

Working on the railroad in Capreol

BY DEBORAH SAUVÉ
For The Sudbury Star

With railway ties and spikes in tow, the Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre of Capreol has been busy laying a one-way track to expansion.

As the first stage in a projected three-year expansion project, a 400-foot stretch of additional railway track is being built at the museum's downtown Capreol address to accommodate several new historic railway cars.

"This new track will allow us to expand our display of rolling stock significantly," said Bob Michelutti, president of the museum board of directors.

"We had a lot of volunteers come out to help us put the track down and spike it, but we still have a long way to go in our plans for expansion."

The decision to undertake an expansion was made about three years ago after the museum participated in a feasibility study. The study showed it had hit a plateau of about 2,000 visitors per year and without changes could expect even less with gas prices and the Canadian dollar on the rise.

"The study basically indicated that for us to have more tourism, we had to have a larger facility," Michelutti said.

"Capreol is not a town that you drive through as you are going somewhere else. Capreol is at the end of the road, so it is our job to attract people to take that little detour.

"We were told if we undertook a \$5-million expansion, we would expect to attract 15,000 to 17,000 visitors per year instead."

The first stage of the project will include laying the new



PHOTO SUPPLIED TO THE STAR

Volunteers with the Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre of Capreol help lay some track on which some of their exhibit trains will be displayed. The museum is undergoing a major expansion in the hopes of attracting more tourists to the town.

track, expanding the museum's perimeter fence to protect the new exhibits and finally transporting the rolling stock from storage to the museum by truck and crane.

Ready to be put on display are a metal caboose, a snowplow car, a warehouse car, and a wooden boxcar. According to Michelutti, the museum may also acquire a unique piece of equipment from Inco's copper refinery.

"We are supposed to get a

car that is like a 60-foot thermos bottle," he said.

"This is a piece that Inco used at their copper refinery to transport molten copper from the smelter over to the refinery."

But all of this expansion has a price tag. Michelutti expects the first stage alone to cost about \$100,000. They have already received large contributions from CN Rail, Renger Enterprises, Artsvest and the Capreol Old Timers to complete the track, and are

now applying to other organizations for assistance with the perimeter fence and transportation of the rolling stock.

"We are now trying to get there in stages because we can't invest that much all at once," Michelutti said.

"In order to get funding, you have to prove that you have a good track record. So, this little expansion we are doing now with the rolling stock is really just the beginning."

In the museum's long-term plan is the construction of a

new building to house their indoor exhibits. Currently, they operate out of the old CN superintendent house, which was built in 1916. Michelutti said they would keep this historic building for administration and build the new one behind it.

"As a divisional point, Capreol has been historically significant to the CN, and because of that we are extremely committed to doing all that we can to keep this museum going," he said.

MUSEUM FACTS

- **Location:** 26 Bloor St., downtown Capreol
- **Hours:** Seasonally from June 1 to Aug. 31: Open Tuesday through Sunday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- **Off-season:** By appointment only
- **Contact:** 705-859-5050
www.northernontariorailroad-museum.ca

"Also, with Sudbury itself having been founded by railways, as well as the nickel ore where Murray Mine is today, we just can't help but feel the railroad is important to the history of the whole area."