



Paintbrushes “Fly” at Richton Park Metra Station

by Peggy Prielozny

In the April 2 issue of **Southland Voice**, when we left beleaguered Richton Park Mayor Rick Reinbold, he had already sent out an e-mail blast with photos of the deplorable conditions of the Metra station in his town, in an effort to call attention to it and get some remediation.

As reported, this e-mail blast not only caught the attention of the media, but of State Representative Al Riley, Democrat of Olympia Fields and member of the Mass Transit Committee.

Leaping into action, Riley arranged to meet Mayor Reinbold, along with daily Metra commuter and Richton Park Trustee Brian Coleman for an inspection tour of the neglected station on a Saturday.

By the time of this inspection tour, most of the snow and ice had already melted, leaving the station mostly dry.

Nevertheless, Mayor Reinbold pointed-out how the months of dripping and streaming water had left their streaky marks on every vertical surface of the station.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Rep. Riley had already contacted the movers and shakers in Metra, including Executive Director Don Orseno, Director Lynne Corrao and Noe Gallardo of Community Affairs.

Between the normal wear and tear of heavy rush-hour traffic and the erosion from the constant flow of water all winter long, the concrete floors, stairs, ramps and platform were seriously pitted and crumbling.

Some sections looked like dried-out chunks of oatmeal, leaving exposed rebar.

In the most recent episode of the NPR program, “99% Invisible,” host Roman Mars pointed out when rebar is exposed to the elements, due to cracking of the surrounding concrete, it can rust, swelling up to four times its original size, which will cause further damage to the structure, until the entire structure becomes a safety hazard.

As the tour continued up to the platform, Mayor Reinbold indicated failing ceiling patches that were crumbling.

“It was a shoddy repair job to begin with. You can see where the water has leaked through the patches and mold has formed, which is an unhealthy condition for the passengers,” he said.

On the platform, the windows of the warming station were weather-worn and scratched to within an inch of their lives by vandals.

Mayor Reinbold explained homeless people had been over-nighting in the warming station.

He discovered this during one of his many inspection tours, finding piles of trash on the floor and the heating lamps, installed for the comfort of commuters, cranked

all the way up to 80 F, needlessly wasting expensive electricity, and thus, taxpayers’ money.

Wherever there was exposed metal from chipping and peeling paint, there was rust.

Paint was chipping and peeling from structural steel surfaces, exposing them to the oxidizing elements, leaving rust stains on the surrounding concrete.

While walking down the wheelchair ramp from the platform to the street level, he grabbed the railing and pulled-up a sizable eighth-inch thick chunk with 27 years of paint layers that had covered a coating of rust, almost as thick, right off the top of the railing.

“Unbelievable,” he remarked.

Rep. Riley and Trustee Coleman nodded in agreement.

As the tour concluded, Rep. Riley paused to discuss the sad state of disrepair and neglect that had befallen the Richton Park METRA Station with Mayor Reinbold and Trustee Coleman.

They were treated to an impromptu lesson in practical civics from Rep. Riley, who has been called one of the most effective legislators in State Government.

He pointed out how half the battle, when dealing with governmental authorities, is to find and go to the exact authorities that have jurisdiction over the matter in question.

Rep. Riley was spellbinding as he discoursed on just about anything imaginable having to do with government, mass transit and the inequities of how badly neglected and overlooked the Southland is.

When it comes to having their needs met, while DuPage County, Northern Cook and Lake Counties, as well as the Far Northwestern Suburbs appear to have merely to snap their fingers to get governmental goodies bestowed upon them.

He was puzzled on how ironic it is that while Highland Park can get Metra to hand-out money for fancy new pedestrian crossing gates at their Ravinia Station, Richton Park and several other Southland municipalities can’t even get Metra to cough-up money for basic maintenance of their stations.

What could be the cause of these apparent injustices in the disbursement of Metra funds?

Is it expectations? Can it be the officials in the north, northwest and west expect to get their needed funding and more, while Southland officials, accustomed to being ignored, have lowered their expectations?

One prominent, but anonymous official speculated “the best-dressed mayors get the money, honey” -- something SSMMA members might want to keep in mind, as they head down to Springfield for their Annual SSMMA Lobby Day.

Rep. Riley concluded by advising

Mayor Reinbold to work closely with the new Metra Executive Director Orseno.

“I believe he’s a good man,” he commented.

The following Monday, Metra work crews showed-up in full-force at the Richton Park Station to begin the extensive repair work.

Later that morning, Director Corrao and Gallardo of Metra Community Affairs met with Village officials at the station for further inspection, and to discuss the work ahead.

When asked what took them so long, Director Corrao reiterated what Mayor Reinbold had been hearing from METRA for the past two years, “We were planning to do this work as soon as weather permitted.”

Postscript: With work at the Richton Park Metra Station having gone on for several weeks now, there are visible signs of improvements. The holes in the ceiling have been patched.

The thick layers of paint and rust have been scraped off the railings with power-grinders. Priming and painting have begun.

Acknowledging the magnitude of the job, Mayor Reinbold seems pleased with the progress that has been, and continues to be made in the station’s facelift.

In a voicemail message he left for **Southland Voice**, Mayor Reinbold praised Metra’s efforts on the Richton Park Station “. . . They’re actually making quite a bit of progress. And I’m grateful for that. I was just up there this morning, and there were five or six guys up there working, cleaning and painting. I was very pleased to notice this morning after the rain we’ve had, the roof was not leaking. I do think they’re making a sincere effort -- for that I’m grateful. I’m also grateful for your coverage, because that was one of the things you definitely helped get them to the mark on this. We appreciate it. We have to be vigilant, based on my conversation with the new Metra Chair, Don Orseno who seems to be genuinely concerned, because of the state of disrepair it had gotten into. We’re definitely making progress and moving in the right direction.”

photos courtesy of Peggy Prielozny

