



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 7, Number 3

Autumn 2016

Sereena Hogan, President • Susie Burrola, 1st Vice President • Lawana Poss, Secretary • Terri Fleming, Treasurer
Kathleen Bisbikis, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative • www.bletauxiliary.net

2016 BLET Executive Council Meeting Chicago, Illinois



BLET Auxiliary Executive Council: Kathleen Bisbikis, National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Rep; Terri Fleming, National Treasurer; Sereena Hogan, National President, Lawana Poss, National Secretary, Susie Burrola, National 1st Vice President/Outreach Coordinator.

The members of the BLET Executive Council held their annual meeting at the Hilton Drake Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, in conjunction with the BLET Eastern Regional Meeting held at that location July 11-15. Many thanks to the BLET National for providing a meeting room for the Council during that week.

The Executive Council is required to meet once each year to discuss the business of the Auxiliary, review its financial status and membership statistics, discuss fundraising activities and ideas for the future, and establish policies and procedures for the organization. Each officer gives a report of her activities since the last meeting, and reports are also given on each of the Auxiliary's programs: Care & Assistance Program, Scholarship Program, Legislative Program, and Mobilization Program.

Grading of scholarship applications is usually done at the Executive Council Meeting also, but because the 2016 meeting was held later in the calendar year than usual, the scholarships had already been graded and awarded prior to the meeting via a conference call of the Executive Council members (see scholarship recipients on page 14).



The Tupperware fundraiser is still ongoing. As of September, a new catalog of items that are included in the fundraiser is available.

To access the fundraiser online go to <http://www.tupperware.com/?fundraiser=573f8deb3d159109284abc15>. Click on the SHOP button and make your selections.

You can also access the fundraiser site from our Facebook page or from our website at www.bletauxiliary.net.

Forty percent of the sales will go to the Auxiliary. Happy shopping!

Many thanks to Northern California BLET Division 839 Engineer Kenny Brown for setting this up for us!

The National Auxiliary now has a Paypal Account. It can be used to make donations, pay annual dues, etc. Go to www.bletauxiliary.net.

From the President - BY SEREENA HOGAN

Greetings members and friends!

It was great to see many of you at the BLET Eastern Regional Meeting in Chicago this summer. In an effort to economize on travel expenses this year, the members of the Executive Council decided to have our annual meeting in Chicago, thereby allowing all five of us to be in attendance for the week of the Eastern Meeting. On Tuesday afternoon, when I arrived at the room designated for our open auxiliary meeting, I was greeted by the other four members of the Council, all wearing t-shirts they had made up that said "She Fights, We Fight" and the pink breast cancer awareness ribbon on them (see photo insert). What a wonderful and touching surprise this was for me... I was moved to tears! The support I have received from these sisters, and from many of you across the nation during this time, has meant the world to me! Thank you so much for the cards, e-mails, phone calls, and texts! Your prayers and caring thoughts are so appreciated! I am doing well and feeling good. Because of my treatment schedule, I was unable to make it to the BLET Western Regional Meeting this year. Our 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Kathleen Bisbikis and National Treasurer Terri Fleming did a wonderful job representing the Auxiliary in Long Beach! Thanks so much to both of you!

Although my wish is somewhat belated, I would like to wish our Auxiliary Sister Doris Chandler McKellar a very happy 90th Birthday! She turned 90 on July 4 of this year. I have had some delightful phone conversations with Doris in recent months in which she has updated me on her life and expressed her gratitude for the monthly stipend that we are able to provide for her to help her with her monthly expenses.

I also had a call in early July from a long-time Auxiliary sister and past national officer, Mabel Grotzinger. Mabel served as 2nd Vice President and National Legislative Representative from 1996 - 2000, and then as 1st Vice President from 2001 - 2007. The close proximity of her home in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, to Washington, D.C., allowed her to make many trips to Capitol Hill where she lobbied extensively for the passage of the Railroad Retirement Reform Act and other important legislation.



Mabel wanted to let me know that her mailing address for the newsletter needed to be updated and she told me that she is happy to see the Auxiliary is doing well and that she likes what she is seeing in the newsletter. She also said that she misses seeing her Auxiliary sisters and the day-to-day involvement, and wanted to say hello to everyone. In spite of some health issues she has experienced in recent years, she sounded good and it was a real pleasure to hear her voice. If anyone would like to reach out to Mabel and say hello back, give me a call or send me a text or e-mail and I will give you her contact information.

September is Suicide Prevention Month. As those of us with connections to railroad life know all too well, people often choose to commit suicide on the railroad tracks, not only taking their own lives, but seriously traumatizing the men and women who are operating the train on that track, sometimes leaving our train crews with lasting repercussions. In light of that and recent events that have occurred on the tracks here in Tucson, I decided to write an article for this issue on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and how it can deeply affect not only our engineers and conductors, but also their spouses and family members. (See pages 12-13).

