Central to take to the rails Saturday

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

CENTRAL — The Central Railroad Festival will expand outside the downtown area from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday.

Bobby Ballentine, one of the organizers, said Clemson Area Transit will provide continuous shuttles to the Central History Museum, Collins Ole Towne and Freedom's Hill Church on the campus of Southern Wesleyan University. For those who enjoy walking, a 1.1 mile walking tour will begin at the Central History Museum and continue to the Old Central High School, Central African-American School, Central Roller Mill, Heirlooms and Comforts, Old Central City Hall and Jail before ending at the Red Caboose.

"The only thing people have to buy is food or arts and crafts items," Ballentine said. "Everything else is free — including free rides to the sites and free tractor train rides at the Rock Station."

Named in honor of the town's rich railroad history, the festival was a staple of the town throughout the 1990s. However, former organizers eventually renamed the event the Central Heritage Festival before taking a hiatus after four years.

But Ballentine credits the new Central Railway Museum for the festival's re-emergence last year.

"The Railway Museum was the real catalyst in bringing it back and is a super nice draw," he said. "They do some neat things that people can see."



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Free train rides for children are among the activities scheduled for the Central Railroad Festival from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday.

Local restaurants, music and arts and crafts vendors will take part.

Ballentine is also excited about including Collins Ole Towne — featuring a chapel, blacksmith shop and schoolhouse in the backyard of local resident Roy Collins — and Freedom's Hill Church. Collins Ole Towne will offer free hayrides while Freedom's Hill, an abolitionist church relocated from North Carolina, features a dramatic history of churchgoers who stood against slavery and faced violent opposition.

"It's great to have that piece of history, including a piece of Wesleyan history, right in our backyard," Ballentine said, adding that the church assisted slaves through the Underground Railroad.

Ballentine said visitors will be welcomed at each historic site and volunteers will provide brief histories.

Entertainment for children will include a musical show, a balloon artist, train rides, face painting, a Thomas the Tank Engine display and other activities. There will also be a tour of the Central red caboose, a rail car and O, S and Standard gauge model train layouts in the Railway Museum's Heritage Room. The Standard layout is the only one of its kind in a public museum in the U.S.

Music will be provided by Hobo Band with Dean Watson and Greg Barfield, Sweet Potato Pie (Young Appalachian Musicians), The Difference from Southern Wesleyan University, Tony Tidwell and The Folsom Prison Gang — a band that pays tribute to the late country music singer Johnny Cash. The Hot Foot Cloggers of Six Mile will also perform.

For more information, visit www.centralrrfestival.com.

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