

## Steam train draws a crowd to Geneseo

By Lisa Depies, [Geneseo Republic](#)

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Geneseo, Ill. — An estimated 10,000 visitors were in Geneseo this past weekend for Trains, Planes and Automobiles.

“The weekend was a huge success,” said Geneseo Chamber of Commerce director Brian DeJohn.

The six-year old festival “is on an upswing” said DeJohn. “I think it creates a lot of excitement.”

A feature of this year’s celebration was a trio of roundtrip Geneseo to Annawan excursions behind a 2-10-2 coal-fired steam locomotive owned by the Iowa Interstate Railroad.



The Iowa Interstate Railroad's 2-10-2 coal-fired steam locomotive pulls into Geneseo after one of its Geneseo-to-Annawan excursions on Sept. 10. A total of 1,845 people bought tickets for the train rides. *Photo by Lisa Depies*

“We sold 1,845 tickets for the train rides,” said DeJohn. Of those tickets, 1,300 were sold in advance with the remaining tickets sold the day of the ride.

Trips were offered at 9 a.m., 11:45 a.m. and 2 p.m. and DeJohn said the 2 p.m. train “was sold out.”

“Different people came (to Trains, Planes and Automobiles) for different reasons, but I think the steam train was part of the draw. They came for that and then realized we had all of this other stuff going on as well,” explained DeJohn.

Geneseo Chamber of Commerce staff promoted the Trains, Planes and Automobiles weekend at this summer’s train festival in Rock Island. That festival, one of the world’s largest, drew train enthusiasts from around the world.

DeJohn said many of those train enthusiasts returned to the area for Geneseo’s event.

“When we sold the tickets, we’d take a look at the addresses we were sending them to. They were from all different states and all different parts of Illinois. The train’s appeal brought a broad range of people to town,” he said.

Though the steam train was a popular attraction at this year’s Trains, Planes and Automobiles, DeJohn said he doesn’t think the train will be at next year’s festivities.

“We’re thinking this will possibly be an every-other-year thing,” said DeJohn.

On Sept. 10, the streets of downtown Geneseo were lined with classic cars as part of the Maple City Cruiser's annual car show.

More than 300 cars were on display — one of the largest shows in the event's history.

"The Maple City Cruisers do a tremendous amount of work during the weekend, and we get a lot of cooperation from them," said DeJohn. "I didn't expect us to have to line cars up as far as we did. It was nice to see everything full downtown."

Free movie showings, museum tours, model train displays, food and children's activities also attracted crowds to downtown Geneseo.

At 11:30 a.m., the festivities paused for a ceremony remembering the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and paying tribute to local first responders.

The weekend's activities also included a fly-in at Gen-Air Airpark by members of the National Stearman Association.

Brett Lohman of Gen-Air said approximately 70 of the World War II-era planes were at the Sept. 8 fly-in.

A Cruise the Canal event on Sept. 9 gave visitors the chance to travel along the Hennepin Canal's bike path in golf carts and learn about the century-old canal's history.

"Overall, (Trains, Planes and Automobiles) was probably one of the smoothest things we've done so far," said DeJohn. "It was just the perfect storm. We had beautiful weather and a lot of cooperation and participation.

"We've received all positive feedback from the weekend," he said.