



# BLET Auxiliary News

*Working to bring about safer working conditions for Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen, educate spouses, and enhance the lifestyles of railroad employees and their families.*

**Volume 3, Number 3**

**Autumn 2012**

Anita J. Caruso, President • Sereena Hogan, Vice President/National Legislative Representative • Linda D. Maher, Secretary  
Helen Brand, Treasurer • Gina Forman, 1st Vice President /National Outreach Coordinator • [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net)

## Health Flexible Spending Accounts Offer Members Opportunity to Save on Health Care Expenses

The BLET National Division announced that postcards will be mailed soon to members who work at participating railroads advising that, during the open enrollment period for healthcare benefits this fall, they may join the Health Flexible Spending Accounts (Health FSA) program that begins in 2013. This program is to help members save money on co-pays and other qualified health care expenses not covered by insurance, as well as other approved health and welfare expenses.

The Health FSA program period for 2013 begins on January 1, 2013, and ends on December 31, 2013. This plan will give members the ability to realize significant health care savings and all eligible members are strongly encouraged to participate. Participants can put aside their own dollars on a pre-tax basis to be available for reimbursement of eligible and qualified health care expenses not covered by medical, vision, or dental plans, as well as other approved health and welfare expenses for which coverage is not afforded.

Personalized enrollment packages will be mailed out in late September and will contain detailed information about enrollment options for 2013, including the Health FSA Program, and the new online enrollment process (<http://www.ble-t.org/pr/news/newsflash.asp?id=5308>). During the open enrollment period, members can go to the Railroad Information Depot (<http://www.rriinfo depot.com>), where they can access the Railroad Enrollment Services secure portal through the Alerts and Important Dates section. The enrollment portal will be available 24/7 during the enrollment period this fall. Those who do not enroll in the Health FSA program during this time period will not be able to enroll in it until next year's open enrollment period in the fall of 2013. For assistance, questions, or to request a paper enrollment kit (once open enrollment begins), please call Railroad Enrollment Services at (800) 753-2692.

## Auxiliary 622 Organized in Alliance, Nebraska

By Natalie Miller and Brandi Keane



**Front row, seated: Darla Fent, Anita Caruso, Brandi Keane. Back row: Jennie Burri, Lindsey Chasek, Robin Hellwig, Ann Underwood, Melissa Van Galder, Natalie Miller, Shelley Pfeiffer.**

On June 20, 2012, National President Anita Caruso and National Chaplain Darla Fent were on hand to organize and re-establish Auxiliary 622 in Alliance, Nebraska, with the swearing in and pinning of eight new members. After a long hiatus, some of the brothers of BLET 622 thought it would be in their best interest to ask their wives to start the Auxiliary in Alliance back up, and Brandi Keane, wife of BLET 622's Shane Keane, took on the challenge head first. Through her hard work and determination, BLET Auxiliary 622 was re-born to support the members of BLET Div. 622. And, in one of the most critical election years in the history of America, the strengthening of the BLET Auxiliary on the local and national level has never been more important.

While Auxiliary 622 may have deep roots and a long history in the community of Alliance, Nebraska, and the surrounding Powder River Division, it had faded into nonexistence over the past few decades. The newly formed BLET Auxiliary 622 is excited to regroup and grow, and to make our own mark on a new page in the history books of the BLET Auxiliary.

The eight new members who took the oath and accepted their pins and new roles as advocates for BLET brothers and sisters

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## Auxiliary President's Message - BY ANITA J. CARUSO

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Does it seem like fall kind of crept up on you? It certainly feels that way to me. It always seems as soon as we celebrate the 4th of July, there goes the rest of our summer! Time certainly has a way of flying by when life gets hectic and busy.

We would have to be living under a rock if we didn't realize that this is one of the most important presidential elections of our lifetime. Our spouses' futures depend on the candidates who support unions, the values of our Railroad Retirement fund, and the Federal Employers Liability Act, and those who do not support legislation that will force our spouses have to "hop a train" until well after the current retirement age of 60 with 30 years of service. The very thought of this makes me sick, but sadly, it is a possibility.

PLEASE do everything in your power to get out the word to every BLET spouse and railroader to make them understand what we are up against if we cast our votes for the wrong candidates. The repercussions could be devastating to all railroad families and could set us back 10 years. Instead of allowing us to look forward to a hard-earned and well-deserved retirement down the road, we will be looking at more years of service with less retirement benefits heading our way, even though we (the employees and the carriers) pay more payroll taxes for railroad retirement Tier 1 and Tier 2 than people pay into social security. If the provision of the Ryan Act that proposes to conform Tier I to Social Security, and other attempts to privatize passenger rail in this country go into effect, Railroad Retirement will move from a solvent retirement system into the same financial difficulties that Social Security is facing.

