Once in a Lifetime Steam Treat for Harlingen

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America's success story can be said to have intimately tied to steam propulsion. Whether it was on land or sea, steam was the premier mover of all manner of equipment and material. It pumped mines, powered mills, plowed fields, threshed grain, and made U. S. productivity more efficient and our country more competitive. Certainly the "iron horse" brought all points of the country closer together time wise and allowed the rapid exchange of people and goods. Harlingen and the Valley could never had developed as they did in the early 20th Century without the arrival of the railroad and the two new 4-4-0 steam locomotives of the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway. Valleyites can once again thrill to the sight of a massive steam locomotive when a very special consist arrives at downtown Harlingen at 10:15 AM, Thursday, April 15. This will be the Union Pacific No. 844 steam locomotive pulling a tender, water car, box car, tool car, boiler/power/staff car, baggage car, souvenir car, and two coaches. The last three cars will be open to the public. The train length of 730 feet adjacent to Centennial Park will barely allow it to fit between Van Buren and Jackson Avenues without disrupting street traffic. Union Pacific No. 844 is the last steam engine locomotive ever built for the UP. It was delivered in December 1944 to be used as a high-speed passenger locomotive engine. It did so in service operating on such widely known routes as the Overland Limited, Los Angeles Limited, Portland Rose, and Challenger. After diesel-electric engines took over from steam passenger engines, the 844 was placed into freight service in Nebraska between the years 1957 and 1959. Fortunately it was saved from being scrapped in 1960 and was designated for special service. This was a good public relations move for UP, for the appearances of No. 844 have since thrilled people at numerous important openings, anniversaries, and special events. It has also been utilized along scenic route excursion runs for railfans. The statistics of No. 844 are impressive. It has a 4-8-4 wheel configuration. The engine and tender weigh a combined total of 454 tons. They have a combined length of over 114 feet. Its 14-wheel tender supplies the engine with 6,200 gallons of No. 5 oil and 23,500 gallons of water. Originally run on coal, it had been converted to run on fuel oil. Its boiler can generate up to 300 lbs. pressure for the 80 inch diameter driving wheel. All this helps to provide the maximum tractive power of 63,800 lbs. On a straight level track No. 844 is alleged to be capable of hauling 26 passenger cars at over 100 miles per hour. This is possible because its late design incorporated a one-piece cast steel bed frame and other modern engineering features. Most children and many adults in the Valley have never witnessed a live steam locomotive. Yes, they have seen them in the movies, but the real thing is so much more to behold. Be one of those to greet No. 844 as it edges into town and helps Harlingen to celebrate its 100th Anniversary.