

Historic Kenosha parade locomotive restored, returning after 12 years

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Dave Lyons, of the Sons of the American Legion, drives the Forty and Eight Voiture 410 parade vehicle which was built in the 1940s and recently restored for upcoming events.

SEAN KRAJACIC, KENOSHA NEWS

A familiar sight will be returning for the Kenosha Civic Veterans Parade on July 2 after more than a decade tucked away in a Downtown garage.

Some Downtown residents may have already spotted the curiosity; the Forty and Eight Voiture 410's parade locomotive, a dark blue and gold trimmed steam train built on a 1937 Nash Lafayette vehicle frame.

The historic vehicle was originally built in the 1940s by Voiture 410, Kenosha's branch of the veterans and nonprofit organization Forty and Eight. For decades, it was a regular of events and parades across both Kenosha County and the United States. Jackson, Michigan, Cleveland, Ohio, Niagara Falls, for years the locomotive made its way across America. Dave Lyons, a key figure in the vehicle's restoration and the son of former Forty and Eight national president William Lyons, recalled its storied past.

"It's been to Atlanta, Louisville, Kansas City, Omaha ... how much room do you have in this story?" Lyons said, laughing.

In 2011, the locomotive was parked in a garage Downtown where it sat for over a decade, gathering dust. Jim Schmidt, president of Voiture 410, said that interest in returning the locomotive to its former glory began more than a year ago.



Dave Lyons, of the Sons of the American Legion, right, and Paul Ciarelli, member of Forty and Eight Voiture 410, get ready to take the American Legion Post 21 parade vehicle, which was built in the 1940s and recently restored for upcoming events, for a spin.

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“Our membership had started to fade, and then when I put the word out that we would probably sell this, a bunch of veterans stepped forward to revitalize the group,” Schmidt said.

What followed was several months, and many hundreds of man-hours, of work to restore the locomotive. Paul Ciarelli, correspondent for Voiture 410, said Chief Engineer Tim Green was the driving force behind physically restoring the locomotive, which was in poor condition after 12 years in a garage.

“The wheels were falling off,” Ciarelli said.

Work was extensive. They flushed out the radiator and gas tank, took out the air compressors, completely rebuilt the carburetor and installed an electronic sound system. While it won't be travelling across America anymore, it's ready to take to Kenosha's streets once again.

Despite the extent of the work, much of the vehicle is original, and it still sports the old City of Kenosha emblem. That respect to the history was important to the members.



Paul Ciarelli, of Forty and Eight Voiture 410, steps off the parade post's vehicle which was built in the 1940s and recently restored for upcoming events.

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Paul Ciarelli, of Forty and Eight Voiture 410, smiles as he sits in the cockpit.

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Jim Schmidt, of Forty and Eight Voiture 410, sits in the rear passenger area of the Forty and Eight Voiture 410 parade vehicle, which was built in the 1940s, was recently restored for upcoming events.

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“There’s a lot of memories that go back to when we knew all the guys, the older World War II veterans, that started this. They brought us into this,” Ciarelli said.

For Lyons, who can still recall his father sitting in the driver’s seat, whether driving cross-country to veterans conventions or at local parades, the connection is personal.

“I’m proud, very proud,” Lyons said. “I sit there now and it brings tears to my eyes. All the times my dad was in there ... they had a lot of fun.”

In honor of his father, Lyons will be driving the locomotive at the upcoming Civic Veterans Parade.

Long history

The story behind the Forty and Eight locomotive and its design dates back to World War I, and the French army box cars used to transport troops and supplies. Train cars could hold 40 men or eight horses, which became the origin for the name of the veterans and nonprofit organization Forty and Eight.

Years after the war, France donated 48 of these boxcars to America laden with gifts, one for each state at the time. The Voiture 410 parade vehicle is designed to resemble a train locomotive, harkening back to that long history.

The parade locomotive will also be used to help raise funds for nursing program scholarships, a major focus of the national Forty and Eight organization.

More information about Kenosha’s Forty and Eight, the parade locomotive and more can be found at sewivets.org/Voiture410/.



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