Please listen carefully to BLET National President Dennis Pierce when he reminds BLET members and their families to vote for the legislators who will preserve our union, our benefits, our lifestyle, and the middle class of this country. If we lose our rights and the benefits our union has fought hard to obtain and maintain, we may never get them back. I beg you to do the research and educate yourself and your family members to see which candidates benefit you and your family the best. Cast your vote for the candidates who understand the value of unions and collective bargaining and the progress that has been made over the last 125 years on behalf of America's working class. It's the least we can all do for our spouses, our families, and future generations.

On a very sad note, Frances Srubas recently passed away on Saturday, August 25, 2012. Frances was a dear, long-time friend of ours and we are greatly saddened to hear of her passing. Frances and her husband Leo have been very active in their retirement years at regional conventions. I will miss this sweet lady who always had a smile on her face and a kind word for everyone. We know her passing will be a great hardship to her husband, Leo, and we extend to him our deepest condolences.

I wish everyone a wonderful fall — enjoy the season with family and friends. Make sure your vote gets counted on November 6 and remember that you are voting for YOUR future!

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Anita J. Caruso  
National President - BLET Auxiliary  
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## Auxiliary 12 Hosts Pot Luck Dinner for National Officers in Omaha, Nebraska

By Darla Fent, National Chaplain & Member of River City Auxiliary No. 12



Front row: Michelle Keefer, Darla Fent, Gina Forman. Back row: Pam Dennis, Gina Sequenzia, Connie Tippery, Linda Maher, Sereena Hogan, Helen Brand.

There certainly are perks to having the National Auxiliary President, Anita Caruso, in our own auxiliary, River City No. 12! We were lucky enough to be able to host a pot luck dinner at the home of Auxiliary 12 Member Pam Dennis when the Executive Council met this summer in Omaha.

When you are not able to attend the BLET Auxiliary National Convention or other yearly conventions, you don't have the opportunity to meet and

visit with, or get to know, the wonderful women who make up our Executive Council. If you think that they are only working for our interests every four years, you are sadly mistaken. They are out there promoting our auxiliary at every regional convention and at every legislative event that they attend. We are fortunate to have a group of women who have made it their mission to educate themselves on the wide variety of laws, proposed laws, and amendments that will greatly affect our lives and those of the spouses who are either retired or are putting themselves out there everyday.

Thank you to the members of River City No. 12 for hosting a great evening of food and fellowship in honor of our women of the Executive Council: Anita Caruso, Sereena Hogan, Helen Brand, Gina Forman, and Linda Maher.

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## Auxiliary 28 Celebrates Labor Day at Pima Area Labor Foundation Event

Members of Guadalupe Auxiliary No. 28 in Tucson, Arizona, braved the 100+ degree heat on September 3 to participate in the 2012 Pima Area Labor Foundation annual Labor Day event by selling "Proud to Be American, Proud to Be Union" t-shirts at their booth. The theme for this year's event was "Red, White, and Blue — Union-made Puts America to Work." Many of the local candidates running in the upcoming election were on hand to visit with labor members at the event, and we had two new members join the Guadalupe Auxiliary that day — retired BLET member Henry Zappia and his wife, Joanna. One of the unexpected perks of Auxiliary 28's effort was the fellowship created when numerous members of BLET Div. 28 and their families showed up to purchase the red shirts and then stuck around in the shaded area behind the booth to visit with one another.



Guadalupe Auxiliary members Joanna Zappia, Jeanne McArdle, President Kathy Hurst, Eric Bergman, Ron Sprague, Ken Kroeger, Secretary/Treasurer Sereena Hogan, and Nick Johnson.

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***Please let us know what is going on with your local auxiliary so we can feature it in our newsletter!***

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## 2012 -2013 Scholarship Recipients

The following scholarships were awarded at the National Auxiliary Executive Council Meeting held in Omaha, Nebraska, June 4-7, 2012:

### EUMA Recipient:

Mark Willard, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Willard, BLET Division 122 (Leona A. Louis Memorial Scholarship)

### SWCM Recipients:

Alexander G. Evans, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jim Evans, BLET Division 527

Katelyn E. Evans, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jim Evans, BLET Division 527 (John & Brenda Casteel Scholarship)

### IWC-Only Recipients:

Tyler Derbish, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Derbish, BLET Division 20

Rachel McWilliams, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Robby L. McWilliams, BLET Division 664

Austin Scharff, son of Mr. & Mrs. Gerald J. Scharff, BLET Division 104

Thomas C. Slocumb, son of Mr. & Mrs. Christopher C. Slocumb. BLET Division 398

Hannah K. Stinson, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. C. Michael Stinson, BLET Division 228

Ha Fai (Frankie) Tang, son of Mr. & Mrs. Clarence D. Logan, BLET Division 727

Roger B. Wickham, son of Mr. & Mrs. Walter R. Wickham, BLET Division 228

**1st Alternate:** Whitney Hodges, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Michael Hodges, BLET Division 232

**2nd Alternate:** Brandon Mooer, son of Mr. & Mrs. Alan J. Mooer. BLET Division 180

## Auxiliary 622 Organized - continued from front cover

are: Brandi Keane, Natalie Miller, Melissa Van Galder, Ann Underwood, Robin Hellwig, Jennie Burri, Lindsey Chasek, and Shelley Pfeiffer. We may be a small group, but we are mighty, and with every new member, our collective voice gets louder.

