

GLACIER RAIL PARK: A TOAST TO TRANSFORMATION

October 07, 2018 at 5:00 am | By DUNCAN ADAMS Daily Inter Lake



Work continues at the Glacier Rail Park site in Kalispell on Tuesday, Oct. 2. (Casey Kreider/Daily Inter Lake)

The celebrants drove a silver spike that memorable day in 1892 and then they all got hammered.

Well, maybe not all.

Kalispell resident George Stannard once described the celebratory mood marking the arrival of the Great Northern Railway to the city: "Beer and whiskey were as free as the fresh air, and that evening there were many men that were partly sober."

Monday's grand opening of the 42-acre Glacier Rail Park in Kalispell promises to be more staid. Post-event beverages will be coffee and bottled water.

Yet enthusiasm likely will run high. The event is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m.

Monday's word of the day might just be "transformative."

That's the adjective repeatedly uttered when officials describe the anticipated impact of the Glacier Rail Park and its companion multi-use trail on Kalispell, its downtown and the Flathead Valley.

The 1.5 mile Kalispell Trail ultimately will replace the railroad tracks that have, in recent history, served two companies that will be the rail park's first tenants. Just the prospect of the trail has helped lure businesses downtown, said Tom Jentz, director of Kalispell's department of planning and building.

Why a grand opening Monday, given that tenants CHS Mountain West Co-op and Northwest Drywall and Roofing Supply haven't moved operations there yet and the rails won't come up until after they do?

"We are celebrating that the rail park infrastructure is complete," said Kim Morisaki, business development and marketing director for Montana West Economic Development. "And we wanted to do that in early October instead of late October because it could snow anytime."

Morisaki added, "The rail is completed. The utilities are in. We are 'open for business.'"

CHS contractors have begun construction of the company's new fertilizer plant, which is rising skyward at the site off Whitefish Stage Road. And some concrete work has been completed for new grain elevators.

Ultimately, CHS Mountain West, whose parent company is Minnesota-based CHS Inc., once known as Cenex Harvest States, will also site at Glacier Rail Park its retail store and regional offices. ACHS will build its fueling station at the intersection of Montclair Drive, East Oregon Lane and Flathead Drive.

Northwest Drywall and Roofing Supply plans to launch construction in April 2019, according to Pamela Mower, general manager. Construction should be complete by October 2019, she said.

The company receives by rail about 65 percent of the products it sells.

"We will continue to operate in our current location, receiving rail shipments, etc., and plan on remaining open for business during the move," Mower said. "Bottom line, this move will not cause us to close for any amount of time."

The earliest chapters of the rail park project and the companion trail were written decades ago, when advocates for a revitalized downtown Kalispell began to discuss ripping up the tracks.

More recently, discussions began in 2010 about how to revitalize downtown's core. Jentz and colleague Katharine Thompson King, among others, shepherded a process that yielded a Core Area plan in 2012. The plan reported that removing the railroad tracks slicing through the core area was a priority.

"The number one question then became, 'We have two businesses being served by the rail line; what do we do with them?'" Jentz said.

The answer required a unique partnership with the city and the Flathead County Economic Development Authority.

Ultimately, FCEDA bought the Brownfields site once occupied by a gravel pit operation. The authority has provided other funding too, including about \$14.2 million to help facilitate the move by CHS in exchange for CHS signing over properties it owns in central Kalispell.

"I would say that FCEDA and the city of Kalispell are the hand-in-glove partners that have made this work," said Morisaki.

Her employer, Montana West Economic Development, a private nonprofit, provides staff for FCEDA.

Other partners include Mission Mountain Railroad, a short-line railroad that will run the rail yard and a trans load facility there and provide a connection to BNSF Railway.

BNSF plans to discount by \$500,000 the sale of the abandoned right of way that will become the Kalispell Trail.

A boost for the \$21 million rail park and trail project came in 2015. The U.S. Department of Transportation awarded the venture \$10 million from its TIGER grant program, with TIGER being an acronym for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery.

Jentz has high hopes for the rail park and especially the trail, which he said could be a catalyst for redevelopment and might someday provide a link in a chain of trails from Flathead Lake to Glacier National Park.

Turner Askew, chairman of FCEDA, said his career in commercial real estate leaves him optimistic about properties along the trail.

"What's going to happen is, when the railroad tracks come out, there is going to be a lot of real estate that's visible," Askew said. "People are going to say, 'What can I do with that?'"

Officials hope to begin removing trails sometime in 2019, with construction of the trail to launch during the summer of 2020.

Morisaki said her organization has communicated with companies that might be a good fit for the Glacier Rail Park. Now that the park is complete she believes recruiting could yield results.

Meanwhile, an artifact from Kalispell's railroad past will be in the mix during Monday's grand opening.

In 1892, according to lore, George Stanford crafted a railroad spike from eight silver dollars "contributed by the ladies of Kalispell."

In 1904, the Great Northern Railway relocated its main line to Whitefish. The silver spike ultimately wound up in the possession of the Stumptown Historical Society in Whitefish.

