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# Trains

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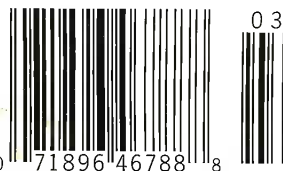
## OFFICE CAR SPECIAL

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Vol. 36, Issue 3

# Ready for her



# close-up

Ask the folks who run Kansas City Southern's office car train, the *Southern Belle*: It's a lot of work to be beautiful

by Peter A. Hansen  
PHOTOS BY ROY INMAN



Kansas City Southern's business train, the *Southern Belle*, crosses Arkansas' Rich Mountain behind shiny and freshly painted Fs in November 2007. KCS



**A florist prepares for a reception on board the *Belle* (above). Willis Kilpatrick (right) is in charge of the train, and keeps the *Belle* looking her finest.**



**L**ike a glamorous movie star, Kansas City Southern's office car train, the *Southern Belle*, features looks that result from a combination of good DNA and painstaking work. As with most stars, those looks can inspire. And as with most stars, those looks have a practical purpose behind them: to make money.

Start with the DNA. The *Belle* is powered by three F units. The entire business train fleet includes 18 cars in the U.S. and Mexico, including lightweights and modernized heavyweights, two domes, a theater car, and an assortment of diners, lounges, and power cars. All of them wear KCS's classic Brunswick green, a shade that's almost black when it's kept clean — as the *Belle* unflinchingly is.

As the name suggests, the train is partly a statement about Kansas City Southern's heritage. It's a rallying point for employees, a matter of intense pride for the people who keep it running, and a rolling promise to customers that they're dealing with an outfit that insists on the best.

### **Behind the tinsel and glitter**

If the *Belle* is a movie star and KCS is her studio, then Willis Kilpatrick is the producer. A close confidant of Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Mike Haverty, Kilpatrick oversees all aspects of this production.

Long before any customer, prospect, or government official sets foot on the train, Kilpatrick and his crew invest hundreds of hours and considerable expense in each car. He helps select new cars for the roster, and is responsible for everything from the nuts and bolts of machinery to the nuts and drinks of on-board hospitality. As operating railroaders go, that makes him something of a renaissance man.

**Preparing for another trip, porter Elton Bindoo puts a shine on a brass rail in the upper level of one of two dome cars in the Kansas City Southern business car fleet.**

"When I first came to work for KCS about 10 years ago, we had one and a half cars," Kilpatrick says. "We had the *Kay See* and the *New Orleans* business cars. *Kay See* was fully operational, but on *New Orleans*, the generator and the air conditioner didn't work, so it was just about half a car." (*Kay See* was a favorite of Harry Truman's, so the car was renamed in his honor and now serves as an executive dining car at KCS headquarters in Kansas City. It rests beneath a canopy that recalls the trainshed of an old station. *New Orleans*, since made fully functional, is still on the *Belle*'s roster.)

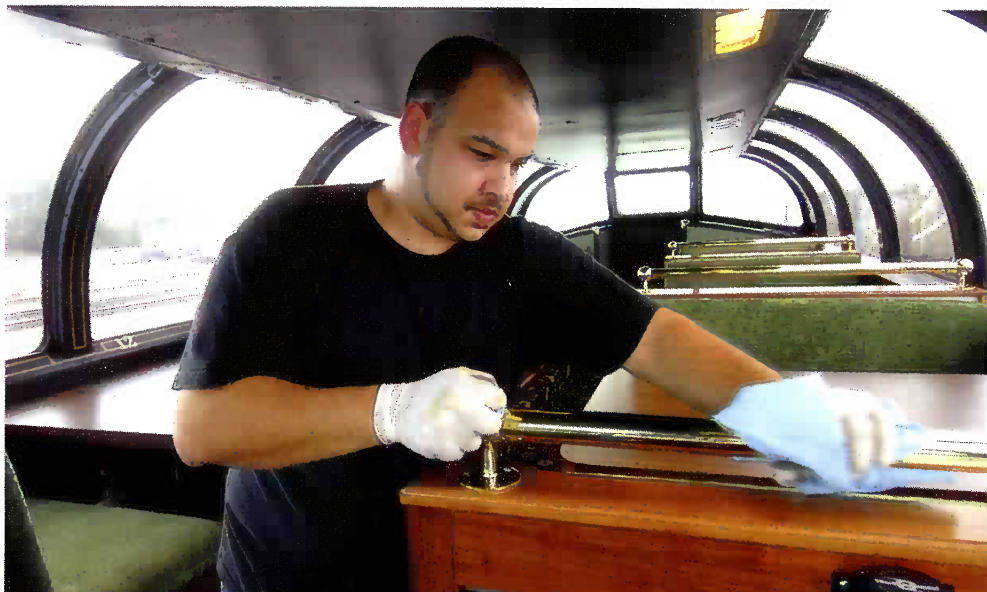
Kilpatrick continues: "Mr. Haverty decided he needed a train to show customers the property, to show them how we operate and how their service would work, and that's when the fleet really started to grow."