BLET Auxiliary 622 looks forward to joining our voices with those of the National BLET Auxiliary to help make a difference in the work conditions and lives of not just our own BLET brothers and sisters and their families here in Nebraska, but for the hard working BLET brothers and sisters and their families all across the country.

We extend a huge thank you to Anita and Darla for making the trip to this end of the state, and for being so patient and helpful in getting us started! We will begin meeting regularly in September, and are excited to see what wonderful things are in store for us.

## IN MEMORIAM

Dan J. Hall, 56 - President of BLET Div. 592, Dalhart Texas

John S. Hall, 49 - Member of Div. 592, Dalhart, Texas

Both of these UP engineers joined the BLET on January 1, 1999, and were killed in a head-on rail collision near the town of Goodwill, Oklahoma, on June 29, 2012

We extend our deepest condolences to their families and friends.

*A bit of trivia -*

### ***What Makes Leaves Change Color in the Fall?***

Chlorophyll is what makes leaves green. During the growing season, which is mainly during the summer, leaves are so dominated by the green of chlorophyll that all other pigments within the leaf are masked. When the cold sets in, and the sun withdraws, the trees begin a withdrawal process of their own. The sugars that are produced by chlorophyll are drawn back into the tree as this will be its sustenance, and the chlorophyll itself is reduced in number. A layer of cork forms between the branch and the leaf, which eventually will allow the leaf to fall. During the change from chlorophyll-abundance to chlorophyll-absence, the color of the leaves will change to create the beautiful fall foliage colors of yellow, orange, and red that we enjoy each year.



## TIDBITS FROM YOUR NATIONAL SECRETARY - BY LINDA D. MAHER

**Prayers and Get Well Wishes** go out to Berniece Beasley who has recently been ill and is now recovering and living with her daughter Cathy. Berniece has been a member since June 27, 1989. On behalf of the BLET Auxiliary officers and members, we wish you a speedy recovery and you are in our prayers.

**Our Deepest Sympathies** go out the families of Arbie Callis and Frances Srubas. Arbie was a member of Generosity Auxiliary 37 in Little Rock, Arkansas, since March 11, 1977. God called Arbie home on August 1, 2012. Frances Srubas started out as a member of Auxiliary 464 on October 7, 1980, and transferred to member-at-large status on January 1, 2000. She regularly attended the SWCM with her husband Leo for many years. Frances went to her eternal peace on August 25, 2012. Sisters, may you rest in peace with God! On behalf of the BLET Auxiliary and its members, our deepest sympathies go out to the families of these beloved sisters.

### **MAL News**

Welcome to our newest members who have joined since our last publication:

**Members-at-large:** Carrie Cumber from Hastings, New York; Kileen Hagadone from Forsyth, Montana; Runa Kenner from Forsyth, Montana; Sheri S. Wood from Sandston, Virginia. and retired member-at-large, Linda (Sunny) Perkovich from West St. Paul, Minnesota.

**Associate members-at-large:** James H. Rigsby from Fitzgerald, Georgia; Woody Taylor from Santa Clara, Utah; Susan Tukul from Southfield, Michigan; and John

Tolman from Cleveland, Ohio.

Welcome also to Rusty Lovell, Ken Gleeson, Ron Sprague, Claudia Anderson, and Henry and Joanna Zappia, who recently became members of Guadalupe Auxiliary 28 in Tucson, Arizona. Good job on recruiting, Sereena!

Thank you to all those NEW members who have caught the bug to join us as members of the BLET AUXILIARY!

As the summer winds down, so am I. We are returning to Hawaii a little early this year as we will be attending a Hawaiian wedding. We have been blessed with many new friends through the years and we are honored to be a guest at Gilbert and Linda's son's wedding. We will be at our condo on Oahu beginning September 30, 2012, and will return back to Ohio on May 3, 2013. During that time, all mail should be sent to the Hawaii address listed below. Should you wish to reach me by phone, please remember that we are in the Hawaii-Aleutian time zone where daylight savings time is not observed.

From my family to yours, we wish a Happy Halloween and a most Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving to all our BLET and Auxiliary brothers and sisters! Be safe throughout the holiday season. May we all be thankful for the many blessings that have been bestowed upon us.

