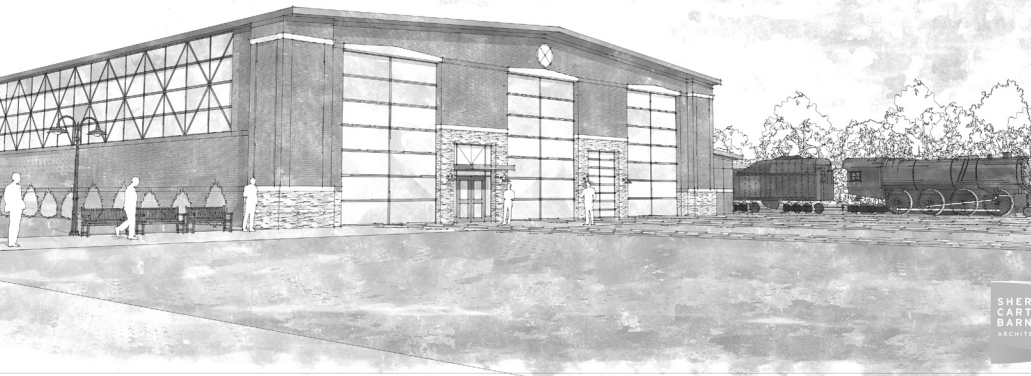


# Kentucky Steam Heritage Corporation announces “The Yard” multi-purpose venue development project



## THE YARD

Thanks to a \$120,000 contribution by the Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet, and an investment commitment by a local company, an exciting community economic development project in Estill County is poised to spur the revitalization of the Eastern Kentucky economy.

“The Yard,” a 40-acre development taking shape on former railroad property between Irvine and Ravenna, will celebrate the region’s railroad heritage while championing regional arts, food and music.

On Wednesday, Michael Hardy, Vice President of Hardy Oil Company in Irvine, announced a sponsorship of the “Hardy Pavilion at The Yard,” a 4,500-person capacity multi-use venue for use in hosting community gatherings, farmers markets and concerts. The site is a specially-zoned development purchased and championed by the Kentucky Steam Heritage Corporation, a 501(c)(3) public charity.

“While it is our hope this project may act as a catalyst for future endeavors, its intent is to provide a place for people to come together,” said Hardy. “Whether it’s an outdoor classroom, a stage for community performances or a filled-to-capacity concert, if you leave with a smile on your face, it will have served its purpose well.”

The ambitious plan to revitalize the sprawling acreage on a decommissioned rail yard began to take shape in 2017 when members of the Kentucky Steam Heritage Corporation initiated talks with CSX Transportation about purchasing the property for a future rail-based tourism and historical development.

In late-2018, Kentucky Steam purchased the property, initially focusing

on utilizing the retired CSX shop on-site, capable of restoring historic rail equipment. The building has already undergone renovations and now houses 75-year old steam locomotive C&O 2716 after an epic move across the state from the Kentucky Railway Museum last summer. The spectacle of a 450-ton locomotive being moved across the Commonwealth brought crowds of thousands trackside, and once restored, the locomotive will be one of the most powerful operating steam locomotives in the world. The engine is currently undergoing restoration at the revitalized facility in Irvine.

The shop will house a rail rehab facility and machine shop which will be open as an interactive museum, and Kentucky Steam plans to partner with area vocational schools to allow work to be done by tech students, intent on learning a skilled trade.

Jeff Saylor, Superintendent of the Estill County Schools district, says the partnership with Kentucky Steam will be an important one for their vocational program and is an exciting concept that could help spur both education and economic growth in the region.

“The Yard and the accompanying Heritage Center is an exciting development for our community,” Saylor said. “Our students will be able to participate in a soon-to-be established satellite program located in the (Kentucky Steam) machine shop. With opportunities in electrical, pipefitting and welding, our students will be able to receive hands-on practical experiences in a first-class facility with experts in their field, while helping tell the story of those who built our region.”