As summer draws to an end and Autumn sweeps in, I wish all of you a season filled with many blessings and good times with family and friends!

Sereena Hogan, National President
8720 N. Myrtle Drive
Tucson, Arizona 85704
520-297-0944, vp3sereena@aol.com

BLET Auxiliary Care & Assistance Program

By Terri Fleming

BLET National Auxiliary Treasurer

The national officers of the BLET Auxiliary work hard throughout each year, and especially at the annual regional conventions, to raise funds to support our Scholarship Program.

We are honored to award scholarships to the sons and daughters of our members every year. Did you know that we also have another program to help our members? It is called the Care and Assistance Program (CAP), through which we offer financial assistance to our members in need. We currently provide a monthly stipend to three long-time auxiliary members to help them meet their financial obligations. Depending upon availability of funds in this program, we may also offer assistance by making a one-time donation to families of our members who experience financial hardship resulting from emergency situations that arise due to illness or injury of the BLET member or the Auxiliary member in the family.

To apply for this program, a petition must be brought before a local auxiliary and be put into writing and submitted to our National President as to the need for financial assistance. Then the National President will send the proper form to the petitioner. After returning the completed form to the National President, the case will be determined by the Executive Council of the BLET Auxiliary. Members-



at-Large are also eligible to apply for assistance through the CAP. Applicants to the Care and Assistance Program must meet the following qualifications:

- 1) An applicant must be a member in good standing of the BLET Auxiliary for a minimum of one year.
- 2) An auxiliary member who loses her or his spouse and needs financial assistance with supporting minor children must be a member in good standing when she or he becomes a widow/widower. The children must live with the widow/widower and the widow/widower must be solely responsible for the support until the child/children reach the age 18 years old.
- 3) A member in need of temporary financial assistance, if approved by the Executive Council, may be allowed to receive help on a one-time basis. Each case will be handled individually and ruled upon according to the information provided.

We feel honored and privileged to be able to award scholarships to our members' children each year to help them reach their goals, and we also have recognized the importance helping out our members who encounter difficult circumstances in their lives. The primary source of income for both our Scholarship Program and our Care and Assistance Program is through fundraising efforts at the regional conventions, which have recently been reduced from four conventions per year to two per year. If you have any questions about this program, please don't hesitate to contact one of the BLET Auxiliary Executive Council members.

Gateway Auxiliary No. 4448 Organized in St. Louis, Missouri



Gateway Auxiliary No. 4448 came into being on March 9, 2016, at a dinner sponsored by FELA Attorney Jerry Schlichter at Crusoe's South Restaurant in St. Louis, Missouri. Illinois State Legislative Chairman Paul Piekarski, and Missouri State Legislative Chairman Brian Kelly and his wife Pam attended the meeting.

Many thanks to Auxiliary 4448 President Tracy Meers for her tireless efforts to get this auxiliary organized. We wish them much success as they strive to recruit new members in the St. Louis area.



Gateway Auxiliary Officers: Tracy Pope, Legislative Rep.; Carol Wray, Secretary-Treasurer; Tammy Poole, Vice President; and Tracy Meers, President.

Happy 90th Birthday to Doris Chandler McKellar!

By Sereena Hogan, National President



Doris Chandler McKellar has been a grateful recipient of our Care & Assistance Program since 2005

Doris Chandler McKellar, of Clay, Alabama, celebrated her 90th birthday on July 5, 2016. A beautifully surprise tea and luncheon, complete with linen tablecloths and flowers, was organized by her church. Her daughter came in from Dove Shores, Alabama, for the celebration, and a video slideshow of photographs from Doris's life was shown for all to enjoy.

Doris has been an Auxiliary member for over 50 years. She joined Emily Denny Auxiliary

189 in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1965, and is now a member-at-large. She remembers well the many trips she took with Past Grand President Lilly Mae Parker and Jessie Frazier to the Southeastern Meeting Association Conventions, where she is remembered for her singing and piano playing. In spite of her many health issues and joint replacements, Doris is proud of the fact that she still lives in her own home, drives, cooks her own meals, and does her own housework.

Doris was originally married to F.W. Chandler, Sr., an engineer for L&N Railroad. They were married 28 years until he died in a head-on collision in 1976. She was 50 and he was 52. Three years later, she married Robert E. McKellar, who worked for Boston & Maine Railroad and was a member of Division 14. They were married 21 years until he passed away in 2000 after being in a nursing home for three years.

She remembers the days when she made breakfast for her engineer husband at 2 a.m., and the many times she and her family had their family photographs taken without him because he was stuck at the other end of the line on the day the photo was scheduled. Doris told me in a recent telephone conversation that she loves all railroad people and her auxiliary, and that she prays often for the safety of the men and women working on the railroad today.