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*Linda Maher can be reached September 30, 2012 - May 3, 2013, at 84-688 Ala Mahiku Street #161A, Waianae, HI 96792, 808-888-5783, or at 29215 West Miller Road, Willoughby Hills, Ohio, 44092, 440-944-6579, from May 4 - September 29, 2013. She can be reached by e-mail any time at [bidykaili@aol.com](mailto:bidykaili@aol.com).*



*Our foremothers fought and died so that we could have the right to vote... sisters, make sure your vote gets counted on November 6!*

Initiatives to promote voting rights for women have been traced back to the 1770s, but the modern movement for a vote for women traces its beginning to the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, when supporters of a Constitutional Amendment to allow women to vote came together. While their movement was slowed during the Civil War years, the two major suffragist organizations united after the war and pushed forward with a movement that culminated, after many difficult years, in the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, giving women the right to vote.



## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE - BY SEREENA HOGAN, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REP

*“Working families built this country with hard work and the belief that work connects us all, and unions are the way we stand up for the principle that everyone’s work matters.”*

— David Boundy, National Campaign Director of the AFL-CIO

### Surface Transportation Bill Signed into Law

On July 6, President Obama signed into law the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) bill to extend federal surface transportation funding through September 2014. H.R. 4348, allocates more than \$100 billion in infrastructure investment across the country. This is the first highway bill to be passed since 2005. The package cleared the House on a 373-52 vote and the Senate on a 74-19 vote. In general, during the conference deliberations, the Senate gave up environmentally friendly provisions while the House gave up its Keystone XL pipeline and coal ash provisions

On June 28, two anti-train amendments were withdrawn by the representatives who had offered them. The amendment offered by Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX) that would have directly shut down Amtrak’s long-distance trains, thereby ending passenger train service in 27 of the lower 48 states was withdrawn. This measure would have also been a threat to the remaining trains, as certain fixed costs that would not disappear would be shifted to the surviving trains, and the costs of closing routes also would be substantial.

Another amendment intended to prohibit the use of appropriated funds on food and beverage service on Amtrak was also withdrawn. Amtrak’s

café car service has been a target of Republican lawmakers’ ire for some time because it operates at a loss that is subsidized by federal funds. However, the service is not intended as a moneymaker, but is provided as a part of the overall service to passengers on the majority of trains that operate on a daily basis. Elimination of the service would translate to a huge loss of ridership. Because it is hard to increase sales when your clientele is limited to the passengers on the train, even a privately run service would suffer losses which would also have to be subsidized by federal funds. Also, the measure in the Senate version of the bill that was intended to delay the implementation of Positive Train Control was eliminated in the final bill.

One thing that is included in the bill is the extension of a Railroad Grade Crossing set aside that targets funds at improving and upgrading crossings to eliminate collisions between automobiles and trains.

Overall, this bill will help maintain jobs on transportation projects, prevent interest rate increases on new loans to millions of college students, and reauthorizes the federal flood insurance program for five years.

### Whistleblower Rights Being Challenged by Railroads

**History:** On August 3, 2007, the Federal Railroad Safety Act (FRSA), 49 U.S.C. §20109, was amended by The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act (Public Law 110-53) to transfer authority for railroad worker whistleblower protections to OSHA and to include new rights, remedies, and procedures. On October 16, 2008, the Rail Safety Improvement Act (Public Law 110-432) again amended FRSA, to specifically prohibit discipline, harassment, or intimidation of employees who report

or participate in an investigation of injuries and safety violations, seek prompt medical treatment for on-the-job injuries, or follow their physician’s treatment orders.

That law is now being challenged by the railroads and a major battle has ensued in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, where Norfolk Southern Railway has sued Labor Secretary Hilda Solis. Norfolk Southern is seeking to overturn a decision by the Administrative Review Board (ARB) of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) affirming an earlier decision by an OSHA Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) that railroad workers may pursue whistleblower claims in addition to labor agreement disciplinary appeals when their rights are violated by a railroad.

The whistleblower rights are contained in Section 20109 of Title 49 of the United States Code. The OSHA ALJ ruled that both avenues are available to railroad workers because subsection (h) of Section 20109 states that: “Nothing in this section shall be deemed to diminish the rights, privileges, or remedies of any employee ... under any collective bargaining agreement.”

Norfolk Southern, with the support of the Association of American Railroads, is seeking to overturn this decision, claiming that railroad workers who appeal their dismissals are barred from pursuing a whistleblower claim by FRSA subsection (g), which states that an “employee may not seek protection under both this section and another provision of law for the same allegedly unlawful act of the railroad carrier.” The carriers argue that the right to appeal discipline for alleged rules infractions to a Section 3 adjustment board under the Railway Labor Act constitutes “protection under another provision of law,” not from a collective bargaining agreement.

