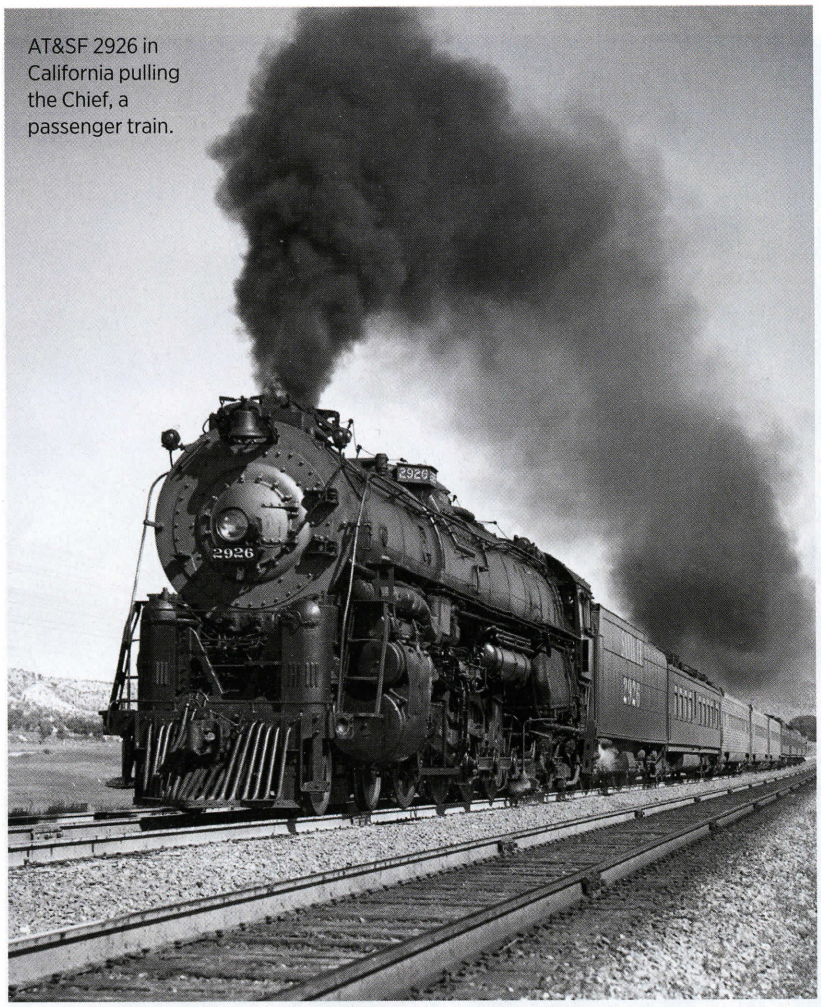
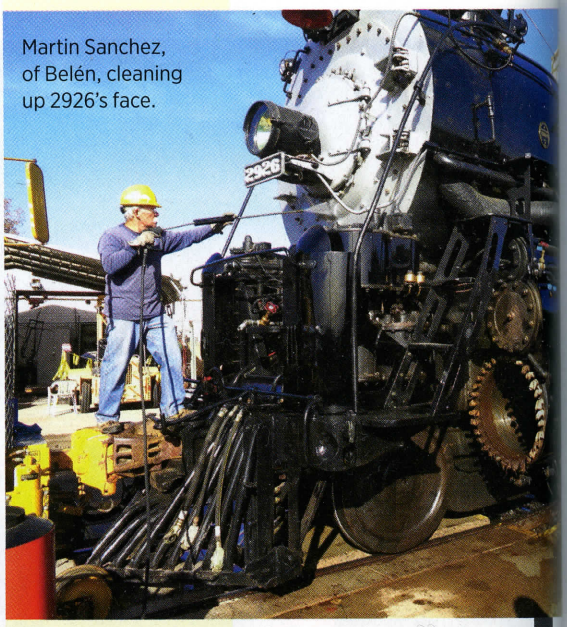


AT&SF 2926 in California pulling the Chief, a passenger train.