Memorial Fund Established for families of the victims of the Panhandle, Texas, Train Collision

The following is from an e-mail sent out by BLET General Chairman Alan Holdcraft on July 6, 2016.

I am sure you are all aware that we lost a Brother and Sister in the tragic accident that occurred in Panhandle, Texas on June 28th at approximately 8:25 a.m. Both were BLET members of Division 299 in Amarillo, TX.

Brother Cody Owens was 52 years old and had worked for BNSF nearly 22 years. He is survived by his wife Cynthia, two sons and a daughter.

Sister Lara Taylor was 45 years old and had been employed with BNSF for 12 years. She is survived by her son Jacob.

This Committee, as well as the entire BLET family, is deeply saddened by these losses and we extend our deepest sympathy to their family and friends. This has been a difficult time and I know that we all grieve for this unfortunate loss.

In memory of Brother Owens and Sister Taylor, we have set up a memorial fund for those divisions or individuals who wish to contribute to the families during this time of need. A gift of any size will help and will be greatly appreciated. To make a donation, please send checks to:

Lara Taylor and Cody Owens Memorial Fund
101 N. Beverly St., Crowley, TX 76028

Unless otherwise directed, all donations will be divided equally between the two families.

Fraternally,

Alan Holdcraft, General Chairman
BLET ATSF/BNSF, GWR, PNR
817-426-9003 (Ext. 101) Office
877-546-3660 Fax

Going Green

You can help reduce our footprint on the environment by going green. As always, our newsletter is available on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net even before the copies are mailed out. We now offer readers the option to receive the newsletter in digital format. If you would like to receive your newsletter as an e-mail attachment sent to you each quarter, please e-mail publisher Sereena Hogan at vp3sereena@aol.com to let us know.



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LE&CMPA #16 monthly premium	Not listed	\$59.50	\$87.50	\$117.25	Why pay a fortune elsewhere? BR&CF members pay less per month for more in daily benefits.	
SMART - UTU monthly assessment	\$64.80	\$81.00	\$121.50	\$162.00		

Auxiliary Members Speak Out



Tracy Pope, Member of Gateway Auxiliary No. 4448, St. Louis, Missouri

"I am proud and honored to be a part of the Auxiliary. It has given me an opportunity to make a difference in my husband's career and to be a part of the railroad family."

Mary Jones, Member-at-Large, Seymour, Tennessee

"Joining the spouse's auxiliary is not only a way of supporting my husband, Rusty Jones, and the BLET, it is an affiliate that will provide mutual support and empowerment beyond retirement. I am a proud first-time member!"



Mike Casella, Member-at-Large, New Rochelle, New York

"My fiancée, Mary Donch, is a lifelong railroader and a member of the BLET Auxiliary. On her recommendation, I joined the BLET Auxiliary. Attending the auxiliary open meeting at the Eastern Regional Meeting in Chicago in July, I learned how passionate and loving the spouses and families of railroaders are towards each other. In a society that values hero worship above all, an organization that combines family, camaraderie, and workplace activism needs the full support of all our union members."

Make the most of your mental health and substance abuse care benefit by seeking care from United Behavioral Health network providers

The following is a press release from United Healthcare.

We all have moments in our lives when we feel overwhelmed and stressed, and confiding in a family member or friend may help us through those difficult times. Sometimes, though, personal struggles can be challenging and additional support is needed. The Mental Health and Substance Abuse Care Benefit (MHSA) offers confidential support and treatment whether it's struggling with raising teenagers, the loss of a loved one, or dealing with depression or an addiction. You are not alone. Once you make the decision to seek help, United Behavioral Health (UBH) is here 24/7 to assist with selecting a network provider with the right qualifications that will meet your particular needs.

Why should I consider choosing a network provider?

There are many reasons you should seek treatment from UBH's network of providers, some of which are:

- **Quality** – UBH network providers are reviewed regularly to ensure the quality of their services meet specific standards.
- **Best Match** – UBH has a large network of licensed, certified professionals, and treatment facilities that are recommended based on training, background, and expertise to suit you or a family member's specific needs.
- **Time** – UBH network providers save you time because they handle the insurance paperwork and submit claims on your behalf.
- **Cost** – UBH network providers can save you money because they agree to accept a pre-negotiated rate from your health insurer, and you will not be billed for any additional charges other than your copayments, deductibles, or coinsurance.

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Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

This year's regional meetings were held in Chicago, Illinois, in July, and Long Beach, California, in August. I hope you were able to attend one of these conventions. They offer a busy, fun-filled, educational week. If you were not able to attend, please try to attend one of the meetings next year! The Auxiliary is able to hold our fundraiser raffles at the meetings, to benefit our auxiliary Scholarship Fund. We want to thank everyone for your support!

