



Eddie Yost Retires

Engineer **Eddie Yost** "hung it up" on August 22, 2002 with 53 years of service as an engineer on the Wisconsin Division. **Eddie** was the last man on the Wisconsin Division Engineer's roster to have run steam engines! Here's **Eddie's** story as told in the Chicago Sun-Times on August 22, 2002

On hot Chicago nights in the days before air conditioning, young **Ed Yost** would lie with his bedroom, window open, listening to the faraway whistles of steam locomotives. He'd spend his 10 cents weekly allowance taking the United Motor Coach bus from his Edison Park home to Des Plaines to spend the day watching freight trains go past. He'd sit near the Deval Tower that controlled comings and goings on tracks used by three rail lines: the SOO Line, the Milwaukee Road and the Chicago & North Western Railway. "That was my boyhood dream, to work the big steam locomotives," he said.

Work on them he did, until steam disappeared and then he had to settle for running the diesel locomotives that took over on commuter, freight and through passenger trains running in and out of Chicago. **Yost** was the last man left on the Union Pacific's Chicago work roster to have operated steam locomotives. Today his railroad pals will get together at the former Chicago & North Western's Madison Street Station for a farewell celebration marking his retirement. He spent 53 years with first the North Western and then the Union Pacific after the lines merged April 26, 1995.

"Talk about romance of the rails," **Yost** said. "I used to love to just sit there and watch a train go by at night. When the fire box door opened, you'd see the flash of light in the sky and you'd know the fireman was putting coal on the fire."

His father didn't want him shoveling coal and said he should be a surveyor. But when **Yost** graduated from Taft High School in 1949, he took the streetcar downtown and asked for a job with the North Western. He really wanted to work on Milwaukee Road freight trains, but he didn't have a car to get to Bensenville for an interview.

He started on the North Western as a section hand, maintaining tracks and roadbed. After a year he went into engine service. He began as a fireman and shoveled coal until 1956, at which time the railroad dieselized, and then put in another 13 years before he had enough seniority to become a full-time engineer. He'd barely started when he had to take two years out to serve in the Korean War.

Soon after he started as a fireman **Yost** began the three years of training needed to become an engineer. Then, besides working as a fireman, he went on the "extra board" and was called to fill in when more engineers were needed. In 1969, he became a full-time engineer. He pulled a lot of commuter duty but found the flat tracks and steady speeds boring. His favorite run was Chicago to Fond du Lac, Wis.

"Once you left Milwaukee there wasn't a straight or a level piece of track. It was uphill, downhill, around a curve to the left, to the right, and that made it more interesting," he said. **Yost** pulled a lot of commuter trains, but he preferred freights drawn by steam locomotives. "You had a train about a mile long and sometimes two miles long. It was always different," he said. "I'd like to see the steam engines back. It was more challenging."