**November**

Tuesday

**6**

**ELECTION DAY**

## **Don't Miss Your Opportunity - Vote Early - Vote Absentee !**

In a BLET Newsflash posted on August 10, 2012, BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce advised all BLET members of the importance of voting, particularly in the current political climate, stating: "It is imperative that every BLET member vote in November, and any member who may possibly be working that day needs to arrange to cast an early or absentee ballot."

To learn the deadlines and requirements for voter registration and early and absentee voting in your state, visit the National Association of Secretaries of State's Can I Vote? website at: <http://www.canivote.org/>

The ruling that was upheld by the Administrative Review Board was issued in a case involving the whistleblower rights of a BLET member, employed as a locomotive engineer, who was wrongfully terminated by the Union Pacific Railroad (UP). The ARB decision came in a consolidated appeal with a Norfolk Southern conductor's complaint, which opened the door to the Norfolk Southern court challenge.

When the locomotive engineer was discharged in November 2007, the BLET appealed on his behalf under the collective bargaining agreement. When UP refused to put him back to work, the BLET successfully argued to a Section 3 arbitrator that his agreement rights were violated. On March 27, 2008, the BLET member filed a whistleblower complaint with OSHA, charging that he was illegally terminated for reporting an on-the-job injury.

The BLET National Division has requested the court's permission to intervene in Norfolk Southern's lawsuit in defense of this member's whistleblower rights, and join Secretary Solis's motion to dismiss the case. This is just one of several OSHA decisions that have gone against Norfolk Southern. On June 18, OSHA announced that Norfolk Southern has been fined over \$800,000 for unlawfully firing workers who reported on-the-job injuries, including \$525,000 for punitive damages and attorneys' fees.

Norfolk Southern is not the only railroad that has caught OSHA's attention. In early June of this year, the Assistant Secretary for Occupational Safety and Health slammed attorneys for Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) for asking OSHA to disclose the names of non-management employee witnesses the agency intended to interview in several other ongoing whistleblower investigations.

BNSF officials had taken the position that it should be able to "offer its representation" to these non-management witnesses. BNSF also asserted that it had a right to be present during any OSHA interview of a non-management witness. In a letter to BNSF's General Counsel, OSHA's Assistant Secretary David Michaels rejected the BNSF requests as "wholly inappropriate," stating that, "OSHA assumes that BNSF counsel would be well aware of the conflict of interest that would inevitably arise if BNSF's attorney were to represent both the corporation and non-managerial employees in a whistleblower case ... OSHA takes allegations of such retaliation extremely seriously and will not tolerate retaliation against witnesses who cooperate in FRSA whistleblower investigations."

In response to the growing need for education and information to increase awareness and use of whistleblower protections throughout the organization, the BLET National Division is providing all General Chairmen, State Legislative Board Chairmen, Local Chairmen, and

Legislative Representatives information concerning the industry's attempt to thwart whistleblower investigations and enforcement of worker protections.

Copies of OSHA's press release concerning the Norfolk Southern fines, OSHA's letter to BNSF's Legal Department, National President Pierce's response to the OSHA letter, and his letter to BLET officers concerning this issue can be viewed, printed, and/or downloaded from this link: [www.ble-t.org/pdf/Whistleblower\\_Circular.pdf](http://www.ble-t.org/pdf/Whistleblower_Circular.pdf).

### **Railroader Sleep Study**

The results of a study regarding railroad worker fatigue management, sleep, and sleep disorders have been made publicly available. The website, entitled "Railroaders' Guide to Healthy Sleep," [www.railroaderssleep.org](http://www.railroaderssleep.org), is the result of a collaborative project that was started in 2010 between BLET, Harvard Medical School, the WGBH Educational Foundation, and the UTU. The final product reflects anonymous survey results from a number of BLET and UTU members.

The website, sponsored by the Federal Railroad Administration, gives members information on how to obtain better sleep and also contains videos and other tools to help railroaders stay safe on the job, including instructions on how to listen to one's body clock and how to recognize sleep apnea. It also has an interactive feature that allows one to check his/her reaction time.

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**Amtrak and High Speed Rail High-Speed Rail in California:** On July 6, the California State Senate voted to pass legislation that will enable high-speed rail construction to begin. The new rail system would be the largest public works project in the state and could potentially employ hundreds of unionized maintenance of way workers and locomotive engineers and trainmen.

California Governor Jerry Brown and his administration have been pushing for the passage of this high-speed rail project ever since he took office in January 2011, and the Obama Administration is strongly in favor of high-speed rail projects.

BLET National President Dennis Pierce commented that California will serve as a model for other states and cities to make similar decisions and that BLET members look forward to operating the equipment on this state-of-the-art rail line.