MAL REMINDER

Thank you to the Members-at-Large who have sent in their dues. Second notices have been mailed. Mail your dues to me and I will get your 2016 Membership Card and receipt to you. You can also pay your dues through Paypal on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net.

AUXILIARY REMINDER

The 2015 year-end report and local auxiliary dues are past due. Local auxiliary secretaries, If you have not yet sent in your auxiliary's report and dues, please contact me. I will be happy to help you if you need more information or help filling out the forms for the report.

CARE AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Established in 1921, the Care and Assistance Program (CAP) is our organization's way of saying thank you to long-time members. These members are usually elderly and their incomes are such that some of life's little pleasures are out of their reach. The CAP provides financial assistance to qualifying members and helps them to maintain a little bit more of the dignity they deserve. Our CAP recipients are grateful for what we do. Please see the story about CAP recipient Doris McKellar on page 3 and more details about the program in an article by our National Treasurer Terri Fleming on page 3.

Contact me for CAP applications!! Please check to see if someone in your Auxiliary may be eligible and encourage them to apply. Members at Large are eligible also!!

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS AT LARGE:

Mary Jones – Seymour, TN
Michael Casella – New Rochelle, NY
Meneyonne Hedgepeth – Mauldin, GA

OUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

Sister Kathleen Bisbikis, National 2nd Vice President, is recovering from shoulder surgery that she had in June. We all send our love, thoughts, and prayers for a speedy recovery.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to Susie and Oscar Burrola on the birth of their first grandbaby, Oliver James Boisjolie. Oliver was born on August 12, 2016, weighing in at 6 lbs., 12 oz., and 20 inches long. Congratulations to Susie and Oscar's daughter Mariah, proud daddy Chris Boisjolie, and all the family!

Fall will be here in the blink of an eye. Children have returned to school after a wonderful, exciting, and hot summer. The seasons change before we know it and another year will quickly come to an end. The best part is that it means new beginnings. It is the chance to begin a new chapter in your life. Take a chance! Do something you have always thought of doing, but never took the time. Your possibilities are endless!

Along my journey I have learned that the more thankful I am, the more I have to be thankful for. Be blessed with everything you need. Keep working hard for everything you want. Most of all, appreciate and thank God for what you have. Enjoy the cool, crisp days of autumn and truly give thanks for all of life's blessings!

Please call or e-mail me, or any national officer, when there is a serious illness or death of a member, or the death of one of their family members. We want to be able to send prayers and/or condolences to the family. We would like to also share in the joy! Please let me know of any exciting happenings!



Lawana Poss can be reached at 770-497-8898, by e-mail at Lewp2007@bellsouth.net, or by mail at 1394 Bywood Court, Suwanee, Georgia 30024.

If I can answer any questions for you, give me a call or send me an e-mail and I will get back to you as soon as I can!!

— Lawana

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE



"Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance."

— St. Francis of Assisi

Are You Registered to Vote?

Election Day is right around the corner; are you registered to vote? How about your son or daughter, niece or nephew who just turned 18 or is away at college? Your wife or husband? Every election year, we hear that the upcoming presidential election is the most important one in history but perhaps this one really *is* the most important with the current candidates and the potential threat to us, and to all working people. We need to make a strong showing at the polling booths this November, so make sure you are registered to vote now.

Railroad life doesn't always allow us to be home on Election Day, so think about an absentee vote so you will still get the opportunity to have your vote count. You can register to vote online at Rock the Vote [https://](https://register2.rockthevote.com/registrants/map/)

[register2.rockthevote.com/
registrants/map/](https://register2.rockthevote.com/registrants/map/)

Smart Watch Rule Issued by FRA

The smart watch rage is everywhere these days, including the railroad. These handy devices not only tell you the time, they also count your steps, monitor your heart rate, and notify you of incoming calls and text messages. And that's where the Federal Railroad Administration has deemed them to be a problem.

These devices can cause the same distraction as other personal electronic devices. The FRA has acknowledged that time pieces have always played an important role in the railroad industry, but have stated that the primary function of Fitbits and other smart watches is not that of time keeping but rather of fitness tracking. The rule states, "In Title 49 CFR 220.303, a railroad operating employee shall not use an electronic device if that use would interfere with the employee's or another railroad operating employee's performance of safety-related duties. No individual in the cab of a controlling locomotive shall use an electronic device if that use would interfere with a railroad operating employee's performance of safety-related duties."

Keep in mind also that the rule does not discern between the different models of smart watches, because not all have the advanced functions, but it's probably safe to err on the side of caution and just leave your smart watch at home.

Collective Bargaining Helps Verizon employees

In a 45-day strike, one of the longest strikes in recent history, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) representing Verizon employees were able to come to a tentative agreement with the corporate phone giant. On April 13, 2016, close to 36,000 Verizon employees walked off the job due to poor working conditions, jobs being shipped overseas, and health-care and retirement issues, as well as being without a contact for over ten months.

