All Aboard! —Joy Rails, Arcade & Attica Railroad, and Medina Railroad Museum

— by Deborah Williams



It was our first "arms held high" moment. This was the signal to employ the brakes on our special electric rail cruisers as we were traveling along on railroad tracks near Arcade. Smiles were everywhere and it was clear that we were all having fun.

How did we get here? We can thank Ben Mowatt who lives in New Hampshire. Several years ago on a family vacation, he discovered railbike adventures. These human propelled quadricycles travel on retired railroad tracks to offer up-close views of nature and new experiences to riders.

He left his 30-year accounting career and founded **Joy Rails** in 2024 to bring fun to all riders. This past summer, Joy Rails brought the four-seater electric rail cruisers to Arcade, the company's fourth location. Joy Rails is based in Curriers, the railroad depot where the Arcade & Attica trains turn around to return to the Arcade train station.

At the Curriers Depot, there is a building where snacks are available, a small museum, rest rooms and a wooden train for children to climb aboard.

Back on our ten-mile railbike voyage we passed a bear crossing sign, although there have been no bear reports so far and staff admitted to installing the sign. There is also an alligator sign on one of the ponds but, of course, there is no danger of alligators in this northern climate.

We move along the ten-mile trip on pedal power or electric assist with no pedaling needed and pass Smokey's Bar & Grill and Conroy Motor Corp., amazingly the oldest Ford dealer in all of New York State. The tracks cross the road a couple times, and we stop and wait for the "all clear" signal to cross the road.

"We have seatbelts on our 13 carts and this first season we have welcomed a wide range of passengers age-wise ranging from a passenger with a three-month old baby, and our oldest rider so far was a 96-year-old," explained Sumner Griffin, Joy Rails supervisor. "The ride is popular with families, and each cart has four seats."

The inaugural season is expected to end this year in mid-November, but the Arcade and Attica Railroad trains will still be chugging down the tracks. Beginning November 21 and continuing weekends through December 20, the holiday train called Santa's Wonderland Express will be transporting riders to a festive "North Pole" at the Curriers Depot.

"This is a very popular train ride for us and we often sell-out early," explained Tammy Hobson, station manager. "I just had a phone call from a hopeful rider in California who is planning to return to the area for Christmas. It has become a tradition for this family and many others to ride the holiday train."

The Wonderland Express excursion includes a visit with Santa, meeting reindeer, mailing holiday wish lists and exploring the Elf House. Hot chocolate and cookies are available for purchase.

"Generations of families have made a holiday ride part of their Christmas tradition," Hobson said. "It really is a quite magical experience."

The Arcade & Attica Railroad was declared a National Historic Site in 1981. It is the oldest continuously operating railroad under the same corporate identity in the state. It is also the only railroad in New York offering steam locomotive passenger excursions. The steam locomotive is on winter break now and will return for service in May.

The railroad has its origins in the Buffalo, Attica & Arcade Railroad, which officially opened in 1880. The rails we were riding on were first spiked down in 1881 and standardized in 1895 to connect with the Pennsylvania Railroad.

By 1917, the railroad company was thinking of closing the section of the railroad between Arcade and Attica.



Attica & Arcade Railroad

Business leaders along the line were very concerned. The line was vital to their businesses. Interested parties began to raise money to purchase the line. Stock was sold to farmers, merchants and anyone else who was interested.

There were 365 people who raised $79,000 and formed the Arcade and Attica Railroad Corp. The small corporation still owns the railroad today. The railroad has an active freight service that has transported milk, cheese, grain, cattle, gasoline, coal and mail.

The railroad is one of the last private common carrier railroads operating both freight and passenger service.

Up north is Medina, an Erie Canal town and home to one of the largest model-train layouts in the country and the place to go for the popular **Polar Express Train Ride.** The rides operate on weekends beginning November 21 and continuing into December.

