

## **“GOODBYE CHOO-CHOO TRAIN”**

*By Frank W. Santucci*

In the late 1800's and through the 1950's Verona was a railroad giant. The main rail line that ran from Pittsburgh to Erie and Buffalo, NY ran through Verona. It was called the Buffalo Express. Along with this passenger line, there were many daily local trains that carried freight and mail to cities north of Verona, the industrial towns of New Kensington and Oil City and beyond. Verona was in love with its train heritage, a large roundhouse repair shop was located in Verona. Most of the employment were men from our town. The town logo is a 1900 steam engine.

A popular train ran in the early morning from Verona to Pittsburgh. Many residents who were employed in East Liberty and Pittsburgh rode this early morning train and then returned around 5 PM to the Verona Station.

By 1970 commuter ridership had declined. Pennsylvania Railroad and New York Central combined, but the new group folded in 1971 – 156,000 passengers for the fiscal year was not enough to warrant the continued schedule.

My son, Frankie, since his early age was infatuated with trains and the history of trains in the United States. We would watch the trains going through Verona into Oakmont. These iron horses seemed to be there just for us. Just below our house, about one-half mile was the railroad repair shop. We could hear the grinder cleaning the used rails daily. There were three or four buildings where all types of railroad repairs were done. I never thought that this activity would desist and turn to history.

An announcement was published the commuter train's last run would be the end of June 1970. That's when I decided Frankie and I would be on that last ride from the Pittsburgh Pennsylvania Railroad Station through Verona. Excitedly we boarded the Blue Ridge Bus from Verona to Pittsburgh early in the afternoon. It was a short walking distance from the Pittsburgh bus station to the Pennsylvania Railroad Station all the while viewing the commanding presence of the stately Pennsylvania Railroad Station with its huge colossus entrance. Being early we were able to take in the sights and size of its grand lobby. After getting a drink of pop we boarded the 4:05 P.M. train for a 4:55 P.M. scheduled arrival back in Verona. We found good seats on the right side of the passenger car so to enjoy the best views as we whistled through East Liberty. There were a few others on the train, only three passenger cars and those not completely full. A diesel engine lead the last commuter train through Verona with no caboose attached. When we arrived in Verona we disembarked along with a few other Verona residents. These were the regular riders. The twelve mile ride just did not seem quite long enough to commemorate the end of an era.

November, 2014