The Verizon strike is an example of the importance of working people having the right to stand together and being able to negotiate collectively for fair wages and benefits as well as safe working conditions. "This tentative resolution is a testament to the power of collective bargaining," U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas Perez said in a statement. CWA President Chris Shelton also stated: "This proves that when we stand together we can raise up working families, improve our

communities and protect the American middle class."

BLET Testifies on 2-Person Crew Proposed Rule

On July 15, 2016, BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John Tolman testified at a public hearing conducted by the Federal Railroad Administration on the proposed two-person crew rule. A July 18 BLET News Flash reports that "Vice President Tolman expressed the BLET's growing frustration with the Association of American Railroads' (AAR's) assertion that not enough data exists regarding the safety of single-person crews.

The only way to gather single-person crew data is for train crews and the public to assume the risk that is being off-loaded by the railroads and onto them. AAR claims that since single person operational data does not exist, then FRA should either keep the status quo or allow single person or no person operations." Also in attendance supporting the two-person crew rule were John Risch from the SMART Transportation Division, and Edward Wytkind, President of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO.

Important Notice Regarding Health and Welfare Rates

On July 1, 2016, the cost share

for active BLET members was increased to \$228.89. This increase is in accordance with the 2012 National Agreement and will stay in effect until the next National Agreement is reached.

Obstructive Sleep Apnea

The public comment deadline passed on July 8 for the potential rule proposed by the Department of Transportation (DOT), Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). The rule would require train operators as well as truck drivers to be screened for obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). OSA is a respiratory disorder that causes breathing to stop and start while sleeping. According to the Mayo Clinic, symptoms of OSA can include waking up gasping or choking, excessive daytime drowsiness, morning headaches, high blood pressure, weight gain, and several other serious indicators that should not be ignored. "The sooner patients with OSA are diagnosed and treated, the sooner our rail network will be safer," said FRA Administrator Sarah Feinberg. For more information on sleeping disorders that directly affect railroaders, you can visit www.railroader-sleep.org.

Amtrak vs. Freight

The Safety Transportation Board announced that the current law stating passenger trains will have preference over freight trains will stay in effect. The STB had recently considered a proposal that would have allowed railroads to

prioritize freight trains before passenger rail. Amtrak argued that allowing this change would cause significant delays across the country to their passengers, both commuter and long-distance. The current statute was developed in the 1970s with the creation of Amtrak.

Railroad Employees' Sickness and Unemployment Benefits

The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) administers the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act, which 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 new benefit year begins each July 1.

For a list of questions and answers that describe these benefits, their eligibility requirements, and how to claim them, please see the related article on page 12 of the Summer issue of BLET Auxiliary News. This publication can be found online at <http://www.bletauxiliary.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Summer-2016.pdf>.

Kathleen Bisbikis can be reached by phone at 209-786-7367; by mail at 7367 Stabulis Rd., Valley Springs, California, 95252; or by e-mail at biz4413@gmail.com.

Make the most of your mental health and substance abuse care benefit

Continued from Page 5

What concerns should I have with out-of-network providers?

Many times when searching for help, individuals seek the advice of friends or explore the internet for providers of mental health and substance abuse treatment instead of calling the number on the back of their medical card. Or, individuals may be drawn to an advertisement for an out-of-network treatment program that appears to be the answer to their problem by promising a free flight to their facility or minimal to no charges for their treatment. What may happen instead is:

- **Quality** – You may not achieve success with rehabilitation or recovery if the out-of-network provider has not been thoroughly assessed for their credentials and the quality of their performance.
- **Best Match** – You may experience fragmented care with lack of coordination of your overall treatment plan because the out-of-network provider may not have the right background or training for your specific situation.
- **Time** – Out-of-network providers may not assist you in requesting preauthorization for services or be willing to advocate on your behalf. They do not usually submit claims so you may be responsible for submitting the claims yourself. Additionally, an out-of-network provider may not provide enough information to your insurance company to allow the necessary approvals for the care or payment of the claim.
- **Cost** – Out-of-network providers may ask you to guarantee payment prior to treatment, usually with a credit card. Charges may be incurred for unnecessary tests which will ultimately result in those costs being passed on to you and owed by you.

Who can I contact for assistance?

UBH can be reached anytime, 24/7, at their toll-free number (866) 850-6212, or through their interactive website www.liveandworkwell.com (use access code: Railroad). You will be connected to a trained specialist who will help identify the nature of the problem and find the right resources for you. Rest assured that all records are kept strictly confidential in accordance with state and federal laws and are never shared with your employer, another family member, or anyone else without your permission.

(This is informational only, not a replacement for the medical advice of your physician.)