There wasn't much to work with on the property. The first car added to the roster was *Jackson*, a 1948 American Car & Foundry-built diner once known as *Mountain*

*Lodge* on the original *Southern Belle*, the Kansas City-New Orleans flagship that ran from 1940 to 1969. "The first time I saw it," Kilpatrick says, "it was down in Shreveport. All the windows were out of it, and you could only walk through the car if you stayed on the I-beam down the center. It had become a home for vagrants and owls." Rebuilding the car took six months.

Most of the remaining roster began life on other roads. Four F units originally belonged to Canadian National, and later to VIA. KCS got them from Independent Locomotive Service and Ohio Central. KCS donated No. 34 to Kansas City Union Station in November 2004 and, on Haverty's orders, it became the first locomotive to wear the revived *Southern Belle* livery.

The fleet grew to 10 cars by early 2006, and that's when a bit of serendipity intervened. KCS had just completed acquiring TFM, the biggest railroad in Mexico, and planned a trip south of the border. The fleet





KCS employee Tom E. Smith adjusts an air conditioning component to keep the *Southern Belle* cool (left), while Charlie Bamberg (above) checks headlight wiring on an F.

didn't have enough sleeping cars, so Kilpatrick called Ed Boyce of Rail Cruise America to see about leasing one from the so-called Green Train. "Better than that, I'll sell you the whole train," Boyce replied. KCS acquired eight cars in the transaction, including two domes.

### Whatever it takes

Kilpatrick has a strong right-hand man in Jim Davis. His facilities manager title underscores a big difference between KCS and most other Class I business train fleets.

"We're the only railroad of any significance where the business train is a function of the building services department, or what some roads call 'bridges and buildings,'" Davis says. "So when people ask me what I do, I tell them I'm in B&B — buildings and business cars!

"To us, the train is almost like another building. When we're building a car, we're going to use equipment that's residential or industrial, as opposed to original parts. Parts from car suppliers are very expensive, and they're harder to get hold of. If we should ever break down on the road, we can go to [parts supplier] Grainger and get a replacement."

The advantages of such an approach become obvious, given the diverse heritage of the *Belle's* cars. Business fleets at other roads may have cars from only one or two builders, but the *Belle's* cars come from five different manufacturers. Kansas City Southern has devised a *de facto* standard for its own fleet, and it works for the railroad.

Surprisingly few employees are needed to keep the *Belle* in good running order. Besides Davis, two employees in Shreveport and two in Kansas City are responsible for everything from the floor up: HVAC, plumbing, and electrical, including the pow-

