

*THE RAILROAD EDUCATION AND
LEARNING CENTER OF FLORIDA*

REALRAIL - WE'RE ALL ABOUT TRAINS

STRATEGIC PLAN 2008

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Executive Summary

RealRail is a newly formed 501(c)(3) organization that is continuing to serve the Manatee & Sarasota county areas and Railroad enthusiasts nationwide. It is an organization that is dedicated to the preservation of railroad history that helped the growth and development of the State of Florida. It achieves this through interactive learning with dynamic exhibits of model railroads, static exhibits that present railroad items of historical significance and educational programs that demonstrate the effects of the railroads on the economy and development of the state and country.

The organization has created this plan as the road map to our future. It is designed to address several challenges facing the organization:

- Relocate to a different facility to improve our ability and desire to provide our educational offerings
- Demonstrate our ability to present quality and entertaining educational programs to the community
- Ensure sufficient funds to operate during our transition over the next three to five years
- Development of a donor base on which to obtain operating funds
- Position ourselves to start a capital campaign to raise funds for a new facility

Our long term goal is to provide an asset to our community that demonstrates the historical and economic influence of Railroading in the United States. This facility will be a museum style building that meets or exceeds the Americans With Disabilities Act specifications and be "ADA Compliant". Interior spaces will have static displays of railroad memorabilia, artifacts and operating models. A library of printed and electronic materials on railroading will be available to the public for research and reading. Classroom and meeting spaces will also be contained in the facility.

Our growth and development through our next three to five years will provide a solid foundation to make our vision a reality. This document is a living and breathing entity. Goals will be modified and new ones defined as we experience our growth and development.

Our Mission

Our mission is to educate the people of Florida about the value and experience of railroading; Past, Present and Future.

Our Vision

The Railroad Education and Learning Center of Florida, Inc. (REALRAIL) will be the educational and historical hub for teaching and illustrating the impact of railroading. We will achieve this through a center that provides an entertaining, interactive learning experience to the community through exhibits and models. RealRail is committed to excellence, good management, and fiscal responsibility.

RealRail E² (Education and Entertainment)

Our History

In 1975, a group with an interest in model railroading came together in Sarasota. A gentleman by the name of Herb Goetschius hung some flyers up in local hobby shops looking for people to start a new model railroad club. In short time, 20 members joined the new organization. It was incorporated as the Sarasota Model Railroad Club, Inc in September 1975. Two of the original members are still active with the organization today.

Through the years, various locations were home to the organization. The first home with permanent exhibits was located in downtown Sarasota on Second Street one block north of Main Street. In time, the club moved two more times, the previous in the early 1980's to our former location in the Tallevast area of Manatee County.

Initially the organization had one exhibit in HO Scale. With the move to the Tallevast location, the larger space offered enough area to add an N Scale exhibit, O Scale Exhibit and a Lionel Toy Train Exhibit. A 2nd floor was added providing meeting space, a workshop area and eventual storage for portable exhibits. In 1994 the organization was recognized as a 501(c)(4) organization by the Internal Revenue Service.

Over time, educational programs were added to the offerings of the organization for both adults and children. Model Train Show Expositions were part of the new offerings as a way to bring the hobby of model railroading to the community. Today these events regularly attract more than 1,000 adults to the Manatee Convention Center to learn and discover the hobby of model railroading and learn about the historical impact of railroading on the United States.

In the spring of 2006 the club applied to the Internal Revenue Service to become a 501(c)(3) public charity. In October of that year, a 501(c)(3) classification was granted. In the fall of 2007, our name was changed to The Railroad Education and Learning Center of Florida, Inc. doing business as RealRail to better reflect our Mission and Vision of a place where our community can gather to learn about railroading.

In the fall of 2008 a newer location was identified as a new home for RealRail. Dismantling of the old exhibits and packing began in November 2008 and occupancy of the new location took effect in mid December of the same year. The move was completed by March 1, 2009. Although the new location is somewhat smaller in size, it is in a better location with significant drive by traffic, ample parking and is ADA accessible, all of which were issues in the Tallevast location.

Our Values

Our values are the heart of our organization. They define who we are and what we want to bring to the community we serve.