EASTERN REGIONAL MEETING -CHICAGO, July 11 –14, 2016

By Lawana Poss, National Secretary

Over 300 members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen and their families were in attendance on Tuesday, July 12, for the opening ceremonies of the BLET Eastern regional meeting at the Drake Hotel in Chicago, Illinois.

After lunch, the Auxiliary held an open meeting. It was wonderful to see new and familiar faces there. The meeting began with a circle of prayer led by BLET Auxiliary National President, Sereena Hogan.

2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Kathleen Bisbikis shared an inspirational poem by Christian D. Larson:

I promise myself...

To be so strong that nothing can disturb my peace of mind.

To talk health, happiness, and prosperity to every person I meet.

To make all my friends feel that there is something worthwhile in them.



Richard Lyon, Investigator for Schlichter, Bogard & Denton, LLP, shared important information with attendees at the Auxiliary Meeting.

To look at the sunny side of everything and make my optimism come true.

To think only of the best, to work only for the best and to expect only the best.

To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as I am about my own.

To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.

To wear a cheerful expression at all times and give a smile to every living creature I meet.

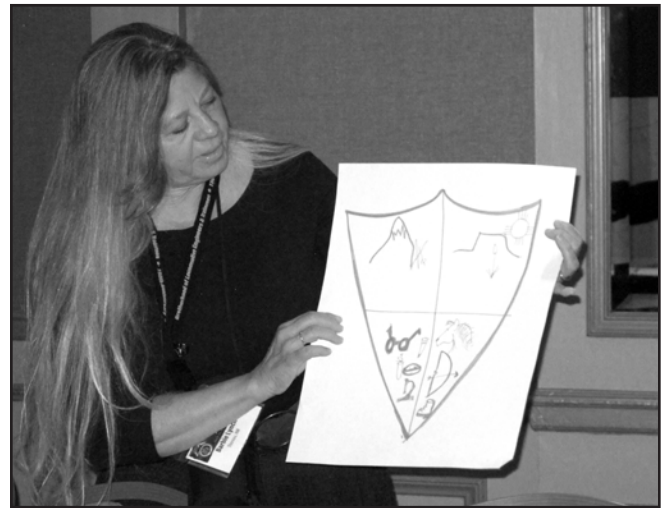
To give so much time to improving myself that I have no time to criticize others.

To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

To think well of myself and to proclaim this fact to the world, not in loud words, but in great deeds.

To live in the faith that the whole world is on my side, so long as I am true to the best that is in me.

After an icebreaker activity to help those in attendance get to know a little about each other, guest speakers shared information on a variety of topics important to railroad families. Some of the speakers included Richard (Dick) Lyon, from the law firm of Schlichter, Bogard & Denton; John Kujawski and Bob Marcus, of Kujawski Marcus, LLC; and Mark Thomson from the Railroad Retirement Board. The meeting concluded with a drawing for door prizes.



Member-at-Large Barbie Lynch shared her "personal shield" drawing during the icebreaker activity at the Auxiliary Meeting.



FELA Attorney John Kujawski visited with attendees at the Auxiliary meeting on Tuesday afternoon, July 12, 2016.

The rest of the week was filled with the golf tournament, educational workshops, and informational meetings. Throughout the week, the Auxiliary sold raffle tickets for a 50/50 drawing. We also sold "mulligans" at the golf tournament. We would like to thank everyone who participated in our fundraising efforts to benefit our Scholarship Program!

The Chicago regional meeting concluded with a banquet on Thursday evening.

Next year's Eastern Regional Meeting will be held at the Hilton Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, August 14-18, 2017.

WESTERN REGIONAL MEETING - LONG BEACH, AUGUST 11 -14, 2016

By Kathleen Bisbikis, National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Rep.

Sunny Long Beach, California, served as the meeting place for this year's BLET Western Regional Meeting that took place August 22-25 at the Hyatt Regency hotel, which is set in a beautiful location right on the Long Beach waterfront. It was a great location with access to several things to see and do and a large variety of places to eat outside of the hotel.



Mike McGill was the winner of a \$100 gift card for All American Clothing Company in the Auxiliary Scholarship Raffle.

Monday was registration day, giving arriving attendees the opportunity to browse and shop in the vendor area and then gather together for the welcome reception that evening.

The meeting was officially underway on Tuesday morning with the opening ceremonies. The Navy color guard presented the colors, and President Pierce gave a motivating speech to all those in attendance, followed by a slide show in remembrance of all our brothers and sisters who lost their lives in the line of duty. Following a break, guest speakers Ron Herrera, Bob

Lauby, Doug Bloch, Walt Barrow and Kathleen Bisbikis spoke all about varying topics, all with the underlying common theme of the importance of unionism and the ongoing fight for the middle class.

