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▼ MUSEUMS &amp; ATTRACTIONS

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## Trolley bells join the sweet sounds of visitors to Abilene

Like fairy tales come true, the beginning of 2003 made the dream of Abilene, Kansas having a trolley come true. Back in 1990, the Board of Directors for the Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau began wishing for a trolley to give historic tours to the visiting tourists and local residence.

As with all projects, how they would accomplish acquiring a trolley was yet to be determined. At their annual retreat of 2002, the board made the bold decision that now was the time. Unused budget funds, although meager in amount, had been set aside for the purpose of acquiring a trolley. It had been in the long-range plan of the CVB as long as anyone could remember.

After the decision was made to have a trolley in Abilene by May 1, 2003, the fun of raising the funds and locating a good used trolley became the priority for the CVB Board. Community fundraisers, letters of pledges, and dedication were in place.

At the end of 2002, everything seemed to be going well. The search had been on for a year to purchase a used trolley. The main obstacle was nearly every trolley cost far more than the money available. Then as if by fate, the Abilene City Manager heard of a trolley for sale at Fort Scott. They

were purchasing a new one.

After a trip to Ft. Scott by the City Manager and Public Works Director, it was decided that the trolley was sound mechanically but needed much cosmetic work. Also because of budget cuts, the trolley had to be purchased before December 31.

The Abilene City Commission and The Abilene CVB board met the day after Christmas and made the decision to bid on the Ft. Scott Trolley. Also in this decision was an estimated cost for refurbishing. Because the winter months are slow unless Abilene had a big storm, the Public Works Department had the leadership and expertise to complete the refurbishing by May 1.

The Public Works Director made another trip to Ft. Scott and the trolley arrived in Abilene on January 3, 2003. Vision was needed to imagine what the final refurbishing would accomplish.

Among of the problems the Public Works Department discovered was considerable rust to the undercarriage and on the roof. Their decision — replace it. The trolley was scratched, marred, dented, corroded and anything else you could imagine. But excitement was still high for having a first class trolley for Abilene. The pride of the Abilene Public Works Director, the Public Works department, Abilene CVB Board of Directors and the

Abilene City Commissioners made the decisions easy. We wanted a like-new trolley.

Some of the things involved in the refurbishing were: replace all the oak paneling on the inside because it was water stained and warped; re-finish the benches as they were scratched, replace all the chrome railings with brass railings, put a cow-catcher on the front, polish all the brass bells, lights, replace all the rubber moldings, fill all scratches on the outside and finally, paint, pin-strip, and place logos on the outside.

The next challenge was to find qualified drivers with CDL passenger endorsement. Again, like magic, school bus drivers stepped forward. Many local citizens have volunteered to be the guides.

On April 15, 2003, the Trolley was street ready and on May 5 made its first Historic Tour. It looks like a new vehicle inside and out.

Now you know the Abilene Trolley tale. It once again reiterates the value of a small community with a dream and the power of a community working together. Come ride with us. Tours are 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. daily. Cost is \$5 adults, \$2 children. Call the Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau to learn more.