Coupland’s Caboose is Level on New Ties

After years of fundraising and planning, the Coupland Civic Organization (CCO) gets the caboose level on new ties.

On March 14, the CCO took a big step in the restoration of its historic caboose. Volunteers who work on old railroad cars and facilities got the caboose leveled and resting on new ties and ballast (the rock that goes under and between the ties). Barbara Piper, CCO Caboose Coordinator says, “Volunteers who have a love of railroads, railroad cars, and their history were a big force in getting this phase of the caboose restoration completed. The volunteers, J. R. Leal, Mark Dixon, and Paul Phalen do this work on their own time.”

She explains, “J. R. Leal has a daughter at Coupland School and happened to read an article in the *Coupland Herald* about the CCO commencing another phase of caboose restoration. He contacted the CCO. He, along with his good friends, Mark Dixon and Paul Phalen, got together to set forth a plan.” They met with several CCO board members in December to explain their recommendations.

Barbara continues, “They subsequently spoke with Al Friede of Hafco Services to see if he could provide any type of assistance. Al responded with a donation of two bundles of ties and spikes.” Al also donated the labor for himself and his crew of six men plus their track tools to get the caboose level. The CCO was responsible for providing the equipment for the job.

CCO members provided a breakfast of kolaches from Taylor’s Kolache Shoppe, plus pigs in blankets. They also served a lunch of tamales from Julie at Tamales To Go with all the fixin’s, plus ribs, and homemade cookies and brownies.

The project involved moving the caboose forward with a backhoe, off of its old ties, unfastening the rail from the old ties, removing the old rotten ties, removing several feet of soil, leveling the ground, and putting down new ties. Then the rails were fastened to the new ties, the crew made sure everything was level, and then put the ballast under and in between the ties to insure a solid foundation. Finally, the backhoe gently pushed the caboose back to its permanent location--on its new ties and leveled rails.

To finish up this amazing undertaking, J. R. and another friend, Kelly Patrick who owns Longhorn Irrigation, a landscape company, spread out all of the dirt that had been removed to make a place for the new ties, then spread the remaining ballast over the track that runs in front of the historic Depot.

It was quite a sight to see the heavy caboose start moving. Caboose Coordinator Barbara Piper, who has worked so hard to get the caboose leveled and restored, said, “When I saw the caboose start moving, I actually got chills. It was an amazing sight.” To see a video of the moving of the caboose, go to the Coupland Civic Organizations’s Facebook page. The CCO has been raising money for years through its annual Choo Choo Fests to restore the caboose. And last year, it received a grant of $10,000 from Williamson County to help with the caboose work.

Susan Schmidt, CCO President, says, “Now that the caboose is level and stable, work on the interior and the doors and windows remains to be done.” Barbara Piper notes, “We will see what our expert volunteers have planned for the next project.” When the caboose is finished, the CCO plans to have a children’s museum in it, where the kids can get up into the cupola and see how it was to ride up there and see the countryside many years ago. The caboose is on the grounds with the CCO’s Depot Museum that houses artifacts of the area. When the caboose is finished, there are plans to have it and the Depot open and staffed with volunteers on the weekends.