

ans.

flood gates installed

PATERSON EVENING NEWS 6/20/80

That old whistle blower and his golden pipes

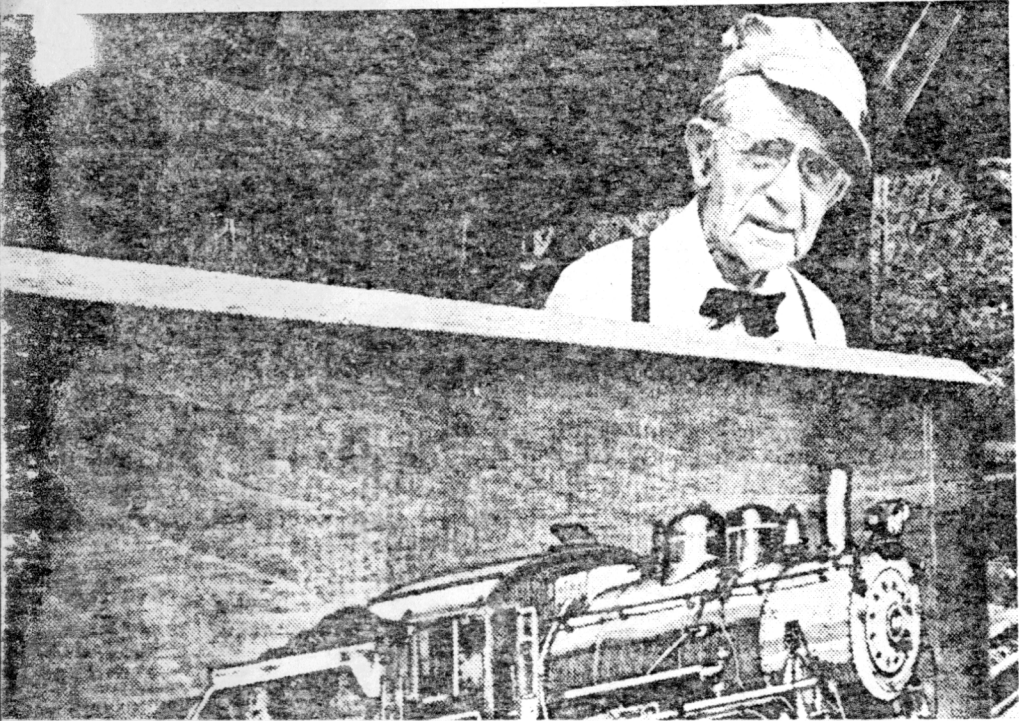


Photo by Don Smith

THE WORLD'S GREATEST imitator of trains' stands outside his tavern, the Great Notch Inn in West Paterson.

By NEIL SULLIVAN

Special to The News

A visitor strolling into the Great Notch Inn in West Paterson might be greeted with the raspy, low toot of a ferry cruising into dock, the piercing, twin blasts of a tug boat lumbering out to sea, or the hoarse, quiet whistle of a Santa Fe railroad train crossing the night desert.

The sound permeates the darkened Route 46 bar, and the bewildered customer slowly focuses on the short, proudly grinning author of the sounds, 81-year-old Greg DeLio, who bills himself as the "world's greatest imitator of trains."

DeLio, owner and operator of the tavern for 56 years, has been imitating trains since 1918, when he worked on the Erie-Lackawanna railroad. He says he cultivated his talent sitting on the Belleville side of the tracks listening to the trains whistle through.

Since then he's built his repertoire to include subway trains, tug boats, ferries, and the differing pitches of every train he's heard.

"I'm still learning 'em," he said recently, alert ears standing at right angles on his head. DeLio travels the East Coast, giving exhibitions on Sundays, like the one he gave when the Engine 299 was returned to Paterson. Sometimes he calls radio stations to give his

renditions on the air. The rest of the week he tends bar, and keeps the acre of greenery his tavern sits on.

"I get a kick out of it," he said of the exhibitions. "It gets me into a lot of places where otherwise they'd throw me the hell out."

Talking rapid-fire, the connoisseur of railroad trains hops off his red bar stool and stands grinning beside a collection of autographed pictures of some of the famous people he's met. Behind him, on the bar, tiny train replicas and pictures mingle with yellowed newspaper stories of his exploits.

"Every opera singer asks me the same question: How do I make those variations. They don't realize it," he said, "but I think I'm the only one in the world who can make them."

DeLio got plenty of whistling practice in the early days of the business, when traffic was lighter. In the days of prohibition, his business went underground.

"There was hardly a car on the road. You might see an old Model T now and then, or a Maxwell," he said.

"I'm not going to leave this place," he said, balancing a peg in his palm from his old house, that used to stand next door.

"It's an old landmark," said DeLio. "I'm the only one left from the old days."