Run RECenter for camps and weekend rides*
- *Cub Run RECenter for camps*
- *Green Spring Gardens for weekend and fall programs*
- *Clemyjontri (an accessible playground park) for weekend rides. This was its biggest success in its weekend rotation with nearly 300 youth riding per weekend*

Among the special events at which the train appeared were:

- *July 4 at Lake Fairfax*
- *Pumpkins in the Park, Turkey Train, and Santa Train Ride at Lake Fairfax*
- *Centreville Day in historic Centreville, Va.*
- *The bunny train at McLean Central Park following McLean Community Center's Easter egg hunt*
- *The Halloween Parade at Hidden Oaks Nature Center*
- *Opening of new facilities at Oak Mar Rec Center*
- *Birthday Parties*
- *Camps*
- *Homeschool programs*



## Creativity/Award Criteria

Featuring the train as both an interpretive tool and an amusement ride makes the program both an innovative and creative delivery of service. A family can ride the train together into areas of parks that they



may not walk through, and while they're enjoying family time together they learn about the history of the place, the traits and habitat patterns of the plants and animals there, and about invasive and native plants. The train is an innovative, entertaining model of an effort to bring people closer to their natural and cultural resources.

VIDEO used to introduce the train: <https://youtu.be/K-9xPuyM9rg>

## Summary

Engine #62 of Resource Railroad is a fun way to interpret natural and cultural resources. It's a transportable, trackless train that can run on grass, gravel or pavement. The Fairfax County Park Authority moves the three-car train from park to park where drivers, who double as interpreters, lead about a dozen people at a time on tours. The ADA-accessible train is used at water parks, playgrounds, historic sites, nature centers, on a farm and at gardens. Fairfax County residents also have requested it for birthday parties and other private functions. It has proven to be a safe and fun way to expand interpretation of parks and to increase local residents' knowledge about stewardship of their local resources.