- Museum Quality Exhibits and Displays – We want to build and present to the community exhibits that are a “cut above the rest”. The exhibits will use state of the art technology and be designed and created incorporating the latest methods and materials that will allow us to constantly improve and change to meet the needs of our community.
- Historic Preservation of Railroad History – We will provide a research facility to discover the vast and strong history of railroading in the United States. We will also offer educational programs that share the knowledge of our membership and volunteers with the community.
- Re-creation of Prototype Railroad Operations – Through our operating exhibits we will offer programs where participants will be able to experience some of the exciting aspects of operating a railroad. Participants will be able to earn credit towards the National Model Railroad Association Achievement Program Chief Dispatcher certificate.
- Provide educational resources to the community on the history, cultural and economic impact of railroading. We will provide this service through an offering of a variety of educational programs and through educational resources that will be available to the elementary education professionals in our community.
- We want to provide our services to the community in a clean, new, state of the art facility that is convenient to the public.
- We will provide space to other community organizations, railroad related and others, to meet and support their own organization and our community.

The Community We Serve

We have defined several initial target audiences. We will provide educational resources & exhibits fulfilling our mission to Youth Groups, Elementary Schools, the Senior Community, Tourists, Families, Rail Fans, Modelers and Community Service Groups. We will also identify and establish strategic partnerships with similar organizations such as Railroad Historical Societies.

Strengths, Weaknesses & Opportunities

Our overall diversity is our greatest strength. Our members bring a complete source of information from A to Z representing prototypical railroad operations and railroad history to our community. Our prior 33 years of community participation has allowed us to reach many people. We offer a wide variety of educational resources and exhibits that demonstrate the effect of railroading on our country's growth and development. Yet for all we know, we know we don't know it all. To meet this new challenge of operating a first class non-profit organization our community will be proud of, we are always seeking resources and information to strengthen our organization. We feel doing so will provide the community a resource second to none. We will continue to seek educational opportunities through organizations such as the Community Foundation of Sarasota and the Manatee Community Foundation to assist our growth and development.

One specific challenge we face in our current facility is our ability to provide services to our physically challenged guests. ADA compliance is not possible in our current structure. Load bearing walls and existing exhibit spaces would need to be moved and modified. The expense of making these changes is not physically or financially feasible. The costs will easily be in the tens of thousands of dollars.

One significant goal of this plan is to move to a temporary facility as soon as possible so we can provide our services to those physically challenged. Through the opportunity to move to a short term, temporary facility we can address this specific issue and increase our ability to serve the community.

Restructuring

One of our greatest strengths is our existing membership base. Our members have a passion for our mission and our vision. It will be these members who will drive us forward. The organization will undergo a transformation. Initially the Board of Directors will be a "working and governing board" directly responsible for setting policy, direction and management of committees in areas of operation. These committees will be created to implement the goals identified as needed for the organization. Initially a Board Member will chair the committee. It is anticipated that over the next three to five years that the Board Member will move from Committee Chair to a Committee Participant. Eventually each Board Member will be responsible for a committee but will not actively participate on the committee. At that time, the Board of Directors will exist only as a "Governing Board", one that sets policy and direction for the organization.

Implementation of policy and administration will be by the committees established through implementation of this plan. As the needs of the organization grow, administrative staff will be hired as required to fill key roles in the organization. Part of this transition will be for the Board of Directors to hire an Executive Director to manage the day to day operations of the organization.

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors will be comprised of twelve (12) members. Nine (9) of the members must be a member of the organization. Three (3) members of the Board of Directors will come from the community we serve. Initially each Director will chair a committee comprised of members and volunteers. The Director will be elected to chair a specific committee. The existing Board structure as of the creation of this document will allow for a smooth transition.