The one-hour train ride is perfect for families and is quite enchanting. Climb aboard one of the powerful locomotives and historic train cars as it departs the **Medina Railroad Museum** for the North Pole to pick up Santa Claus himself. Enjoy hot chocolate and sweet

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For thousands of years, humans have been partaking in breaking bread and sharing wine with one another as a form of connection. It is one of the few things in this world so simple, yet so powerful. Sitting around a table, looking each other in the eye, talking, and experiencing all of the senses together. Food I tell ya! It does bring people together and if you know me, food is my love language. But, even if it's not a restaurant, anything you can do together that you deem a fun activity is powerful.

You're experiencing each other's undivided attention. You are whisked away into a fantastical world by the aroma of the meal plated in front of you or the activity you have chosen. You're not parents in these moments; you are the two people who fell in love in the first place and chose this life together. Two love birds having a collective moment together. Enjoying one another. Free of responsibility for that carved out timeframe. Just the two of you. That is what I mean when I say date your partner. That is what I mean when I talk about how important it is to turn your date night into a full-on experience. Pay attention to the person sitting there with you and take full advantage of this moment as a couple. Not parents, a couple.

You can create such a moving and meaningful experience with your partner merely by just going on a date to a fun restaurant. These articles are about more than just where to go in and around Buffalo, New York. They are my way of teaching you my superpower, and my superpower is connection.

Anyway, if you know me, yeah, I'm a little extra. Leave it to me to turn a simple date night into a therapeutic session with your partner. But hey, whatever it takes, right? Your relationship is important and should always be put first. These articles may usually be about the best places to have an experience surrounded by food and libation, but I think what warms my heart the most about writing these articles is knowing that I am helping couples build connection on a fun and playful level.

This is Western New York Family Magazine, and this is the Parents' Night Out column. I speak to the masses, but you parents are the ones I'm really trying to drive this home to. As a mom of 23 years and a married woman of 27 years, I know a thing or two about how hard this juggle of parenting and marriage can be. But over the years, I've learned more than a thing or two about how to keep it all together. Connection is key. Connect with your partner. Make the time. Enjoy each other. Remember each other. Love one another.

I hope this resonates with someone. Even if it's just one couple, I feel honored to have helped.

Get out there and date your partner!



Tasha Wagner is a Buffalo born and raised, recent empty nester, known for her connections in the local foodie scene. Tasha is fully equipped to be your personal date night concierge.

FAMILY TRAVEL
continued...

treats while singing and dancing all the way to the Pole.

The story of The Polar Express Train Ride is based on the story of a child's Christmas Eve journey first told in the award-winning book by Chris Van Allsburg. It was adapted for the big screen in 2004.

Passengers pass through the quiet wilderness for the special North Pole visit. The ride is set to the sounds of the motion picture soundtrack, and everyone is invited to listen and read along with the magical story. Once the train arrives at the North Pole, Santa Claus is waiting to board the train. He greets each child and presents them with a special gift as in the story. On the return to Medina, passengers are invited to sing Christmas carols.

The museum is open Polar Express days and features one of the largest collections of train artifacts and memorabilia known to exist under one roof.



Medina Railroad Museum

The HO scale layout is the longest—all on one floor—an immense 14 ft. by 204 ft. Construction of the model train layout continues. Visitors are invited to blow the train whistles.

The museum is a couple blocks from downtown Medina. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is one of the finest examples of 19th century commercial architecture on the Erie Canal.

Travel Tip of the Month: For **Joy Rails** visit joyrails.com or call 716-389-9280. For **Arcade & Attica Railroad** visit www.aarailroad.com or call 585-492-3100. For **Medina Railroad** visit medinarailroad.org or call 585-798-6106. The holiday train rides in both Arcade and Medina are very popular and regularly sell out, so early reservations are a must.

Deborah Williams lives in Holland, NY and is a veteran travel writer whose work has appeared in national and international publications. She is the recipient of the Society of American Travel Writers' Lowell Thomas Gold Travel Writing Award.