## Celebrating success

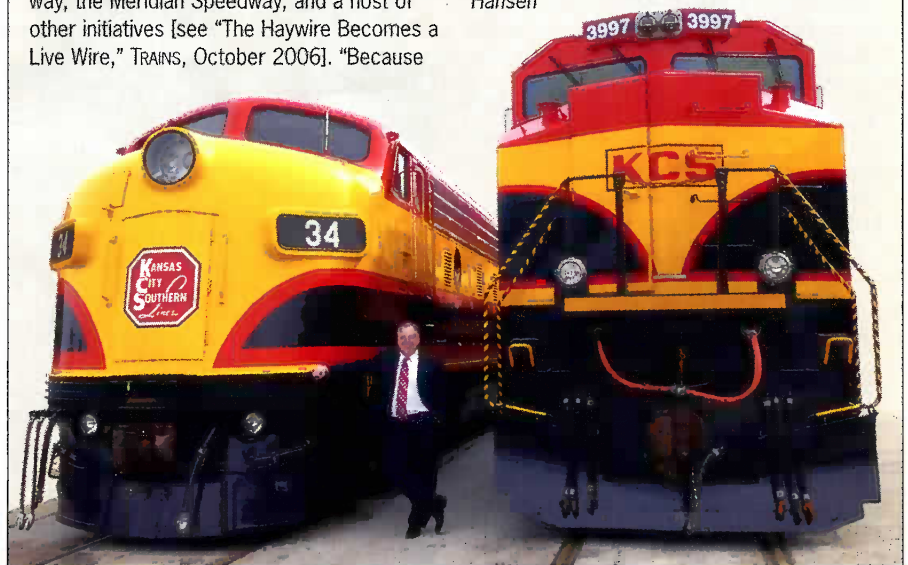
"Everybody knew I revived the Warbonnet colors at Santa Fe," says Kansas City Southern Chairman and CEO Mike Haverty, "so when I first came here [in 1995], they all wanted to paint our freight units in the historic KCS scheme." The repaints came in 2007.

Why did it take so long? "We were a struggling railroad, fighting for survival, and I just didn't think it was proper to spend the money painting the locomotives." For freight units, Haverty says, "Battleship gray sort of symbolized that we were battle-hardened. For the *Belle's* locomotives, black was a lot cheaper, and it matched the rest of the train."

By 2007, KCS was a different railroad. No longer the sick man of Class I lines, it had taken its destiny into its own hands with the Mexican acquisition, the Panama Canal Railway, the Meridian Speedway, and a host of other initiatives [see "The Haywire Becomes a Live Wire," *TRAINS*, October 2006]. "Because

we've now put the company together in Mexico and the U.S., we're trying to present a new image and honor our heritage as well," says Haverty (below). New EMD SD70ACe and GE ES44AC freight locomotives began getting an adaptation of the historic *Southern Belle* scheme last year. And when the business train's F units came due for repainting a few months later, they received the same dazzling scheme as the *Belle* of old.

"One of the guys I give credit to is [TRAINS author] Fred Frailey," Haverty says. "Years ago, we painted the Panama Canal Railway locomotives in *Southern Belle* colors, and Fred sent me an e-mail saying, 'Mike there are a lot of railfans who would like to see these colors on the KCS units.'" When the time was right, Haverty acted. — Peter A. Hansen





**Kansas City Southern Events Director Patti Tamisiea makes a call to prepare the Belle for an outing in Kansas City. It's the train's staff that makes it come alive, she says.**

er car. Heavy below-the-floor jobs go to the railroad's car shop in Shreveport or to an outside contractor like Pete Messina in New Orleans or Mid-America Car in Kansas City. "If we have a truck that needs work, I don't want any part of that," says Davis, whose background is in electronics.

One current project is a case in point. Davis is overseeing the conversion of an ex-Illinois Central sleeper to a five-bedroom executive car, each suite with its own queen-size bed, toilet, and shower. When the company wants to give overnight guests the royal treatment, this will be the car they use. Messina gutted it and installed head-end power, preparing it for KCS personnel to perform interior work. The finishing touch, solid cherry woodwork, is a lavish-but-tasteful feature of other *Southern Belle* cars. An outside craftsman will install it.

In response to a question about how much these interior appointments will cost, Davis says, "It'll be a cost-plus deal on the inside. I can't get someone to bid on this — they can't bid on it. It's whatever it takes."

This extraordinary commitment to the project came from President and Chief Operating Officer Art Shoener, and it also suggests the train's future is secure, even after Haverty retires.

Historically KCS has gone its own way, doing so right from the first when founder Arthur Stilwell built north-to-south instead of east-to-west. The railroad's approach to building and maintaining its business train is no different but, as Davis observes, "I've had people tell us our theater car, [named for Stilwell], is as good as there is." Adds Kilpatrick, "The cars we have, I'd put them up against any other railroad in America. It's a beautiful train."

## Out on the road

A typical trip for the *Southern Belle* begins with a phone call or an email to Kilpatrick. Requests have to come from a vice

president or above, though the trips are often instigated by directors or assistant directors further down the chain of command. Kilpatrick quizzes the booking executive on date, origin and destination, number of guests, and meal services required — and he also gets a cost-center number. All above-the-rail costs are charged back to the department that books the trip.

