

# Duluth News Tribune

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## Historic train will steam into Duluth this weekend

Duluth will be the place to be for steam locomotive enthusiasts this weekend.

By: [Steve Kuchera](#), Duluth News Tribune

Duluth will be the place to be for steam locomotive enthusiasts this weekend.

And for the first time in years, more than 500 of them will arrive from the Twin Cities on a train pulled by the historic Milwaukee Road 261 locomotive.

"When the 261 gets up here, the 2719, our Soo Line locomotive, will be in full operation, and we will have two mainline passenger steam locomotives working at the same time in the same place," said Ken Buehler, executive director at the Historic Union Depot & Lake Superior Railroad Museum.

"I liken this as the same thing for steam engine enthusiasts, railroad enthusiasts as what the tall ships will be for maritime enthusiasts later this summer," he said.

The 261's two-day visit will be its first to Duluth following a four-year overhaul. It is operated by the Minneapolis-based nonprofit Friends of the 261.

"We love coming to Duluth; it's an extremely popular trip, and the overnight thing works well," said Friends chief operating officer and 261 engineer Steve Sandberg.

Planning for the 261's post-overhaul inaugural excursion began some time back. Visit Duluth helped advertise the trip, which sold out.

"We have people coming from all over the world," Sandberg said. "We have people coming from England, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, even South Africa."

"Duluth is probably one of our more popular locations," he said. "It is a perfect trip. We'll take a nice leisurely trip up. We'll just chug up there at 40 or 50 mph, giving everyone the opportunity to see the scenery."

The passengers will ride in 15 cars — vintage coaches, lounge and dome cars and a glass-backed observation car — dating from the 1940s and 50s.

"All of them have been modernized, so they have modern heating and air-conditioning and bathrooms," Sandberg said.

The 500-plus passengers will have time to tour Duluth Saturday and Sunday before leaving at noon.

"We're very excited about our trip to Duluth," Sandberg said. "Everything is coming together; it even looks like the weather might cooperate. One year we left Minneapolis and it was 76 degrees and we got up there and it was like 40."

The extended forecast calls for daytime highs in the 50s this weekend.

While the 261 could have gone to other cities on its inaugural excursion, Sandberg and Buehler agree that Duluth has an added advantage for railroad buffs: the Lake Superior Railroad Museum.

"They have so much historic railroad equipment there," Sandberg said. "It was great for us to market these trips internationally."

One of the LSRM and NSSR's attractions, of course, is the steam-powered 2719, built in 1923. The Soo Line's last steam-powered train, it was retired in 1959.

The 261 was built in 1944. It was retired 10 years later.

"We are very fortunate that the Friends of the 261 have rebuilt the engine so it can continue to run," Buehler said. "And we are very fortunate that they decided to come here. As a railroad museum, we're honored to have them and also to be able to operate our 2719 steam locomotive and to be able to put on quite a show for the people. To have all this in one place at one time is quite awesome."

In addition to its normal displays, the LSRM is hosting special events on Saturday — National Train Day — and Sunday — Mother's Day.

National Train Day commemorates the May 10, 1869, meeting of the Union and Central Pacific railroads at Promontory Summit, Utah, completing America's first transcontinental railroad.

"We will have a whole series of special National Train Day events," Buehler said. "We will have special trains on display in our model train building" in addition to children's activities.

Special events continue on Mother's Day, including an afternoon steam ride up the Shore.

"Up at Palmer's (Siding) everyone will get off the train, the steam engine will back up, people will set up a photo line, and then the engine will come thundering through, whistle blowing, bell ringing, all blaze and glory," Buehler said. "We're going to have a great weekend."

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