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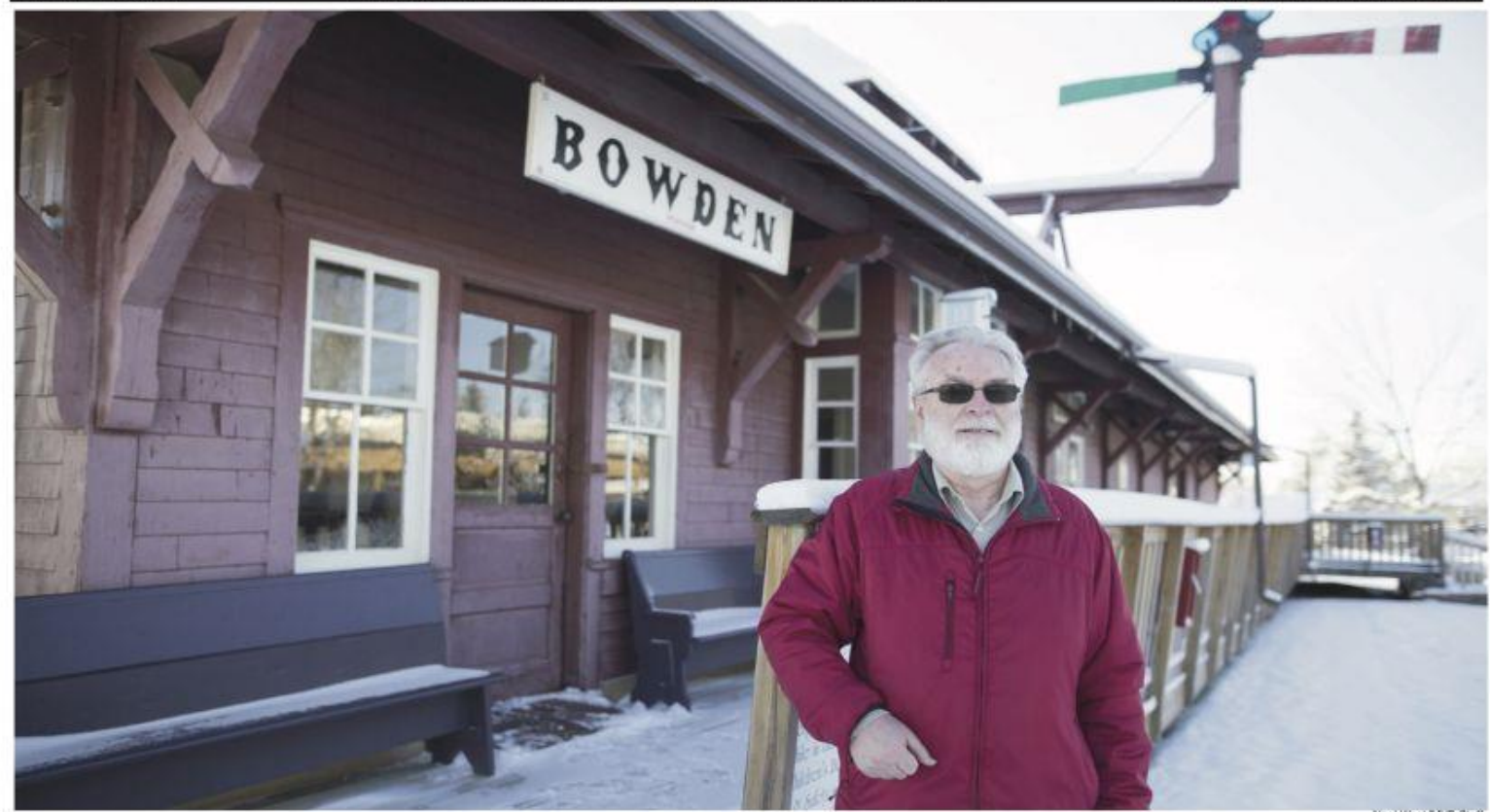


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Noel West/MVP Staff

DETERMINED DREAMER - Paul Pettypiece, the founder and president of the Forth Junction Heritage Society, proudly stands at the pioneer Bowden train station at the Innisfail and District Historical Village on Nov. 6. For more than a decade he's pitched his dream of creating his ambitious Forth Junction Regional Heritage Rail Park project for Central Alberta. Following unsuccessful attempts elsewhere he's now hoping to create his project in Innisfail.

Never giving up on a railway dream

BY Johnnie Bachusky, MVP Staff

INNISFAIL- Paul Pettypiece remains a grand beautiful dreamer. For more than a decade he's held and pitched a bold vision of a one-of-a-kind railway heritage park for Central

Alberta. Pettypiece, the president of the 10-member Forth Junction Heritage Society, has pounded the pavement across Central Alberta to secure support for his ambitious Forth Junction Regional Heritage Rail Park project.