Since every trip is customized, two weeks' advance notice is generally required. Kilpatrick will get the crew together and brief them on everything that's needed for the trip, and then the preparations can begin. The *Belle* usually operates from Shreveport, which is centrally located in the KCS system, but some of the crew members are based in Kansas City. They typically fly south two days before departure, using the intervening time to clean the cars, provision the dining car, and perform other tasks.

"It gets crazier the closer we get to a trip," says Patricia Bindoo, one of three

contract porters who work the train, including her brother, Elton. "We'll start out kind of slow, but then we'll work more and more as the trip gets closer."

Head business car attendant Grant Elliott describes a typical day out on the road: "We had a continental breakfast today, so we were on at 6. Tonight, we'll probably work a couple of hours past dinner. Yesterday, we worked from 7 in the morning to 10 at night. The further you get into the trip, the more tired you are, but the further you get into the trip, the more is usually expected of you — or at least it seems that way," he says, laughing.

Events Director Patti Tamisiea says these porters are among the best she's ever had. On the *Southern Belle*, porters are responsible not only for the sleeping cars, but also for serving food and keeping the cars clean. "That, and doing everything Patti and Willis say," Patricia Bindoo interjects. "Wait!" Elliott says. "Make sure everyone knows we mean that in a good way!" Bindoo agrees: "They're incredibly good bosses."

If the train's immaculate appearance is the first thing most people notice, food is next. The train can accommodate up to 22 people for a formal dinner of four or five courses. More can be served buffet-style, and KCS often hosts as many as 70 for *hors d'oeuvres*. At a benefit in 2006 for the Kansas City Symphony, the crew served a record 217 guests, thanks in part to a catering firm hired to assist with the occasion.

All of it is supervised by Hugo Cuevas, a six-year veteran employee who trained at the Culinary Institute of America in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., one of the pre-eminent schools of its kind. His training shows.

When Cuevas arrives in Shreveport before a trip, he hits the local grocers, as dining car commissaries are a thing of the past. Depending on the number of guests and how long the *Southern Belle* will be out, he might shuttle to the grocer several times to stock the train. Besides the dining car kitchen, his domain extends to the power car, which houses a pair of 48-cubic-foot Hobart freezers and a like number of 48-cubic-foot refrigerators. That's a lot of food but, even so, the train might still run low on provisions during an extended run of four or five days. If the train is going to be stopped for a while, Cuevas will borrow an automobile and get more fresh produce.

Running a passenger train in 2007 is not an easy task because en-route servicing facilities no longer exist. Davis offers an example of a once-mundane task that takes on a whole new level of complexity today:



**Hugo Cuevas is in charge of Kansas City Southern's food service on board the *Southern Belle*. He's preparing for a meal in the dining car during a 2006 trip.**

