

Volunteer Spotlight - Barry Keegan

Barry Keegan is LASTA's Director of Marketing and Merchandising. He is a member of the Board of Directors, an active Crew Member, and was this year's Steam Fest 2009 Lead.

Barry, his wife Suzette and their two children live in Metairie. By day Barry is a Mechanical Engineer for Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company at the NASA Michoud Assembly Facility where Space Shuttle External Tanks have been assembled with his computer-controlled welding equipment. Barry and Suzette are also successful entrepreneurs. They help people to start and grow businesses that take advantage of the emerging trends in the Internet, enabling people with limited business experience to become business owners of their own.

Barry's interests include offshore and marsh fishing, long distance bike rides like the 150 mile MS Tour for Cure, and LSU and Saints football. He has restored classic and antique cars and is a volunteer Scout leader. He also has an interest in the history of technology and unusual mechanical equipment needed to satisfy specialty applications, an interest that fits well with his LASTA work.

It was actually volleyball though that led Barry to LASTA. He and Suzette played in sand leagues at Coconut Beach in New Orleans for years. In 1999 a shoulder injury sent him to see a sports doctor at Ochsner Clinic by the LASTA Yard. From the seventh floor he noticed the locomotives and rail cars across the street rusting away. "I thought 'if they ever did anything with that, I'd help *them* out,'" Barry recounts. Four years later, in 2003, the Times-Picayune ran a story about the restoration of SP 745 and the need for volunteers to help. "I walked in the yard the following weekend and became one of '*them*,'" he says.

"When I arrived at the Yard, I met LASTA's first President Bruce



LASTA Volunteer and Steam Fest 2009 Coordinator Barry Keegan "posts the colors" on SP#745.

Bill Hamblin, Jr. photo

Brown. He asked what I could do; I asked what he needed done," Barry remembers. Having done auto body painting between college semesters and during car restorations, it was a natural fit to work on the interior of the "Jefferson" parlor car. "Back then the Jefferson was all beat up and had a big hole in the floor, among other problems. It was in really bad shape but you had to look past all that to visualize the finished product," Barry said. "After the inside was done it looked great but the outside was still untouched."

This led to a much bigger job painting the Jefferson exterior and the other cars over the next year and a half. From coupling to coupling, from rooftop to the underside of the frames and trucks, sand blasting, priming and painting was done outdoors with the vagaries of the weather to further complicate matters. The very last details were finally finished the day before the train started the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Trip around the state.

Currently in his director position he is working on additional public appearances for LASTA at regional

festivals or events at the yard. "With Katrina behind us, membership is growing. The 745 is nearing the end of a thorough five-year inspection. Once that is done we have an opportunity to get back out in front of the public where the engine belongs. Additional film and movie opportunities are also in the works."

Barry comments, "In 2005, LASTA had little funding to prepare for the state tour. Many companies helped get us going in those early days. One in particular, Sigma Coatings, donated the industrial urethane paint that is still on the cars to this day. The signature 'LASTA Green' color was selected straight off a color chip chart and has served us well, but is weathering after years of exposure."

Next year, in addition to the marketing efforts, Barry plans to "return to his roots" to once again repaint the cars with a durable, top-quality paint. "This new finish needs to be a reflection of LASTA's bright future."

Jonathan Sturges