

PRESS RELEASE

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*Image available at:

<http://hesston.org/images/rita.jpg>

The LaPorte County Historical Steam Society (LCHS) Board of Directors met in December and unanimously elected Thaddeus (Ted) Rita as a paid, full-time general manager for the Hesston Steam Museum, effective Jan. 16, 2016.

The Hesston Steam Museum hasn't had a full-time general manager since the late John Edris, an original co-founder.

"We've listened to our many volunteers who would like Ted to be able to dedicate his complete attention to the Museum," says Windham Brenner, outgoing LCHS board president. "Ted has served as part-time general manager for 10 years—and even five years before that as an assistant general manager. We believe his record speaks for itself and the Hesston Steam Museum's growth and success are directly related to his leadership."

Since his 2005 appointment to general manager, Rita has worked with volunteers to grow the Hesston Steam Museum's year-round operating schedule; renovate equipment, buildings and grounds; lead equipment maintenance and inspections; pursue new equipment acquisitions; expand the campus' historical reach; and even extend the Hesston Steam Museum's educational and philanthropic relationships with area schools and charities.

There have been several highlights during that time. Since 2005, the Hesston Steam Museum has restored its Shay logging locomotive, renovated and enlarged the main ticket station and built a modern, stylish, guest-friendly restaurant and restrooms. Online guest surveys (involving as many as 200 visitors) show that 98% of visitors would highly recommend the Hesston Steam Museum to a friend.

LCHS' financial records show that from 2000 to 2015, the Hesston Steam Museum increased its total revenues by 107%. Guest ridership on the museum's railroads also increased 234% during the same time frame (based on ticket sales).

"What makes Ted unique is his genuine ability to effectively work across all aspects of this organization," says Bill Gibson, incoming LCHS board president. "He works seamlessly across the spectrum with the Museum's many dedicated volunteers. Ted is equally at home working side by side with our volunteers who handle equipment and operations; the retail store; marketing, promotion and communications. He also has been a true ambassador and built relationships between the Hesston Steam Museum and area schools, charities, and local and regional tourism groups."

Rita, 43, has been an active Hesston Steam Museum member since the age of 15. However, his experience and exposure dates even further back, to the '70s, when he first visited with his father,

volunteer Frank Rita (now of Michigan City, IN). It wasn't long before John Edris, himself taught Ted how to maintain and restore the organization's operating equipment.

Now, with his full time attention dedicated to the Museum, Rita says he has many goals to help leaders and volunteers in every area. These activities will involve every facet of the Museum's organization. They range from coordinating and hosting restoration work during the week (instead of only on weekends) to building the Hesston Steam Museum's relationships with area community groups and schools.

"I'm honored to hold this position and I look forward to increasing efficiency so our volunteers can get more done in the limited time they have to give—all while keeping our safety standards very high," says Rita. "There are so many opportunities to build a larger volunteer base, improve our guest experience and develop business relationships that foster mutual benefits for the museum and the community we call home. I'm thrilled to continue the work and vision to make the museum the most exciting learning experience in the area."

The Hesston Steam Museum is operated by the LaPorte County Historical Steam Society, an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) not-for-profit. Visit www.hesston.org for more information and details.