## Kansas City Southern's business train fleet

Number	Name	Builder, Date	Current Service	Previous Service
1	<i>Shreveport</i>	General Motors Diesel, 1957	FP9A	Canadian National 6504, VIA 6604, Independent Locomotive Service 6504
2	<i>Meridian</i>	GMD, 1957	FP9A	CN 6512, VIA 6512, Ohio Central 6512
3	<i>Pittsburg</i>	GMD, 1957	FP9B	CN 6616, VIA 6616, ILS 6616
19	<i>Heavener</i>	Pullman, 1959	Tool car	Originally KCS 17
40	<i>Kansas City</i>	ACF*, 1949	Dining car	UP diner 4812, *American Car & Foundry
56	<i>Jackson</i>	ACF, 1948	Dining car	Originally KCS <i>Mountain Lodge</i> , rebuilt 1996
96	<i>St. Louis</i>	ACF, 1944	Power car	Ex-Army, former Amtrak baggage-dorm from the <i>Spirit of Tennessee</i> state bicentennial train
97	<i>Dallas</i>	ACF, 1944	Crew sleeper	Army hospital car, converted to Amtrak baggage car, ex- <i>Spirit of Tennessee</i> state bicentennial train
98	<i>Harry S. Truman</i>	Pullman, 1928	Display at KCS headquarters	Originally office car <i>Kay See</i>
99	<i>New Orleans</i>	Pullman, 1925	Office car	Originally Pullman <i>Monte Cristo</i> , then Chicago Great Western 399, Chicago & North Western 100
1810	<i>San Luis Potosi</i>	Pullman, 1953	Executive sleeper	Illinois Central car <i>Baton Rouge</i> 3500
1859	<i>Arthur E. Stilwell</i>	Budd, 1946	Theater car	New York Central coach 2955, Amtrak coach 5671
1887	<i>Port Arthur</i>	Pullman, 1950	Parlor-observation	Union Pacific 5403, Rail Cruise America <i>Missouri River</i>
1940	<i>Kansas City</i>	ACF, 1954	Dome parlor	UP dome coach 7002, Auto Train 702, Rail Cruise America 800200 <i>Mississippi River</i>
1942	<i>Lake Charles</i>	St. Louis Car, 1959	Diner-bar	UP lunch counter/café/lounge 5013, Alaska Railroad 5013, Rail Cruise America <i>Osage River</i>
1969	<i>Laredo</i>	ACF, 1957	Party car	UP baggage 5715, Alaska Railroad 5715, Rail Cruise America <i>Charrete Creek</i>
1970	<i>Baton Rouge</i>	Pullman, 1953	Executive sleeper	IC <i>Brookhaven</i> 3505, Amtrak 800107, private car <i>Julia Harvey Redfield</i> , purchased by KCS in 2001; under conversion to executive sleeper
2005	<i>Monterrey</i>	ACF, 1955	Dome diner	UP 8009, Auto Train 808, Rail Cruise America <i>Columbia River</i> ; assigned to KCSM
2006	<i>Lázaro Cárdenas</i>	Pullman, 1950	Executive sleeper	UP chair car 5428, Rail Cruise America <i>Cuivre River</i>
2007	<i>Veracruz</i>	Pullman, 1948	Executive sleeper	Rail Cruise America <i>Colorado River</i>
2008	<i>Tampico</i>	St. Louis Car, 1952	Crew dormitory-power car	Army hospital car, Rail Cruise America <i>Current River</i> ; assigned to KCSM

“Let’s say the train runs all day and ties up for the night in Jackson [Miss.] or Dallas. The train needs to be watered and, frequently, that will involve dragging out several hundred feet of hoses. It’s not really practical to get a plumber in there and rip up half the yard to install something.”

The dearth of en-route facilities, along with the *Belle’s* highly visible mission, means the train carries on-board mechanical personnel — just in case. Shreveport electrician Charlie Bamburg tends not only to the F units up front, but also to the generator in the power car. One of the facilities people also rides along to take care of any-

**The Kansas City Southern office car fleet features a variety of cars. Parlor-observation *Port Arthur*, with its open platform, brings up the rear of most trains.**





**Up front in the cab of FP9 KCS 2, crew members are all business as they pilot the train across the system winning friends on board for the company.**

thing on the train above the floor.

Kilpatrick works every trip, too. The train is “like running a four- or five-star restaurant or hotel, except that it has wheels,” he says. “You have to anticipate every customer desire, even for something as simple as a particular brand of pop or a certain kind of wine.” He trusts his crew implicitly but, as the top dog, he’s always on hand.

Almost everyone associated with the *Belle* has another job with the railroad. Kilpatrick is involved in several special projects for Haverly, for example. He and Davis also take the lead on KCS’s Holiday Express, which has become a significant year-round commitment since 2001. Tamisiea is an international purchasing manager. Even chef Cuevas and head attendant Elliott have other responsibilities, like maintaining the displays in the railroad’s corporate museum. Juggling their multiple commitments can get a little tricky sometimes, but everyone interviewed for this story loves to work on the *Belle*. They all walk a little taller because of their involvement with the train.

### **A sister for the ‘Belle’**

The 2006 Mexico trip that led indirectly to the acquisition of the Rail Cruise America cars used the U.S.-based equipment, but it underscored the need for Kansas City Southern de Mexico (KCSM) to have its

**Kansas City Southern Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Mike Haverly and his wife, Marlys, right, entertain guests on board the *Southern Belle*.**

own set of office cars.

Some of Kansas City Southern’s greatest opportunities are in Mexico. The company is working to develop the port of Lázaro Cárdenas on Mexico’s Pacific coast, which is dramatically closer to many Southern U.S. destinations than the ports of Los Angeles or Long Beach. In addition, KCS is upbeat about the growth prospects in Mexico’s own domestic market.

