

ALASKA

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Alaska Railroad Dedicates Coach to 50-Year Conductor Warren Redfearn

The Alaska Railroad's long-serving conductor retires after half-century career

TALKEETNA, Alaska – On Thursday at noon, the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) will honor the career of Conductor Warren Redfearn with a coach dedication ceremony at the Talkeetna Depot. The dedication ceremony will also serve as a retirement celebration for Redfearn, who is turning in his conductor's uniform after almost 50 years working for ARRC. Immediately following the coach dedication, Redfearn will enjoy a farewell ride as honorary conductor aboard the Hurricane Turn Flagstop Train.

Growing up in Anderson, Alaska, Redfearn remembers taking the train as a part of life. Before the Parks Highway was completed, the Tanana River would become seasonally impassable due to ice conditions, and the family would ride the railroad to Fairbanks to go grocery shopping. Redfearn remembers his first ride aboard the Alaska Railroad at age 10 to visit Denali National Park. "I followed the conductor everywhere, but I never once thought of doing the job myself," he said.

That opportunity came in 1975, as ARRC was scaling up employment to support the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System. Redfearn says a friend who had just hired on at ARRC suggested he turn in an application. He did, and was promptly hired – but not without a warning from the hiring manager. "She wanted me to know that this was a temporary job, and not a career," said Redfearn. He started as a brakeman before quickly advancing to conductor, a role he has held for the better part of half a century.

It didn't take long for Redfearn to learn which kinds of jobs he liked. "Work trains are fun because you see an accomplishment," he said, referring to train operations in support of ARRC capital projects. "Hauling in materials, positioning the train to dump gravel. I like being able to point to a new roadbed or bridge and say I helped build that."



ARRC Conductor Warren Redfearn in Nenana during the Alaska Railroad's centennial celebration. Photo Courtesy: Alaska Railroad

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But passenger trains were always his favorite. "Freight doesn't talk to you," he said. "I love Alaska, and I love sharing Alaska with the people on the train. I still get excited to share moose and bears and the mountains with visitors."

Redfearn's love of passenger trains was evident during his time working on the Hurricane Turn Train. The route, which is the last flagstop train service in the nation, provides access for remote cabins north of Talkeetna that can't be reached by the road system. Redfearn took a liking to the route and the unique opportunities afforded by the flexible flagstop train. If there was time in the schedule, he'd stop the train at Twin Bridges to let

passengers step out and enjoy the view at a particularly nice bend in the Indian River. A similar stop at Curry, along with a conversation with a local business owner, led to the development of a new tour option: the River, Rails and Trails Tour from Mahay's Riverboat, in which passengers ride the train to Curry and then disembark for a guided tour of the area and jetboat ride back to Talkeetna.



ARRC Conductor Warren Redfearn greets passengers as they arrive in Nenana on July 15, 2023. Photo Courtesy: Alaska Railroad

Onboard the Hurricane Turn, Redfearn made a special effort to ensure his youngest passengers enjoyed the ride. "I still think of my first ride on the Alaska Railroad, and how that conductor let me follow him around," he said. "When I became a conductor, I would always do my best to make sure that every kid had the best time possible." That included onboard Alaska trivia contests and a special gift of a 'golden spike' – that is, discarded railroad spikes Redfearn would receive from ARRC section crews and spray paint gold.

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He also appealed to ARRC management to add a Vista-Dome passenger coach to the Hurricane Turn. The Vista-Dome dates to 1952 and at the time of its introduction was considered the leading standard of passenger coaches, featuring a panoramic, glass-enclosed observation dome at the top of a short flight of stairs. "One of my biggest thrills on the Hurricane was getting that car on there," said Redfearn. On Thursday, ARRC will dedicate the Vista-Dome 521 coach in his honor.

"In many ways, Warren exemplifies the best of the Alaska Railroad," said ARRC President and CEO Bill O'Leary. "The pride he takes in his work is obvious, whether it's helping local off-gridders unload their gear from the baggage car or going above and beyond to share the best of Alaska with our visitors. This organization has been incredibly fortunate to benefit from fifty years of Warren's considerable energy and professional excellence. He'll be missed by many as we wish him all the best in a well-deserved retirement."

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