Tuesday afternoon was the BLET Auxiliary meeting with guest speakers Mark Robb from the BRCF, John Hiatt from the Bremseth Law Firm, and Express Scripts Representative Christopher, who introduced the new Express

Scripts app and showed us all the advantages of using the app to help manage our prescriptions. A great discussion took place about local auxiliaries and the importance of our members-at-large. The meeting was very casual, and many great ideas were shared.

Wednesday was the annual golf tournament. Kathleen Bisbikis, and Terri Fleming attended in the morning to sell mulligans to all the golfers. The rest of the day was open so that families could enjoy the area.

Thursday morning started bright and early with classes and meetings. We continued to sell raffle tickets throughout the day for the chance to win one of several of the baskets and gifts that were donated to the auxiliary. Everyone seemed to enjoy the Chinese raffle system we used this year and being able to pick the items they

wanted to win in the raffle by putting all of their tickets into that item's bag. We also held a silent auction for a beautiful framed print donated by Mark Robb and the BRCF. Congratulations to all the raffle winners and silent auction winner. We appreciate your support! Thursday night finished off with the annual banquet. President Pierce called Mark Robb up to center stage and announced that Mark would very soon be joining the ranks of the retired. Mark was thanked for all he has done over the years to support the BLET.

Next year's Western Regional Meeting will be held in San Antonio, Texas, June 5-9, 1917.



Johnny and Jane Butler, from Phoenix Arizona. Jane joined the Auxiliary as a member-at-large during the conference. Welcome Jane!



Oregon State Legislative Board Chairman Scott Palmer and his wife Christine.

PTSD and Relationships:

Death on the Rails Can Haunt Family Members as well as Crew Members

By Sereena Hogan, National President, BLET Auxiliary

According to statistics published by Operation Lifesaver, about every three hours a person or vehicle is hit by a train, usually resulting in death. Sometimes it is by accident; sometimes it's intentional as in the case of a suicide. The likelihood that a train operator will be involved in an unexpected incident on the tracks at some point in his or working career is very high. These incidents put locomotive engineers in a position where they are unable to stop the train in time to avoid an accident. Despite having done nothing wrong and having followed all the proper procedures, the engineer and conductor must live with the fallout of such an incident. When it results in a fatality, it can have a profound and lasting effect on the train crew for the rest of their working careers, or their lives (Valenti, K; "Death on the Rails," 2011). As railroad spouses, many of us have seen the effect this kind of incident can have on the crew members involved.

After a traumatic incident of this nature, some railroad workers are able to return to the job fairly quickly, others take longer, according to Dr. Howard Rombom, a psychologist who works with New York subway and bus employees who must deal with similar incidents. Some feel guilt and many second-guess themselves, even as they understand there was nothing they could do. In general, most are able to return to their jobs in six months or less, and the vast majority return within a year. Those who are deeply affected often suffer post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), waking from nightmares and sometimes withdrawing from social situations because they feel so uncomfortable they can't relate to other people (Valenti, K; "Death on the Rails," 2011).

The symptoms of PTSD can interfere with trust, emotional closeness, communication, responsive assertiveness, and effective problem solving (National Center for PTSD, "PTSD and Relationships," n.d.). Trauma survivors who suffer from PTSD may experience problems in their intimate and family relations or close friendships.

Oftentimes, in an effort to be helpful, spouses and family members have a tendency to ask too many questions or talk too much about the incident and their own feelings about it. In some cases, the person who experienced the trauma is in shock and may be in a trance-like state that is hard for those around him or her to understand. They may not be able to remember the details of the incident or may be unable to put it into words or make sense of it (Royal College of Psychiatrists, "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder," n.d.). It is important to give them time to process the event and get in touch with their feelings and emotions. When they are ready to talk about it, be there for them and give them the space they need to share what they are willing to—let them do the talking and be a good listener. Take time to allow them to tell their story. Don't interrupt the flow

by interjecting your own feelings and experiences. Don't tell them you know how they feel—you don't. Don't try to minimize their experience or suggest that they need to "pull themselves together."

Do your best to keep life as normal as possible following the traumatic incident; however, if you see indications that your spouse or family member is behaving in a manner that is not normal for them (showing signs of anger, irritability, depression, lack of interest, lack of concentration, or other PTSD symptoms), you may want to take some sort of action to encourage them to seek help. (*See the list that begins on the opposite page and continues on page 15 for an overview of commonly experienced PTSD symptoms.*)