When the U.S.-based *Belle* visited Mexico last year, it stayed four weeks. Under the direction of KCSM President and Executive Representative José Zozaya, the train provided an opportunity to entertain politicians, port officials, labor leaders, and potential customers. In addition, the train was

used to take employees out on the road, many of whom had never seen the line before. It also made goodwill stops along the way and, just like in the United States, townspeople came out to take pictures of the rare passenger train.

Kilpatrick says KCS will send three cars to Mexico permanently. A power car, dome diner, and theater car will be based in Monterrey. (The latter will be a near-twin to the *Arthur E. Stilwell* car.) A KCSM employee will manage the train and report to Kilpatrick. A chef and two other porters







During an outing for the Kansas City Symphony, musicians played on board the train to entertain guests. A former baggage car becomes a great venue (below).



will round out the crew.

"In Mexico, we try to use all the local people we can," Kilpatrick says. The chef will be skilled with Mexican cuisine, and the crew will all speak the language. Kilpatrick says, "In my case, I speak enough Spanish to get by, but not fluently, and there's usually someone who speaks English, but not fluently, so we get together and have a five-minute conversation for about an hour."

### The train that's a 'working tool'

Few people have the opportunity to ride trains like the *Southern Belle* today. As sales tools go, this one is hard to beat, and it always makes an impression.

Haverty was a big believer in such trains even before signing on with KCS in 1995. He had spent most of his career at Santa Fe, rising to president from 1989 to 1991, and he made good use of the business cars there. He loves to tell the story of Santa Fe's groundbreaking deal with trucking company J.B. Hunt, where he and a Hunt consultant rode the business train across Arizona.

"We went out there, parallel to Interstate 40, and his mouth just hung open. He couldn't believe how we were passing the trucks." Later, Haverty entertained Hunt himself on a trip out of Chicago, and says of the experience, "I'll tell you what, I had him hooked by the time we got to Joliet [Ill.]"

KCS uses its *Southern Belle* in much the same way. The railroad is understandably reticent about naming specific customers and prospects, but officials will discuss partnerships the train has helped

to forge and strengthen. On the 2006 Mexico trip, for example, KCS entertained Hutchison Whampoa Ltd., the port operator that manages Lázaro Cárdenas. Hutchison is in the midst of expanding the port's capacity seven-fold, and KCSM is the port's sole rail carrier. Clearly, both companies value their relationship.

Also in 2006, the *Belle* hosted the signing of an agreement between KCS and the Staubach Co., an international real estate firm headed by Dallas Cowboys football great Roger Staubach. Officials won't disclose the value of the deal, but it calls for Staubach to represent the railroad in property leases and sales, and in the administration of lease and transload agreements.

The *Belle* is also an ambassador to government officials. Almost all the governors of states that KCS serves have been entertained on board, as have several U.S. representatives, senators, and mayors, says Haverty. Law enforcement officers are frequent guests, too, particularly in connection with Operation Lifesaver.

In addition, the train often appears at community events along the railroad. When the city of Stilwell, Okla., opened the former KCS depot as a museum, the *Belle* was on hand to help celebrate the community's roots. "We use the *Belle* in many ways other than just wining and dining customers," Kilpatrick says. "We look at it as a working tool that helps us garner business and helps us in our movement of traffic, but also helps us in PR with different organizations and people across our system."

### Rallying around the heritage

Haverty has been around railroads all his life. He comes from a railroading family, and has worked in the industry since he was 19. Few people have a better sense of the hold trains have on people.

"I love the railroad business," Haverty says, "and I think it makes good business sense to use the things people are attracted to. People were attracted to passenger trains, and they're attracted to the *Southern Belle* today."

He applied the same thinking at Santa Fe, where he revived that road's Warbonnet paint scheme, the legendary livery of the *Super Chief*. "Talk about a great advertising mechanism — it was just unbelievable what we got from that."

And it wasn't just the locomotives, either. "We kind of set up a *Super Chief* environment for entertaining customers. So I thought doing the *Southern Belle* here would be a good thing."

He pauses. "Rallying around the heritage — that's what happened here. The train symbolizes the tradition of this company, and it makes people very proud."

Haverty and Shoener know well that some efforts are worth more than they cost and not everything can be quantified on a corporate income statement. **I**

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