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### Lehigh Gorge Scenic Railway Smashes Ridership Records

#### Port Clinton, PA – January 19, 2016

The Lehigh Gorge Scenic Railway smashed all of its ridership records in 2015 as over 100,000 visitors rode LGSR trains last year. Although LGSR has been a successful tourist railroad attraction in Jim Thorpe, PA for the past ten years, its highest prior ridership had been 72,300 in 2014. The railroad averaged 55,000 total riders between 2010 and 2013.

According to Andy Muller, Jr., owner and CEO of LGSR, the reasons for the substantial increase in ridership are simple. “People love trains and we cater to those people. We have clean cars and knowledgeable conductors who make our train trips family friendly. And we bring our trains to communities with a long tradition of railroading so that our older riders can share their love of railroading with their kids and grandkids.”

Families and tourists are seen riding the trains most frequently along with many other groups of people who make riding the train part of an exciting day trip. Several bus charters, school trips, scout groups, wedding parties, reunion parties, and senior groups visit the railroad regularly. The riders get to interact with the ticket agents, narrators, car hosts, and conductors. The railroad even has its own black bear mascot, “Lehigh George”, seen most often at the platform interacting with passengers boarding the train in Jim Thorpe.

Conductor Bill Solomon enjoys working for the railroad. “You get to meet a lot of nice people from all over the country. It is a fun job and many kids want to grow up to be a conductor. My uncle worked in Jim Thorpe on the Central Railroad of New Jersey, and I always had an interest in trains.” The train crew is extremely popular and friendly. Passengers also ride in restored coaches that date back as early as 1917. All standard coaches have clean restrooms year-round and heat in the colder months. During warmer times of the season, many people prefer riding the open air car. People sit and watch the scenery roll by or stand and take pictures due to the open side views in the open air cars. The open air cars are also decorated with beautiful murals depicting local wildlife commonly seen in Eastern Pennsylvania. All of these factors make the tourist railroad an enjoyable experience that make people want to come back and visit on a regular basis.

Among the successful programs expanded by LGSR in 2015 are Bike Trains along the Lehigh River where people can take the train 25 miles into Lehigh Gorge and then bike back to Jim Thorpe. This special train partners with Pocono Biking. If customers do not have their own bikes, they can rent a bike from Pocono Biking. There are few tourist railroads with this type of exciting offering. No other railroad can offer a train ride followed by the amazing scenery of the return bike trip down the Delaware and Lehigh Heritage Trail through the entire Lehigh Gorge State Park.

Jim Thorpe saw the most successful Winterfest Celebration in years partially due to the opportunity to ride Winterfest trains into the beautiful, snow-covered Lehigh Gorge. Couples spent Valentine's Day riding an all-day Port Clinton to Jim Thorpe Valentine's Day Train as they were served chocolate while some rode the first-class accommodations of the Pullman car. Easter trains returned to the railroad offering trips with the Easter Bunny in spring. Also, steam trips materialized from Bethlehem to Pittston with a layover in Jim Thorpe one weekend in August. The event was planned with Norfolk Southern Railroad and the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society with their steam locomotive no. 765. This was the first time in over 20 years that such a trip was offered attracting thousands of people along the route to watch the train pass through the Lehigh Gorge and Wyoming Valley.

No. 425 steam locomotive rides from Port Clinton to Jim Thorpe sold out in the October season. In total, a record seven Fall Foliage trips were offered. With over 600 seats available on each trip, all sold out. Additionally, the trips into the Lehigh Gorge are always popular during peak autumn leaf color. Also, the option of taking a two hour train ride to the Hometown High Bridge was available during Fall Foliage Festival weekends. This trip offers a ride past two lakes to the 168 foot tall Hometown High Bridge.

Santa trains bring Christmas to Jim Thorpe and many additional communities. "Christmas time is always special with the kids riding the train. It gets you in the spirit seeing their faces light up when they see Santa and hear 'All Aboard' at the beginning of the trip" said Solomon. A special offering to families occurred during Santa Claus Specials-for every paying adult, a child aged 3 to 12 rode for free. Children under 3 ride free all season long. Many families in Eastern Pennsylvania happily took advantage of this gift the railroad offered to the public.

Besides operating LGSR trains in Jim Thorpe, many special trips ran in Schuylkill County, Luzerne County, and Wyoming County during 2015 in cooperation with related company Reading Blue Mountain and Northern Railroad. These special trips run in conjunction with various charity groups in the region. In Schuylkill County, the rail company worked with Railroad Restoration Project 113, Pottsville Area Development Corporation, Schuylkill Haven Borough Day Committee, and the Tamaqua Historical Society. The Pittston Charity trip benefited the Pittston Public Library, Care and Concern Free Health Clinic, and the Pittston YMCA. Farther north on the system, the railroad worked with Tunkhannock Business and Professional Association to sponsor trains in Wyoming County. Train rides in these locations help raise several thousands of dollars for the charities to use in their communities.

The record ridership and special events of 2015 were a very fitting way to celebrate the RBMN passenger department's 30th year of service along with the ten years of memories on the LGSR.

Trains are running in Jim Thorpe for Winterfest on February 13 and 14. Also, a special Valentine's Day train will operate from Port Clinton to Jim Thorpe and return on February 14. Please visit [www.lgsry.com](http://www.lgsry.com) or go to the Lehigh Gorge Scenic Railway Facebook for official updates. Finally, you may call 610-562-2102 to find out more information about the 2016 season or pre-order tickets.

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