**High-Speed Rail on the East Coast:** In a report released in early July, Amtrak announced an updated plan for high-speed train travel on the East Coast that envisions 37-minute trips between Philadelphia and New York after a \$151 billion redevelopment of the Northeast Corridor. This faster service would be phased in gradually as Amtrak improves existing tracks, signals, bridges, and power lines, and builds a separate high-speed corridor between Washington and Boston to accommodate trains traveling at 220 miles per hour. The segment between New York and Washington is expected to be completed by 2030, and the route between New York and Boston by 2040. Amtrak says the costs of building the new rail system would be offset by 40,000 construction jobs a year for 25 years, 22,000 new permanent jobs, and increased revenue and productivity for East Coast employers. Amtrak plans to acquire 40 more Acela Express passenger cars, which will increase

capacity by 40 percent on the fastest trains they now operate.

It's no secret that Amtrak is dependent on annual appropriations from Congress for its survival. Amtrak reduced cost estimates in its new plan by combining proposals for upgrading the existing corridor and building the high-speed line. The railroad now calls for spending \$3 billion to \$4 billion a year during peak construction years and delaying some spending beyond 2040, when ticket revenues of \$4.86 billion a year are anticipated to be rolling in from 43.5 million passengers. If federal, state, and local governments pay to build the new high-speed rail system, the revenues from the trains will more than pay for the costs of operating and maintaining them. Amtrak is projecting a \$928 million operating surplus by 2040, which could be used to pay back money borrowed for construction.

Amtrak needs to build political and popular support for funding and building this proposed high-speed corridor. With incremental projects now underway, like the \$450 million effort to increase train speeds between Trenton and New Brunswick, the railroad hopes to demonstrate its ability to get bigger and faster.

The outcome of the November election, however, could spell real trouble for Amtrak. On August 28, the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Florida, approved its platform to eliminate funding for Amtrak passenger rail service, privatize airport security screening wherever possible, and stop the use of money earmarked for highway construction and other purposes. The platform includes many provisions that were pushed by Republicans in the House during recent negotiations over the new \$105 billion transportation bill that was approved by lawmakers in June. An excerpt from "We Believe in America," the 2012 Republican

platform, states:

"Amtrak continues to be, for the taxpayers, an extremely expensive railroad. The public has to subsidize every ticket nearly \$50. It is long past time for the federal government to get out of way and allow private ventures to provide passenger service to the northeast corridor. The same holds true with regard to high-speed and intercity rail across the country."

And here is what BLET President Pierce has to say on this matter:

"Adopting a policy that calls for the outright demise of Amtrak is an eye-opener for all railroad workers in the United States. The fate of our Railroad Retirement system is tied to steady employment levels in the railroad industry over a long period of time. The sudden elimination of 20,000 Amtrak jobs could likely sound the death knell for Railroad Retirement as we know it."

**Railroad Retirement Under Attack**  
As reported in the last issue of this publication, the attack on Railroad Retirement proffered under Congressman Paul Ryan's budget proposal (House Congressional Resolution 112) is a huge issue to consider as national election time draws closer. We fought hard in an unprecedented coalition of the carriers, retirees, and the rail labor unions for the changes that were made to Railroad Retirement in 2001. No taxpayer funds are used for our retirement plan; therefore, there would be no budgetary savings as the Ryan Budget purports. If enacted, the Ryan Budget would:

- Eliminate the "60/30" provision, which allows railroad employees to retire with full benefits at 60 years of age with 30 years of service;
- Eliminate the Railroad Retirement Occupational disability program for rail workers who can no longer

- perform their railroad duties due to disability;
- Increase the minimum retirement age for railroad workers to 62 years of age with a reduction in benefits;
  - Increase the minimum age for spousal annuities with a reduction in benefits;
  - Eliminate Medicare as we know it and increase the Medicare eligibility age to 67 with drastically reduced coverage;
  - Increase the annual out-of-pocket medical costs paid by railroad retirees and cause the costs of railroad retiree health insurance under GA46000 to soar; and
  - Replace Medicare's guaranteed benefits with a voucher system that is not guaranteed to cover the cost of equivalent care currently provided under Medicare.

Presidential candidate Mitt Romney has repeatedly stated his support for the Ryan Budget, and now has named Paul Ryan as his running mate in the upcoming election. President Pierce made the following statement back in May: "If those who support the Ryan Budget capture the White House and the Senate, and retain the House, this nightmare will become a reality, and our members' economic security will be set back by decades. We need to remember this on November 6 and vote for candidates who will help working Americans."

As an organization, we are not allowed to get involved in politics or tell our members how to vote; however, it is the job of our National Auxiliary Legislative Department to do what we can to make sure our members are educated about the issues. Enough said!