Countless times he's approached possible investors, collected artifacts, talked to municipal officials about acquiring land, and made presentations to anyone who would listen, including most recently at his society's AGM on Oct. 24 at the Innisfail

Aquatic Centre. But with no funding or even a site he's met big disappointment and heartbreak, especially after being teased with hope but shut down by the City of Red Deer and Red Deer County.
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Heritage train park plan proposed for Innisfail

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But the 72-year-old Pettypiece, a retired regional coordinator for Junior Achievement, never gives up. He has found new hope. The next stop for his dream is Innisfail, at the northern edge of town where his society's vision of a 25-acre heritage rail park could finally be realized.

"I am actually quite excited with the prospect. There is a lot of work that has to be done before we can put any shovels in the ground or anything," he said.

Earlier this year, after Red Deer County effectively closed the door to a once promising Springbrook site, the society focused its attention back to Innisfail, specifically a quarter section site they previously looked at immediately north of Discovery Wildlife Park and owned by Melcor Developments Ltd.

Pettypiece previously talked to Innisfail town council in 2017 and 2018, and while he received a positive response there were concerns about the cost of access and servicing.

Nevertheless, at least one council member, Doug Bos, who is also the co-owner of the wildlife park, remains supportive of Pettypiece's ambition, even though he's well aware of the challenges he faces.

"It would be great for Innisfail. It would be great for us but he does have a tough road to haul," said Bos. "When



Anna Lenters, president of the Innisfail and District Historical Society and Paul Pettypiece at the Innisfail Historical Village on Nov. 6. Lenters supports Pettypiece's ambitions despite the many challenges he and his society still face.

Noel West/MVP Staff

we moved to Innisfail we had been doing it (zoo) and we had animals. We were basically relocating rather than taking a fresh idea and starting from scratch.

"But any or another tourist attraction in Innisfail would be great," he added.

"It is a way to get people off Highway 2, because no other community between Edmonton and Calgary has got as many tourist attractions as we currently do, and adding another major one would be great."

Bos's support for the initiative is echoed by Anna Lenters, president of the Innisfail and District Historical Society, who was

the featured speaker at the Oct. 24 AGM for her 10 years of previous work at Calgary's Heritage Park.

"I support museums. It would be good for the Town of Innisfail but I have to acknowledge they have major challenges ahead of them," said Lenters.

"The challenges would be the economy, and the lack of government funds for anything related to culture.

"The flip side is that this would be very good for local tourism. When you get more tourism for Innisfail it's good for everyone," she added.

And most importantly for Pettypiece, Melcor likes it as well, but only

if other pieces fall into place. Gregg Broks, regional manager for Melcor, confirmed his company is working with the society. He said Melcor is prepared to do "whatever it takes" to get that property developed. However, he quickly added the hurdles are "very high" as the property requires costly infrastructure that could run into the millions of dollars. That includes a rail spur, a roadway into the quarter section, and water and sewer lines.

"For us there would have to be an additional paying user that would come along with the whole Forth Junction proposal," he said. "Or as Paul's idea suggests there

is a commercial piece in the middle. Maybe there is somebody out there who believes they can operate a business, a hotel or a museum, conference centre or tourist destination, they might be willing to pay. That would change everything."

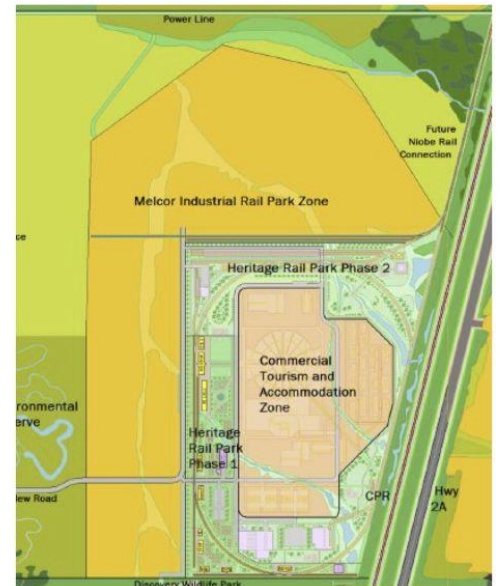
For now though Pettypiece can only wait. The economy remains problematic and potential investors looking for good deals are understandably nervous. There is a new provincial government in place with a mandate to cut spending and be cost conscious.

But Pettypiece has long weathered uncertainty over his dream project and he is prepared to wait even longer. His mission is too important.

"We've never given up but we decided right from the very beginning that we were either going to do it properly or not all because we didn't want something that was just like another railway museum," said Pettypiece.

"The vast majority of people have absolutely no recollection or understanding or impact of the railway in terms of the development of Central Alberta," he added. "Several railways, some of which don't exist anymore, like the Alberta Central Railway, people just don't have any concept of it."

For more information on the Forth Junction Regional Heritage Rail Park project go to www.forthjunction.ca



An artist rendering of the planned 25-acre heritage rail park on Melcor property just north of Discovery Wildlife Park.

Courtesy of Forth Junction Heritage Society