

Indiana's forgotten hot spot

Griffith provides modern rail action in a suburban setting with plenty of history



A westbound tank train moves from the former GTW to the former EJ&E to bypass Chicago congestion. Three photos, TRAINS: Brian Schmidt

LOCATION: Lake County, Ind., is home to popular train-watching locations, including the little-remarked Griffith. Railroads vying for a piece of the Chicago rail scene have crossed the landscape here for generations, and while paint schemes have changed, the train-watching action in this suburban community of almost 17,000 people is still tops.

Once the crossing of five railroads, Griffith is now a major junction for just one: Canadian National. With its 2009 acquisition of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern, CN has turned Griffith into an important crossroads on its international system. Trains from the South, elsewhere in the Midwest, and even Canada traverse the maze of tracks in town to access Kirk Yard in Gary, CN's primary loose car facility in the Chicago area.

TRAIN-WATCHING: Griffith sits at the junction of three CN subdivisions. The Elsdon Sub runs between Griffith and Chicago. The Matteson Sub runs between Kirk

Yard in Gary and Joliet, Ill. The South Bend Sub runs between Battle Creek, Mich., and Griffith. Three connecting tracks link the double-track main lines together. A small yard sits west of the junction on the Elsdon Sub.

Talking defect detectors are located west of Griffith on the Matteson Sub at milepost 33.5 and east of town on the South Bend Sub at milepost 41.0.

Folks may see up to 40 trains a day at Griffith, with most traffic on the Matteson and South Bend subdivisions. Motive power can include anything on the CN system roster, ranging from cowl units and end-cab switchers in a variety of paint schemes to the road's latest locomotive purchases.

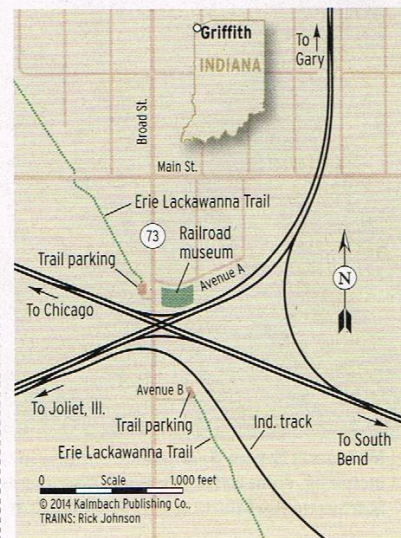
The best place to take in the rail action is from the Griffith Historical Society museum, adjacent to the diamonds on the north side. The museum collection includes cupola and transfer-style cabooses, a troop sleeper, the town's former Grand Trunk Western depot, and Griffith Tower, moved from its original location to the park in July 2000. For more information, go to www.griffithhistoricalsociety.org.

RADIO FREQUENCIES: CN Elsdon Sub, 160.590; CN Matteson Sub, 160.350; CN South Bend Sub, 160.530

FOR YOUR FAMILY: The southern portion of the Erie Lackawanna Trail crosses town, passing the junction area. The trail segment runs between Crown Point and Highland on the former EL right-of-way. Together with the northern segment to Hammond, the trail extends 15.7 miles. Trail parking is available near the diamonds.



An eastbound freight bound for Kirk Yard passes the museum grounds, seen from the steps of Griffith Tower in June 2014.



The former Grand Trunk Western depot now sits at the corner of Broad Street and Avenue A, just north of the diamonds.