

# Historic caboose on rebound



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An old Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad caboose behind Oberlin Early Childhood Center that has fallen into disrepair is shown before a planned restoration.

## Old Chesapeake & Ohio car set to get restoration

**Christina Jolliffe**  
 The Chronicle-Telegram

OBERLIN — If you don't know much about the Oberlin Early Childhood Center, you'll likely be familiar with at least one aspect — the 1920s-era C&O caboose behind the center.

Located at 317 E. College St., the caboose was donated to the center by Eric Nord of the Lorain County Nord Family Foundation. It has been beloved by children for decades, but over the years has fallen into disrepair.

There were only two options: either invest in some very extensive restoration work or tear down the caboose and haul it away.

Thankfully for nostalgia's sake, restoration is underway by Matt Lunsford of Lunsford Group LLC.

But the restoration project



Another view shows the deteriorating caboose.

is just the beginning.

"This is what I like to call the 'attention getter' for a larger project, which will take a lot more time and funding," said OECC board member David Sonner. "This renovation project is

a first step toward strengthening OECC's position as an important provider of Nature Based Education to children in our area. Our ultimate goal is to utilize the amazing resources and beautiful outdoor space at the childhood

center to help connect children to nature and increase their innate qualities of curiosity, risk taking and appreciation and understanding of food sourcing."

The center is considering outdoor classrooms, solar energy, a sensory garden and state-of-the-art teacher training and certification as additional pathways toward achieving its goals.

The OECC, which has been in existence since the early 1970s, was visionary for its time, offering affordable child care for infants to kindergarten-age children, regardless of income," said board chair Ellen Mavrach.

"It's a beloved organization," she said. "We have employees and board members who even attended the school."

See **CABOOSE**, A2



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The exterior of an old C&O caboose is shown deteriorating badly behind the Oberlin Early Childhood Center.

## CABOOSE

From A1

The planned nature-centered upgrades also mean OECC could be a source of food, water and shelter for the community in the event of a natural or human-caused disaster.

"Society is in a fix," Sonner said. "If a disaster takes place, the community needs to have made preparations. There are federal, state and local planning groups. This is one more step. I like to call it the "grand project."

Additionally, it can be a meeting place for grown-ups as well as an educational place for kids with the outdoor education aspect.

The flower wall, for example, would cover the chain-link fence that already surrounds the property.

"The idea is to assist with pollination and the food supply to help the birds and bees," Sonner said. "It will help children understand that all living creatures are in this together. It will show them that even little kids can help with the birds, bees and butterflies by giving them a habitat and food, and it will be beautiful."

The city of Oberlin, Bendix Corp. Commercial Vehicle Systems and Midwest Railway Preservation Society have all helped to make the project possible.

"It all comes together to make Oberlin work better, look better and do less damage to the planet," Sonner said. "It will also make Oberlin a more comfortable and secure place to live."

Restoration on the caboose could be finished as soon as August. An open house is in the works for that time.

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