

Carousel horse returns home

By **JO ANN BOBBY-GILBERT**

jgilbert@reviewonline.com

EAST LIVERPOOL — After more than 40 years, a piece of local history has come home, where it will give the community a chance to relive memories of a once-popular amusement park.

This week, a hand-carved D.C. Muller jumper horse which once graced the carousel at Rock Springs Park in nearby Chester, W.Va., was delivered to the Lou Holtz Upper Ohio Valley Hall of Fame here, the fruition of a long-time dream of museum Director Robin Brown Webster.

Her dream actually began 41 years ago while growing up and attending school next to the “slumbering giant of an amusement park,” which opened in 1897 and closed after a final run on Labor Day 1970, except for a last dance at the Virginia Gardens ballroom in 1974.

As the carousel was disassembled after being sold in 1974, Webster said, “It got me thinking what I could do to get it back some day, or at least part of it.”

That quest began in earnest nine years ago when she became director of the Lou Holtz museum, which already housed the Model 153 Wurlitzer organ that once provided the music to which the high-stepping carousel

See **HORSE**, Page 4A



A crew from Tri-State Glass removes a panel of glass from in front of the recently refurbished Wurlitzer band organ at the Lou Holtz Upper Ohio Valley Hall of Fame as part of a construction project to prepare for the addition of the new carousel horse display. (Submitted photo)



This photograph shows the 1927 D.C. Muller jumper as it appeared on the Dentzel carousel at Rock Springs Park, centered between two stationary stander horses. (Submitted photo)

Horse

FROM PAGE 1A

horses pranced.

Webster said she asked museum President Frank Dawson if she could try to find one of the horses and bring it back.

"He said, 'Good luck,' and that's all it took," she recalled, and her search began.

The carousel was initially sold to Jim Wells of Virginia and had changed hands several times since. When Webster began her search, she tracked it to the Brass Ring Carousel Company in Los Angeles and spoke with a man there, learning the carousel was available for the sum of \$1.5 million.

"That was the end of that," she said, although she did learn in her conversation at that time the company also brokered the sale of some of the individual horses.

Just recently, while in the midst of planning and implementing the annual Lou Holtz Upper Ohio Valley Hall of Fame award ceremonies, Webster happened to Google "Rock Springs carousel horse" and hit pay dirt.

"I saw it; there was a picture of this horse on the Brass Ring Carousel Co. website. I couldn't catch my breath. I couldn't believe I was seeing it and knew it would disappear (fast)," Webster said, adding she instantly wondered if she could raise the money needed to purchase the antique carousel horse.

It was decided to front the money and then search for sponsors to each pay a portion of the cost.

"I called that very day and said I wanted it," she said.

When Webster explained her interest in the historical park and the horse's importance to that history, "(the broker) said it deserved to come home" and waived \$500 of his brokering fee, putting her in touch with Americana Antiques in Maryland, which actually had the horse for sale, having purchased it from the original buyers.

Although the arrangement was to have them bring the horse just part of the way, the owner ended up bringing it to East Liverpool this week, where it was carefully unloaded into the Fifth Street museum.

Webster said that, as she cut the check and told the owner why she

wanted the horse, he deducted \$1,000 from the cost, saying he was happy about the sale and that "it belongs here in your community."

Immediately upon deciding to purchase the horse, Webster and her director of development Rosemary Mackall had begun approaching people in an attempt to find 20 who would each donate \$1,000 toward the price and installation costs.

Only one expressed disinterest. The rest have had the same level of excitement as she had when realizing a piece of history could be brought home, Webster said.

"One said she had goose bumps. Someone on the phone just gasped when I told her. It's been exciting. It's like buying that perfect Christmas present for someone."

To those who might argue the Rock Springs Park collectible should be housed in Chester, not East Liverpool, Webster said the Lou Holtz museum has long-term sustainability and offers security, the proper environment to protect the valuable finish of the horse and the wherewithal to maintain that finish.

She pointed out the museum has invested \$14,000 in overhauling the Wurlitzer band organ from the same carousel, even though it does not own it, just so it has the most visibility to the public who wishes to see it.

"It's free. If you want to come and see it every week day for a year, for seven hours, you can," she said.

Mackall also pointed out that having the actual carousel horse will help school children who visit better visualize what the park's carousel looked like, saying there is a miniature version with the train display.

"This would bring it alive for our young visitors," Mackall said.

The lobby is being reconstructed by Mike and Crystal Tice and Mark Neville to showcase the carousel horse next to the Wurlitzer, where a plaque with the names of contributors will be placed.

A carousel horse such as this is actually a valuable art work, according to Webster, who said this particular horse is of the Philadelphia style.

The horse was one of 48 on the 1927 Dentzel carousel which delighted thousands of children in the

park's heyday. The carousel was the fourth installed in the pavilion at the park and included both jumpers and standers.

The jumpers were those that moved up and down and were located on the inner circle of the carousel, whereas the standers were stationary and were located along the rim.

This style includes elegant horses with realistically sculpted legs, double-tuck manes and faces, and this peek-a-boo model - which has been nicknamed Picabo by museum staff members - has a glass eye rather than carved. It also sports 1937 factory paint.

Only about a dozen master carvers produced these horses, including Daniel Muller at the Dentzel factory, who was known for the accurate features on his saddles, bridles and other accoutrements.

Sponsors who contributed to the project are: Arner Funeral Chapel/Arner families; Bob and Robin's Flowers; Richard N. Brookes; Chester Volunteer Fire Department; The Davis Family; Frank and Gretchen Dawson; Frank's Pastry Shop/the Brian and Margie Potts family; Hill International Trucks/Jack and Beverly Hill; Homer Laughlin China Co./Hall China Co.; Rosemary Thomas Mackall; Bob Milby Post 6450 VFW; 1st National Community Bank; Neville Enterprises/Mark and Cathy Neville; The Orchards/the Fox family; Bob and Linda Sebo; the Shenton family; Scott Shepherd; Six Recycling Corporation; R. Tice Builders/Ron, Mike and Crystal Tice; and the Michael and Robin (Brown) Webster family.

Picabo will be unveiled to sponsors and their guests at a private reception July 26, and she will be on display to the public at the museum the next day at 10 a.m.

"We do feel we are bringing her home to the Tri-State area. We literally can't wait for people to come in and start sharing their memories of her. No one has seen her for 41 years," Webster said. "I don't know if we knew all we were getting into, but it's been worth every minute."