Jill Evans, the society's executive director, will escort the spike to Monday's ceremony, though she joked that Kalispell history buffs might make a play for the relic.

"I'll be the one guarding the silver spike with my life," she said.

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Local Officials Hammer Ceremonial Golden Spikes at Glacier Rail Park Opening

Laborers putting the finishing touches on new rail park this week

BY JUSTIN FRANZ // OCT 8, 2018



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One-hundred-and-twenty-six years after a ceremonial silver spike was driven into the ground in downtown Kalispell to mark the arrival of the Great Northern

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Railway in the Flathead Valley, local officials hammered down 10 golden spikes to celebrate the completion of the new \$12.2 million Glacier Rail Park in Evergreen.

While some landscaping and paving work still needs to be completed, the majority of the rail park's construction has been completed allowing officials with the City of Kalispell and Flathead County Economic Development Authority to throw a grand opening celebration on Oct. 8. Joining them was U.S. Sen. Jon Tester and representatives from the U.S. Department of Commerce, BNSF Railway, and Watco Companies' Mission Mountain Railroad.

The completion of the rail park and eventual relocation of CHS Kalispell's grain elevator and Northwest Drywall will allow for the removal of two miles of railroad track in downtown Kalispell, clearing the way for a new trail and development.



**I CAME,
I SAW,
I stayed.**

DAVID FETVEIT BROKER/OWNER

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“This project will transform Kalispell,” Tester said.

Construction began on the Glacier Rail Park in August 2017 and since

then contractors have been busy building roads, railroad track, and water and sewer systems. Earlier this year, CHS Kalispell broke ground on its new facility and the fertilizer plant is being built at a feverish pitch. Construction has also begun on Northwest Drywall's new warehouse. If everything goes according to plan, both companies will be operating out of the 44-acre rail park by next summer. Once that happens, the rails in downtown Kalispell will be abandoned and removed.

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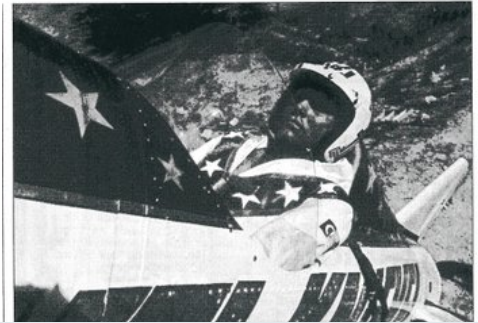
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#OTD: Eighty years ago today, on October 17, 1938, **#EvelKnieval** was born Robert Craig Knieval in **#Butte**, Montana. He led a life of extremes, lived to the age of 69, and died on November 30, 2007.



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The rail park was funded in part by a \$10 million TIGER grant the City of Kalispell and Flathead County Economic Development Authority received in 2015.

Jerry Meerkatz, president of Montana West Economic Development, the non-profit that helps operate the economic development authority, said while CHS Kalispell and Northwest Drywall are taking up the majority of the park, there is still seven acres of land ready for development. The rail park also features a team track, where multiple businesses can load and unload rail cars.

“We’re already getting a lot of calls from people and businesses that are interested in moving to the park,” he said.

Monday’s event featured speeches from local officials before they stood along the recently completed railroad track to hammer in 10 golden spikes — a ceremonial gesture that harkens back to the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad in 1869. When the railroad arrived in Kalispell in 1892, a silver spike of melted silver dollars was driven into the rail. That original spike is now on display at the Stumptown Historical Society Museum in Whitefish and it was brought down to Kalispell under glass for the grand opening celebration.

City officials and community members are currently determining what the rail trail through Kalispell will look like. When the rail trail and rail park are fully developed, the project is expected to have cost more than \$30 million.

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Grand opening set for Glacier Rail Park

MTN News 7:14 am October 5, 2018



The site of the new Glacier Rail Park in Kalispell. (MTN News photo)

KALISPELL – A rail-served industrial park under construction on the northeast edge of Kalispell will have a grand opening next week.



Kim Morisaki with Montana West Economic Development says the improved roads and utilities in the area will benefit not just Glacier Rail Park, but also the surrounding neighborhoods and businesses.



“All the train track will be in for all of the users in the park all of the safety equipment where the train track intersects with the public roads and all the public roads will be finished,” Morisaki said.

The grand opening of **Glacier Rail Park** is slated for Monday with a ribbon cutting and a ceremonial driving of a Golden Spike. A community ribbon-cutting ceremony will begin at 10 a .m.

- **Kalispell development project picks up award**

The \$21 million Kalispell project that launched in 2012 includes the Glacier Rail Park and Trail System downtown got a push in 2012 with a \$10 million TIGER grant from the US Department of Transportation.

Harvest States – a Fortune 100 company – is in the process of moving to the new rail park – and Northwest Drywall has already moved there. The removal of the existing railroad tracks is likely to begin in spring of 2020.

Additional new development in the Kalispell Core Area is expected once the rail is removed and the new pedestrian trail and linear park are constructed.

-Nicole Miller reporting for MTN News



MTN News