Martin Sanchez, of Belén, cleaning up 2926's face.

Training Days

Up to 60 volunteers work on AT&SF 2926 either Wednesday or Saturday, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. If the historical society can't find a part, members fabricate it there. Visitors are welcome to take a tour on workdays, gawk at the size of the locomotive, and snap a couple of photos, but only if they wear a hard hat (nmslrhs.org).

Back on Track

AT&SF 2926 long sat idle in an Albuquerque park. Now it's coming back to life after a 20-year renovation. ***By Alicia Inez Guzmán***

In 1999, when Albuquerque Mayor Jim Baca decided to sell the AT&SF 2926 to the New Mexico Steam Locomotive and Railroad Historical Society, the behemoth had been a fixture of Coronado Park since 1956. Kids treated it like a playground. A park sprinkler system had rusted the components. Some of Albuquerque's unsheltered residents were living inside the steam engine. Parts had been stolen. And there was asbestos in the jacket.

"For one dollar, we ended up buying a $3.5 million problem," says chief safety officer Jon Spargo from the outside of a trailer the historical society affectionately calls its "world headquarters." Just a few footsteps away, past the "Foamer Garden" (foamers are to trains what groupies are to musicians) and more than a few feral cats, the train gleams beneath a bright blue sky on a stretch of track just off Eighth Street.

Between 1944 and 1953, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe steam engine carried passengers, including men on their way to the war front, and freight from Kansas City through Albuquerque and on to the West

Coast. Because diesel was at a premium, AT&SF resorted to using an older technology—steam—making this one of the last locomotives of its kind the railway ever built, but also one of the most modern. It clocked around one million miles before getting retired in 1953. Other models got scrapped since, while the 2925 sits in a museum in Sacramento, California. Of its series, the 2926 might be the only engine to run the tracks again.

"When this thing is fired and ready to roll, we did a calculation that the energy equivalent of a fully steamed boiler up to pressure is roughly equal to about 6,000 pounds of TNT," says Spargo. That energy was once used to pull passenger trains at over 100 miles per hour.

Inside world headquarters, the historical society displays photos marking stages of the renovation, as well as a copy of the check written back in 1999. It's all a reminder of how much work has gone into the renovation—nearly 200,000 hours of labor over the course of two decades.

"We've literally touched every nut and bolt on this machine," says Spargo, who's known to wax poetic on train regulations and how to stay safe while working on the locomotive to volunteers who range in profession from lawyers, engineers, and doctors to welders and retired police officers.

The renovation has felt endless, but the historical society estimates that after multiple tests and following the strict railroad standards to a T, the project is nearly complete. The hope is that by late 2020, the 2926 will pull passenger cars once again. So far, trips to Las Vegas, New Mexico, and the Grand Canyon are on the table. While the train has held the historical society's attention for so long, Mike Hartshorne, its president, says, "This restoration of a steam locomotive is really a story about people—New Mexicans of every background, race, religion, profession, political persuasion, who have one thing in common: We want to see the 2926 run again."

The pre-renovation engine, rusted out and stripped down.

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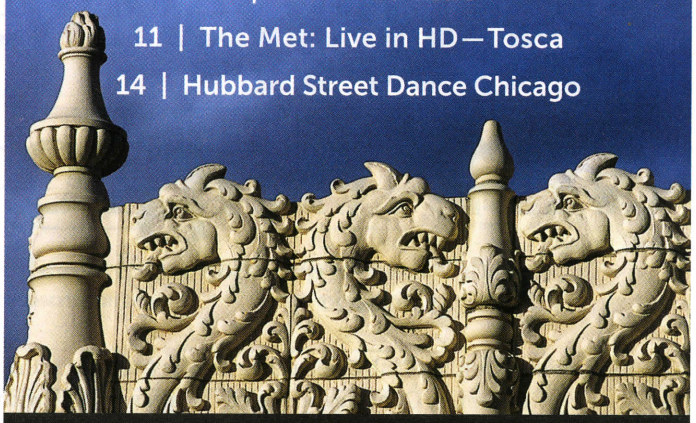

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