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Steam Whistle to Herald Christmas Cheer

The Annual Christmas Morning Steam Whistle Concert will carol again.

York, PA - The Lancaster-York Heritage Region and other community and corporate partners are pleased to announce that Yorkers will again be ushered into Christmas morning with the unique Christmas carol concert performed by Whistle Master Donald E. Ryan from the New York Wire Company's factory steam whistle. The Christmas carols are played annually at 12:15 a.m. on December 25th on the factory steam whistle located atop the New York Wire Company plant at 441 East Market Street, York. The concert usually lasts about 15-20 minutes. On a clear night, Yorkers can hear the music within a five-mile radius and residents ten and twelve miles away report hearing the carols as well.

Even with the current economic conditions, local partners have come together to make this year's concert possible. PeoplesBank has once again stepped forward to pledge funding support as the primary community sponsor of the concert. Funding and in-kind services are also being contributed by the Lancaster-York Heritage Region, Worden & Shewell, New York Wire Company and York Oil. The City of York will also provide coordination assistance. Additional support is provided from the Steam Whistle Concert fund that was set up in 2006 thanks to generous contributions from The Wolf Organization, Susquehanna Pfaltzgraff Foundation, PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources/Heritage Areas Program, and many York County citizens.

Additional contributions from the community are needed and are invited to keep this holiday tradition alive for years to come. Those wishing to make donations for future Steam Whistle Concerts may send their tax deductible contributions to: **STEAM WHISTLE CONCERT FUND, c/o PeoplesBank, 48 East Market Street, York, PA 17401**, or call the Lancaster-York Heritage Region at 717-252-0229.

Rehearsal Session: The practice date and time will be announced next week. Media will be invited to attend.

Background: Although the whistle no longer signals workers' shifts and the 59-year old oil boiler no longer heats the factory, both industrial relics have been maintained by the New York Wire

Company to keep the revered Christmas concert tradition alive. In 2005, the boiler, which provides steam for the whistle, failed shortly before the music was to start, forcing the concert to be cancelled. Repair costs for the old boiler proved to be excessive, with no assurance against future problems. Faced with losing this tradition, in late 2006 a partnership between the Lancaster-York Heritage Region, the New York Wire Company and Worden & Shewell agreed to coordinate efforts to save this unique heritage initiative. Together a 21st century solution was crafted to continue this long-established Christmas event. The innovative rescue plan involved the installation of new permanent steam and electrical connections to the exterior of the factory, where a state-of-the-art, trailer-enclosed portable oil boiler system is trucked in and connected to make steam for the traditional concert practice session and the early Christmas morning concert itself.

In the 1920's, a York music teacher, Karl Alex Smyser, began the Christmas concert tradition that Yorkers have grown to love. Whistle Masters Marlin L. and Donald E. Ryan began playing Christmas carols on Christmas morning in 1955. After 35 years of performances, Marlin Ryan retired from the tradition. Donald with assistance from his children has continued the legacy. Only twice (1986 and 2005) during the past 54 years were the concerts canceled due to problems with the boiler. Mr. Ryan is excited about continuing the concert tradition this year but is keeping the carol lineup a surprise because many listeners like to guess the tunes.

The Lancaster-York Heritage Region is a non-profit organization based in Wrightsville that raises awareness and appreciation of the cultural and economic value of the Susquehanna Gateway region, and preserve, enhance and celebrate its most significant heritage assets as economically vital attractions for residents and visitors alike. For more information about the organization's mission and programs please visit www.StoriesoftheLand.org.

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