- **Finance Committee** - Chaired by the Treasurer. Responsible for the finances, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable and any matters related to the finances of the organization. This committee will be responsible for creating the annual budget to be submitted to the Board of Directors for approval.
- **Membership Committee** - Responsible for solicitation of members of the organization. These members will be categorized by their participation to the organization.
- **Facilities Committee** - Responsible for the physical plant and building, its maintenance and repair.
- **Communications Committee** - Responsible for Public Relations, Media Relations and all forms of communications from the organization including the Newsletter and Marketing Materials to promote RealRail

- **Education Committee** - Responsible for all educational programs and resources created and offered by the organization.
- **Exhibits and Interpretation Committee** - Responsible for all dynamic and static exhibits, including operating layouts and the library
- **Development Committee** - Responsible for fund raising activity, including cash donations, sponsorships and collections stewardship.
- **Special Events Committee** – Responsible for all outside events and displays presented by the organization. This committee will liaise with other committees as dictated by the needs of the specific event.
- **Executive Committee** - Comprised of the President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer

Short Term Goals and Objectives

This is a comprehensive list of Short Term Goals and Objectives for RealRail. It is anticipated that these goals will take two to three years to complete. We are a work in progress and as such, this will be a dynamic roadmap towards our future. This document is a dynamic guide. It will change and grow as our organization grows.

Short Term Goals by Priority

Priority 1

Goal Due Date	Committee Assignment	Initial Objectives
Re-write Bylaws and Operating Procedures including Board restructuring Due Date: October 2008 Completed: December 2008	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research Similar Organization Bylaws Write new Bylaws Submit to membership for approval
Definition of categories for Members Due Date: December 31, 2008 Completed: January 2009	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research similar organizations Develop definitions Implement through new policies and marketing
Definition of categories for Sponsors Due Date: December 31, 2009		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research similar organizations Develop definitions Implement through new policies and marketing
Establish Volunteer Program Due Date: December 2009	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify volunteer opportunities Create training program Solicit Volunteers
Create Committees Due Date: November 2008 Completed: November 2008	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define Committee Structure Solicit Committee Members
Establish Rate Schedule for outside displays and create written agreements for same Due Date: August 2009	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify pricing structure for outside displays For profit Non-Profit with admission Non-Profit without admission
American Association of Museums Museum Assessment Program Due Date: May 2009	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicit team members Complete Self Assessment

Priority 2

Goal Due Date	Committee Assignment	Initial Objectives
Establish and implement Educational Task Force with the Boards of Education in Manatee and Sarasota Counties to define guidelines for establishing educational programs Due Date: January 2010	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize Educational Task Force with members of the educations community Identify target audiences Develop programs and courses Prepare materials
Complete development of new logo Due Date: November 2008 Completed Date: December 2009	Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify potential logos Present to Board for review

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board selects final logo artwork
Document and Inventory existing collections Due Date: 9/01/2009	Exhibits and Interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare system for inventory Perform inventory Identify items for disposal Dispose of unneeded items
Document exhibit plans for each permanent exhibit Due Date: 07/01/2009	Exhibits and Interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine overall educational goal for exhibit Determine objectives to reach the goal Document policies and procedures to implement objectives Establish milestones for key objective tasks
Document plans for temporary/loaned exhibits Due Date: 10/01/2009	Exhibits and Interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create documentation that defines procedures for locating content, arranging delivery, preparing educational and marketing materials for the exhibit, display the collection and return to owner
Create New Membership Package Due Date: 07/01/2009	Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update Membership Handbook including member policies Print copies Distribute to existing members

Priority 3

Goal Due Date	Committee Assignment	Initial Objectives
Solicit first outside director to handle Communications Due Date: December 2008 NA	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicit candidates Interview candidates Select Director
Solicit Outside Directors – Ongoing		<ul style="list-style-type: none">
Develop New Name Tags and New Member Shirts Due Date: December 2008 Completed: December 2008	Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select Colors & Style Solicit pricing & Purchase
Develop New Business Cards Due Date: December 2008	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select & Develop Layout Purchase Cards for Board Members
Develop mailing lists Ongoing	Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicit mailing house to do data entry, US Mail mailings Have show survey slips from Feb entered into electronic form
Begin development of collectibles and other items for RealRail to sell as fund raising materials Due Date: Ongoing	Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify potential types of collectibles Submit to Board for approval
Newsletter Development Monthly Electronic: Completed 1/2009 Quarterly Printed: Due 9/2009	Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create alternate formats for printed monthly publication including title Develop format for electronic