Since the project’s genesis, the property’s redevelopment has been aided strictly by private donations and volunteer labor, and Kentucky Steam president Chris Campbell says that the entire project couldn’t have gotten off the ground without tremendous community buy-in, and in-kind donations from companies like Sherman Carter Barnhart Architects of Lexington, who contributed site plans and designs for the campus in 2018, as well as render-

ings for the newly-announced Hardy Pavilion.

“When we pitched the idea to local community leaders, they were supportive but cautious, simply because of the large scope of our plans,” Campbell said. “Now, as we enter a new phase of the project, I think the entire county can see what impact a fully-funded initiative such as this could do for not just Estill, but many surrounding communities in the area.”

Last spring, The Anna B Milburn Charitable Lead Annuity Trust contributed a gift of \$50,000 for architectural renderings for an on-site restaurant, brewery and community center. Work Architecture + Design of Louisville produced plans for a building that combines functionality with a nod to the railroad history of the site. Campbell says the plans have sparked significant interest from several area vendors who are evaluating sponsoring the construction and operation of a rail-themed brewpub and event space.

“This type of project has a lot of interconnected parts, and the attractive design of the brewpub coupled with the exciting commitment from The Hardy Family has injected a lot of interest into making the entire concept a reality,” Campbell said. “With proper funding, we are really on the cusp of something big here.”

The only original building on the site — a former storage house and yard office dating back to the 1910’s when the rail yard was originally built by the Louisville and Nashville Railroad — will host the Kentucky Rail Heritage Center, a rail museum focusing on the area’s rich railroad heritage, which will help tell the stories of railroaders and coal miners who made Appalachian Kentucky boom. The building will also host a gift shop, ticket office and meeting spaces, and will be the center of operations for the Kentucky Steam Heritage Corporation. It will also integrate a 1940s-era train platform adjacent to the tracks for loading and unloading passengers for potential rail excursion operations.

Kentucky Steam has received gifts from CSX Transportation, Norfolk

Southern Railway and the R.J. Corman Railroad Group of Nicholasville, Kentucky. Both CSX and Norfolk Southern contributed operating diesel locomotives, and in March, R.J. Corman announced the donation of their own steam locomotive as well as a large glass building that was built in the late 2000s to house the engine in Downtown Lexington. Plans call for the building to be a life-size display case for locomotives and will house a tribute to Rick Corman, founder of the R.J. Corman railroad empire.

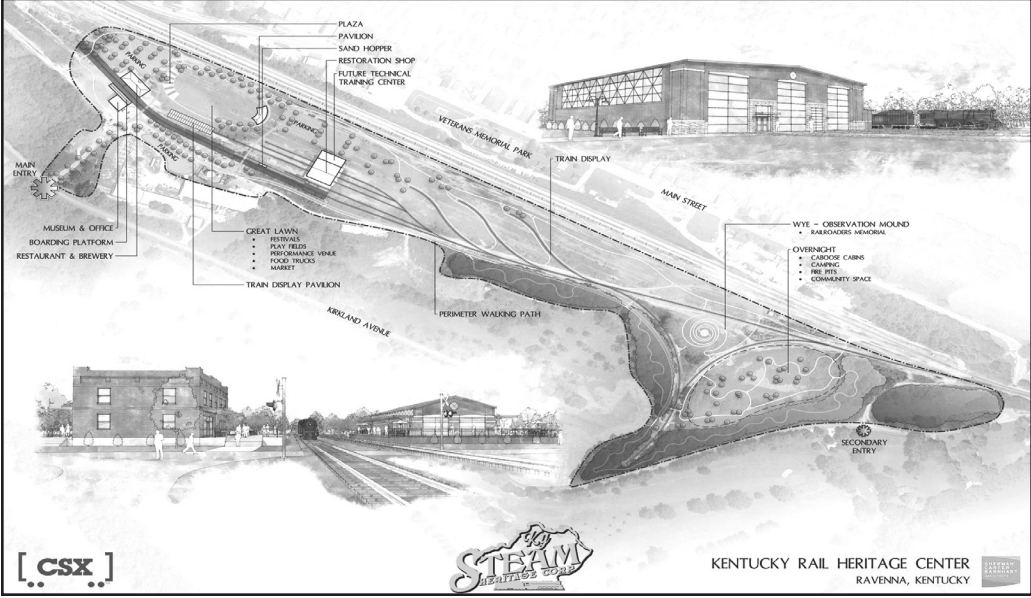
In April, Kentucky Steam secured a \$120,000 partially-forgivable loan from the Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet. The funds were allocated to fund site work for the concert venue lawn and community space, which got underway in July after Kentucky Steam retained Ridgwood Contracting, LLC, of Jackson, Kentucky, for grading and site preparation for the Hardy Pavilion.

