

March 13, 2008

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No Horsing Around: 18-month-old boy takes lucky 20,000th ride at 2TOOTS TRAIN WHISTLE GRILL

Charles Novak is nearly 19 months old, so it's not unusual that trains are a growing attraction in his world.

His family lives near railroad tracks that cut through Western Springs, a toy train stands sentry on his dresser, and Charles is uttering "choo choo" with regularity.

And as of March 13, thanks to lucky timing, he is now the precocious owner of a Lionel Train Set, courtesy of 2TOOTS TRAIN WHISTLE GRILL in Downers Grove.

The train-themed restaurant has been tooting this promotional horn for the past month: the child who took the 20,000th ride on Champion, a mechanical horse stationed near the restaurant's front door, would receive the train set, valued at \$250.

Charles was that child, even if he's still a bit too young to understand it entirely.

On the fateful day, he first enjoyed a meal with his mother, Megan; his father, Rob; his sister, Emma, who turns 4 on March 26, one of Emma's friends, 4-year-old Sara; and his aunt, Brooke, who is Megan Novak's identical twin sister.

Megan Novak saw a sign mentioning the 20,000th-ride promotion, but didn't expect it to have anything to do with her family's visit.

"I was thinking, 'Oh, that's cute, maybe they just had this. I wasn't sure if someone had already won,'" said Novak.

She said they have visited the restaurant about five other times and contributed about a dozen rides to the Champion count before Thursday.

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On Thursday, Sara was first to saddle up, followed by Emma, who took ride number 19,999 on Champion. Then it was Charles' turn.

“He used to be hesitant. This time he was all about it. Little did he know...” said Megan Novak.

When Charles hopped aboard Champion, 2TOOTS co-owner Dale Eisenberg began playing the song “Celebration” and informed the Novaks that their son was a winner.

“I had to convince them, they were just absolutely so flabbergasted that they were winners,” said Eisenberg. “They did say afterwards that they had to go buy a lottery ticket now.”

In addition to awarding the train set, 2TOOTS is donating \$200 in gift certificates—or a penny for every ride so far—to the West Suburban Humane Society, based in Downers Grove. Eisenberg and co-owner Mike Ventre have been encouraging patrons to contribute to the organization as well.

“We’d be going back anyway, but it just makes it a fun experience,” said Novak. “And knowing about that donation, that just makes me appreciate the business, knowing they give back.”

She was also pleased with her daughter’s attitude after she came so close to being the 20,000th rider. As Charles became the center of attention for his milestone moment, Emma told him, “Charles, I’m so proud of you.”

Champion was installed in July 2006, logging about 1,000 rides a month since then. A quarter deposit results in a rollicking 90-second ride on the authentic restored ride from the 1950s. An internal box includes a counter that tracks the ride count, so only employees had access to the number.

2TOOTS is at 950 Warren Ave., directly across from the Metra train station. Online, visit www.2toots.com.

The West Suburban Humane Society is at 1901 Ogden Ave. in Downers Grove, and online at www.WSHS-DG.org.

About 2TOOTS TRAIN WHISTLE GRILL

Complete with multiple toy trains chugging and whistling along a counter track serving meals to delighted children, 2TOOTS TRAIN WHISTLE GRILL ã features traditional American-style bites priced at under \$10.

Eisenberg and Ventre are 30-year restaurant veterans and have a long history of owning and operating several successful Original Pancake House franchised locations, including the current one in Park Ridge. They are in the midst of developing 2TOOTS franchise locations as well.

2TOOTS is at 950 Warren Ave. in Downers Grove, directly across from the Metra train station. The restaurant is open Monday-Friday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., and on Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The phone number at 2TOOTS is 630-729-0235, and the restaurant has a menu, photo album, media reviews, and more information online at www.2toots.com.