### **Medicare**

As outlined in the bulleted text above, the same proposed Ryan Budget that would have extremely detrimental effects on our Railroad Retirement would also put an end to Medicare as we know

it, replacing Medicare's guaranteed benefits with a capped voucher that beneficiaries could use to purchase their own health insurance. A publication entitled "Medicare Watch – Your Weekly Medicare Consumer Advocacy Update" reported on August 9, 2012:

"The proposal would also establish block grants for Medicaid, meaning the government would provide a capped amount of funding to states for the program. The proposal cuts Medicaid by over \$800 billion. These changes would significantly increase costs and decrease access to care for Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries.

"In response to the Ryan budget proposal, the House Energy and Commerce Committee has analyzed the impact the proposal would have in all 405 congressional districts. The Energy and Commerce Committee details the ways in which the proposal reduces access to care for millions of Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries across the country. For example, in New York's 18th Congressional District, older adults and people with disabilities would spend an extra \$95 million in prescription drug costs over the next 10 years. Similarly, nearly 100,000 Medicare beneficiaries in New York's 8th Congressional District alone would no longer be able to access free preventive services.

"While policymakers claim the goal of Chairman Ryan's budget proposal is to save the government money, it shifts costs to Medicare beneficiaries and does little to address the real cause of increased Medicare spending: rising costs in the health care sector overall. According to the Congressional Budget Office, over time, proposals similar to the one Chairman Ryan introduced would double out-of-pocket costs for people with Medicare. Policies that aim to save money in the Medicare program should be based on solutions that preserve access to affordable health care and

protect beneficiaries from the burden of added out-of-pocket health costs."

**Source:** <http://www.medicarerights.org/issues-actions/medicare-watch-archive/2012-30.php>.

### **New benefit year for Railroad Unemployment and Sickness Benefits**

A new benefit year under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act began July 1, 2012. Administered by the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB), this Act provides two kinds of benefits for qualified railroaders: unemployment benefits for those who become unemployed but are ready, willing, and able to work; and sickness benefits for those who are unable to work because of sickness or injury. Sickness benefits are also payable to female rail workers for periods of time when they are unable to work because of pregnancy and childbirth. A listing of questions and answers that describe these benefits, their eligibility requirements, and how to claim them can be found at: [http://www.rrb.gov/opa/qa/pub\\_1206.asp](http://www.rrb.gov/opa/qa/pub_1206.asp).

### **Register to Vote!**

If you are not yet registered to vote, you can get the forms needed to register in your state quickly and easily by going to <http://www.teamster.org/content/register-vote-2>. In most states, residents have until some time in early to mid-October to register for the general election in November. So much hangs on this election that will affect your livelihood. How our representatives vote on issues at the state or national level determines so much about our lives, and we are the ones who put them in office! If you can vote early in your state, then take advantage of that option, especially if you are on a train crew — you never know whether or not you will be in town on Election Day.

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# Retirement Rocks!

By Pat Murphy, Member, Auxiliary No. 3,  
Buffalo, New York

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The decision to retire came to us as a result of my husband Jack's medical condition, so we were thrust upon this new stage of our lives without any concern as to how we would spend our time. Back then, I had no idea if we would be able to get him well again, but I was told it would take time—lots of time!

Retirement was the gift of freedom for us. It allowed us to move to a warmer and sunnier climate for a better chance at Jack's recovery. It also gave us the gift of time. Now we would be able to make and keep the landslide of appointments that came as a result of the number and types of treatments he would receive. Those first years were awash with constraints on any type of personal plans we would have liked to have made. For a railroad wife, setting priorities of what can and would get done comes with the job. So I was already on auto pilot when it came to making less-than-favorite choices for how we would spend our time. Our new neighbors and friends in Florida found it hard to understand why Jack had to frequently sleep during the day when there was golfing and fishing to be done. With so much that we couldn't do, it was as if he was still working.

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*Oklahoma basketball coach Abe Lemons once said, "The trouble with retirement is that you never get a day off." So far, that hasn't been a problem.*

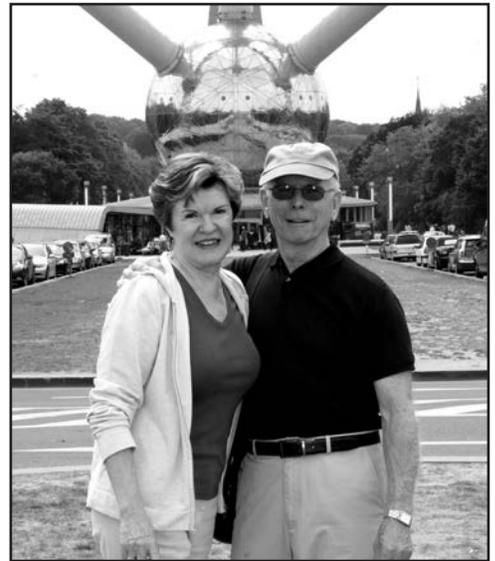
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But prayers were answered, the surgeries and treatments worked, and a lot of time was spent waiting for things to get better, and they did!

