



Marilyn Merdzinski taking “one last spin” around the monorail loop before the Herpolsheimer’s Train was dismantled.

My Favorite Museum Object Of All Time Is Back!

by Marilyn Merdzinski, Curator of Collections & Preservation

If you’re like me—a Baby Boomer who grew up in Grand Rapids—I suspect you’ll be as excited as I am to once again see the Herp’s Train!

The Museum was entrusted with this local history icon by City Centre owner Peter Secchia in 2000 when the old Herpolsheimer’s Department Store building was renovated to become the new Grand Rapids Police Department. As part of the salvage operation team, I was on site at the start of demolition. You can imagine how tickled I was when asked if I wanted to “take one last spin” around the monorail loop before the train was dismantled for the move to the Museum. What can I say—it was a blast!

When I boarded the train that day I instantly recalled how it felt to be inside it as a kid in the late 1950’s when my sister and I would take a spin around the Toy Department before stopping to see Santa. I remembered lacing my much smaller fingers through the window wires and straining to catch a glimpse of my mom below. I know others share similar memories.

The train made its inaugural run in 1949 as the *Santa Express*. It was approximately 33’ long and each of its three cars held 8 smiling riders. In the 1960’s during the space race the train got a new identity as the *Rocket Express*. In 1976—with a coat of yellow paint and the addition of a face

and glasses—it was dubbed the *Caterpillar Express*. It changed one last time in the 1980’s as part of Mackie’s World Children’s Mall and wore a new jungle motif and moniker, the *Dino Express*.

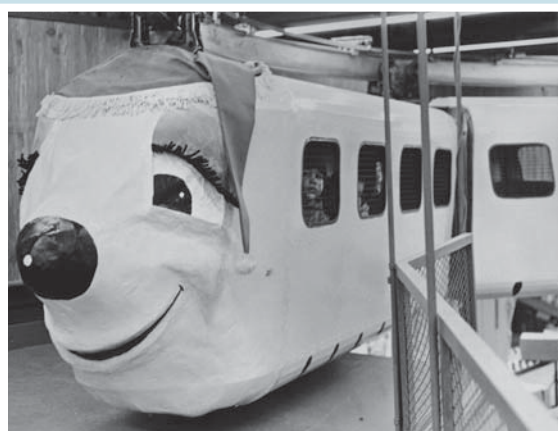


Photo courtesy of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections Archives, Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids, MI

Museum visitors will be able to see this special community treasure on display in the lobby from November 22 to January 4. You can climb aboard to relive your own childhood memories and make new ones with your families!

P.S. If you’re a former rider, please contact us. We’d love to collect your old train photos or home movies and keep them preserved at the Public Museum right along with the train itself! We invite you to share your stories and images by posting to our blog at <http://grmuseum.wordpress.com>.