		newsletter
Develop promotional video productions Due Date: July 2010	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop storyline • Write Script • Gather photographs from Florida Archives and other sources • Obtain rights to use 3rd party materials • Create production
Develop promotional materials for community and media (brochures, handouts, press packet, etc) Due Date: July 2010	Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define type of materials • Solicit artists to create materials • Create materials • Implement distribution
Community "Kick Off" Event Due Date: November 2009	Special Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify theme of the event • Organize logistics • Identify invitees • Work with foundations to promote the event • Send invitations
Create Code of Ethics Completed: January 2009	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research existing documents used by other non-profit organizations • Write Code of Ethics
Create Conflict of Interest Policy Due Date: January 2009 Completed: January 2009	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create policy • Get document signed by necessary Board Members

Priority 4

Goal Due Date	Committee Assignment	Initial Objectives
Facilities Search Due Date: April 2009 Completed: February 2009	Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify potential properties • Recommend property to the board for review • Prepare and implement transition and move to new facility

Priority 5

Goal Due Date	Committee Assignment	Initial Objectives
Membership Development Ongoing	Membership	
Planned Giving Program Due Date: October 2009	Finance	
Establish formal fundraising methods and procedures Due Date: Due October 2009	Development	
Establish Donor Base Due Date: Ongoing	Development	
Implement Fund Raising Programs (Operational Support/Annual Fund) Due Date: Due October 2009	Development	

Priority 6

Goal Due Date	Committee Assignment	Initial Objectives
Develop administrative procedures and policies for document changes Due Date: November 2009	Executive	
Identify and budget continuing education for Board and Administrative Staff Due Date: May 2009	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify training needed including professional conferences and memberships • Locate training materials and sources • Create budget
Establish policies and procedures for implementation of outside displays Due Date: September 2009	Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify types of events we will participate • Identify costs • Create checklists and promotional materials packages that are part of the exhibit • Sign and banner printing
Implement Telephone Answering system Due Date: August 2009	Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify software • Identify needed hardware • Write and record scripts • Implement
Create Business plan for implementation of Strategic Plan Due Date: February 2010	Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the costs for RealRail to move forward • Create formal Business Plan document
Develop Collections Management Policy Due Date: November 2009	Exhibits	
Develop accounting procedures Due Date: December 2009	Finance	
Develop all other Administrative procedures identified as Strategic Plan is implemented Due Date: Ongoing	Executive	

Long Term Goals and Objectives

Our long term goal is a new facility for RealRail to provide our products and services. The exterior of the structure would be constructed using the architectural styles of passenger train stations that served the railroads of Florida. The interior will consist of modern museum style spaces with static displays of railroad memorabilia, artifacts and operating models. Exhibits will be supported with an educational storyline that demonstrates the influence and impact of railroading. The building will house a library on railroading and model railroading. Also within the building will be classroom and meeting spaces. Our home would be available to other likeminded non-profit organizations such as Railroad Historical Societies. We would make our meeting spaces available to other non-profit organizations for their use. The complex will meet or exceed ADA requirements.

We know many of the pieces of the puzzle to make that vision a reality. We are aware of several tasks that will be needed to achieve the goal of a new building. They include:

- Demonstrate our abilities to raise funding for program, operational and administrative expenses
- Hiring of Fund Raising Consultant
- Establish and implement a Capital Campaign to raise construction funding
- Hire Executive Director
- Begin planning of a permanent facility
- Identify types of potential activities and exhibits that would serve the community in a new facility
- Identify potential locations
- Define the characteristics of this facility including:
 - Static Exhibits and Dioramas
 - Gift/Souvenir Shop
 - Operating Exhibits
 - Educational/Classroom spaces
 - Meeting spaces
 - Workshop areas
 - Administrative Offices
 - Expanded educational programs

We expect to begin implementation of these goals within the next three years.

Through the next few years as our Vision becomes a reality and ideas and concepts become more concrete for the facility we are planning, we will refine our long term goals and objectives. It is our dream to provide our community with this facility and what it can offer for many years into the future.