So it is only within the recent past that we have been able to move into this prolonged holiday stage of retirement that many of us anticipate. Now friends and family from back home in New York have been able to spend vacation time with us and each visit is just like a vacation for

us too. We have discovered our local museums, theme parks, aquariums, theatre, and symphonies during their stays. We even mastered using the Segway with them. A visitor from back home is always a treat as well as an adventure.



**Pat and Jack Murphy**

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Some of our new friends here came from Ireland, Belgium, and Malta for a new life in America as they became citizens. They have shared their stories, customs, and food with us, and each is one is a gentle reminder of how much people want to live in this country. We have visited Brussels, Antwerp, and Bruges, where we consumed more than our share of seafood and heavenly Belgian waffles. We took the bullet train to Paris, where the crepes with ham and cheese tasted best from a stand right across from the Eiffel Tower. Then we toured the Louvre and lit a candle in Notre Dame before rummaging through a world spice market on our way back to the metro. Europe was a wonderful place to visit because one of our traveling companions was born and raised there. We had no learning curve and we were treated like extended family in all of their favorite bistros and restaurants.

Three weeks of June were spent back home in Buffalo—our longest visit yet, that included a tour through the Finger Lakes region and charter fishing for walleye on Lake Erie with retired BLET engineer, Capt. Lance Ehrhardt. We hope there will be more visits like that in our future. Our next trip will take place before this issue is printed. We are going to the EUMA Convention in Atlantic City to see old friends, trade old stories, and make new memories. A Christmas in Las Vegas is next on our list.

Oklahoma basketball coach Abe Lemons once said, "The trouble with retirement is that you never get a day off." So far, that hasn't been a problem.

# 36 Reasons Why You Should Thank a Union

1. Weekends
2. All Breaks at Work, including your Lunch Breaks
3. Paid Vacation
4. FMLA
5. Sick Leave
6. Social Security
7. Minimum Wage
8. Civil Rights Act/Title VII (Prohibits Employer Discrimination)
9. 8-Hour Work Day
10. Overtime Pay
11. Child Labor Laws
12. Occupational Safety & Health Act (OSHA)
13. 40 Hour Work Week
14. Worker's Compensation (Worker's Comp)
15. Unemployment Insurance
16. Pensions
17. Workplace Safety Standards and Regulations
18. Employer Health Care Insurance
19. Collective Bargaining Rights for Employees
20. Wrongful Termination Laws
21. Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967
22. Whistleblower Protection Laws
23. Employee Polygraph Protect Act (Prohibits Employer from using a lie detector test on an employee)
24. Veteran's Employment and Training Services (VETS)
25. Compensation increases and Evaluations (Raises)
26. Sexual Harassment Laws
27. Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)
28. Holiday Pay
29. Employer Dental, Life, and Vision Insurance
30. Privacy Rights
31. Pregnancy and Parental Leave
32. Military Leave
33. The Right to Strike
34. Public Education for Children
35. Equal Pay Acts of 1963 & 2011 (Requires employers pay men and women equally for the same amount of work)
36. Laws Ending Sweatshops in the United States

## From 1st VP/National Outreach Coordinator Gina Forman



With the end of summer comes the beginning of another school year and I am hard at work doing what I love - helping to educate young people. I enjoyed getting together with my Auxiliary sisters on the Executive Council in Omaha in early June and taking care of the important business of the Auxiliary for another year.

We have updated our recruiting materials and have copies of our Abbreviated Packets available to send out to potential new members as well as New Auxiliary Start-up Packets for those who are interested in getting a local auxiliary started in their areas. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need materials sent to you.

Wishing everyone a very Happy Thanksgiving and all the blessings that the Autumn season of harvest brings to us!

Gina Forman can be reached at 765-432-1050, [tweety95@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tweety95@sbcglobal.net), or 63 S. Hood Street, Peru, Indiana 46970

## Greetings from the Editor, Sereena Hogan

The autumn months, when the temperatures begin to fall and that clean, crisp feel returns to the air is always a very welcome time for me. It seems that my energy level begins to rise again as we can all become a little sluggish at the end of a long, hot summer. Its a relief to be able to turn off the air conditioning and open the doors and windows!

As I write this, the Southwestern Convention in Galveston is wrapping up and that marks the end of another year of regional conventions. I was unable to make it to the SWCM this year, but I heard it was a good one, as were all the regional conventions. Stories on those will appear in the next issue of this publication.

Happy fall season to all our readers — if you get a chance, get out and enjoy the fall colors before all the leaves fall to the ground!

**We welcome your submissions for our publication. Please send your stories, articles, photos, poems, etc., to:**

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**The next issue will be published in December. Please have your submissions to Sereena by November 20.**

*Moving? Please notify us of your new address*

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