“We cannot thank the state of Kentucky enough for their consideration for this project,” said Campbell. “Their contributions are already well-documented, and the monies allocated have gone to local contractors, some of whom have needed the work since the shuttering of coal mines in the area.”

That injection of funding for site work helped spur The Hardys to commit to funding the music pavilion. Michael Hardy said the contribution will be a legacy for the family-owned and founded Hardy Oil Company.

“Irvine is a simple town with a simple life. And that’s all (parents) Brenda and Butch Hardy and (grandparents) H.T. and Doris Hardy ever wanted,” he said. “Growing up here instilled a love for our hometown which still remains strong today. It is this love which inspired our investment.”

Kentucky Steam hopes to raise an additional \$125,000 for supporting work for the venue, including utilities and parking spaces. For more information, sponsorship opportunities or to make a tax-deductible cash or in-kind contribution to the project, visit [www.kentuckysteam.org](http://www.kentuckysteam.org).



You know, as a kid growing up in a southern Kentucky coal town, we learned from the way our parents acted, the skills they showed us, their toughness. We learned their sayings, such as “Son, the best thing to say, most of the time, is nothing at all.” One of my most favorite sayings, was “Give them roses, while they are living”. We do very little of that these days,

because of a different way of living; no more sitting around the family table for breakfast, or supper. They even call supper, dinner, now, and it is eaten mostly in a chair in your living room, checking out your e-mails.

Today, I want to take time to give some roses to my friend, here in Estill County, Rick Hardy. I met Rick as soon as we moved here, he was my nearest neighbor; not involved in drugs, or having his muffler cut off his truck. He is also like me, hates garbage that people throw along the road, and he keeps his yard looking like a golf course. He also has no barking dogs running all over the neighborhood. But the thing that really brought us together, is our love for hunting.

I recall the first time Rick saw my game collection, he was speechless. To his credit, he had harvested a few really good deer, a few turkeys; but most of all, my new friend, like myself, still enjoys squirrel hunting. When I had the land leased on Old Fox Road, we would head over and be in the woods at daylight. Although the miles, and years, have taken their

toll on my body, Rick is still able to go anytime he wants, to go squirrel hunting, unlike my weary soul.

About four years ago, I could hear him in the woods behind his house, and hear him shoot, just ever so often. I knew my buddy was at the top of his game when he would go get Shorty to clean his take for the day. Rick was having a blast. Although I took Rick with me to black bear hunt in North Carolina, turkey hunt to get his “Grand Slam”, in Wyoming, Kansas, and Florida, I don’t think he enjoyed all those trips as much as he did just stepping out his back door and getting a mess of squirrels. By the end of squirrel season, I would venture to guess, he had gotten well over two-hundred and fifty squirrels, and had Ms. G fix each and every one for him to eat. Here Rick, is you a rose, for being a real hunter, a good neighbor, and for someone that cares about his county. On second thought, here is a whole dozen. I hope you enjoy them, while you are alive.

**You can email Steve Brewer at <[Steve@EstillTribune.com](mailto:Steve@EstillTribune.com)> and message is forwarded.**