Ways PTSD can Affect Relationships with Spouses or Significant Others

- Loss of interest in social or sexual activities, and feeling distant from others, as well as feeling emotionally numb. Partners, friends or family members may feel hurt, alienated, or discouraged, and then become angry or distant toward the survivor.
- Feeling irritable, on-guard, easily startled, worried, or anxious may lead survivors to be unable to relax, socialize, or be intimate without being tense or demanding. Significant others may feel pressured, tense, and controlled as a result.
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep and severe nightmares prevent both the survivor and partner from sleeping restfully, and may make sleeping together difficult.
- Trauma memories, trauma reminders or flashbacks, and the attempt to avoid such memories or reminders, can make living with a survivor feel like living in a war zone or living in constant threat of vague but terrible danger. Living with an individual who has PTSD does not automatically cause PTSD; but it can produce "vicarious" or "secondary" traumatization, which is almost like having PTSD.
- Reliving trauma memories, avoiding trauma reminders, and struggling with fear and anger greatly interferes with survivors' abilities to concentrate, listen carefully, and make cooperative decisions — so problems often go unresolved for a long time. Significant others may come to feel that dialogue and teamwork are impossible (National Center for PTSD, "PTSD and Relationships," n.d.).

What if Your Spouse is in Denial?

The symptoms of PTSD can surface immediately following a traumatic incident, or they can show up after a delay of weeks or months, but usually within six months of the incident (Royal College of

Psychiatrists, "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder," n.d.). None of us likes to talk about upsetting events and feelings. Your spouse may not want to admit to having symptoms because he or she doesn't want to be thought of as weak or mentally unstable. Your spouse may be worried about stigmas, what their fellow railroaders think of them, and of course, their career (Uncle Sam's Mistress, "Living with PTSD & TBI," 2010).

If you suspect your spouse is suffering from PTSD and is in denial, you may want to make a plan to help him or her. The first step is to educate yourself about the disorder and its symptoms. Then, do some detective work for a month or so and gather any facts you can without invading his or her privacy, or bringing on an awkward confrontation. You may want to keep a small journal of your observations. Then, if you feel comfortable enough to do so, initiate a conversation in which you state that you have noticed some changes and you would like to talk it over. In a matter-of-fact and non-judgmental way, simply state the facts. You may state that you have observed that your spouse is having nightmares, or has discontinued some of the activities he or she used to enjoy, or no longer is interested in hanging out with his or her friends, or other irrefutable things of that nature. No one can dispute the facts; they are what they are. They have no judgment or emotion attached to them (Borchard, T.J., n.d. "11 Ways to Help a Loved One in Denial"). If he or she is not ready to talk, don't push it. You can simply say, "I love you and I am here for you. When you are ready, you come to me and I will listen for as long as you want me to" (Uncle Sam's Mistress, "Living with PTSD & TBI," 2010).

Another option may be to seek professional help for yourself. Most of us are fortunate to have access to this kind of help through the health insurance plans offered by the railroad (see article on page 9). A mental health professional may be able to help you make a plan to reach out to your spouse.

Many treatment options are available for those who suffer from PTSD symptoms. Sometimes individuals must try several different treatments before finding the one that is right for them. Finding a therapist that one feels comfortable with and trusts is of utmost importance. Counseling is usually a big part of the road to recovery. Some therapies that have been found to be helpful for treating PTSD include:

- Cognitive therapy, in which one learns to change thoughts about the trauma that are not true or that cause stress.
- Exposure therapy, in which one talks about the traumatic event over and over, in a safe place, until fear is diminished.
- Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), which uses eye movements to help the brain to process flashbacks and to make sense of the traumatic experience. It may sound odd, but it has been proven to be very effective with PTSD.
- Group Therapy - meeting with a group of other people who have been through the same, or a similar traumatic event. It can be

easier to talk about what happened if you are with other people who have been through a similar experience.

- Medication - Under a doctor's care, SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) have also been found to be helpful for those who suffer from PTSD. These prescription antidepressant medications can sometimes help one feel less sad and worried (Royal College of Psychiatrists, "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder," n.d.).

For some ideas and information about how you can help your spouse or partner with PTSD, including (1) ways to help when he or she experiences frightening memories, (2) what you can do about emotional numbness in your partner, and (3) how to help reduce anxiety in your spouse or partner, go to the web page entitled *You, Me and PTSD: Relationships with Partners Who Have Suffered Trauma*, By Kate Thieda at <http://blogs.psychcentral.com/wellness/2011/05/you-me-and-ptsd>.

Another web page that might be helpful is entitled *10 Tips for Understanding Someone with PTSD - A guide for friends, family and colleagues* and can be found at <http://www.healmyptsd.com/10-tips>.

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PTSD Checklist

Below is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes experience in response to stressful experiences. The list was created by Weathers, Litz, Huska, and Keane (1994); National Center for PTSD - Behavioral Science Division.

1. Repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of a stressful experience.
2. Repeated, disturbing dreams of a stressful experience.
3. Suddenly acting or feeling as if a stressful experience were happening again (as if you were reliving it).
4. Feeling very upset when something reminded you of a stressful experience.

— continued on page 15

BLET Auxiliary Scholarship Awards for School Year 2016-2017

Each of these deserving students received a \$1000 Award to help them on their path to higher education.



JENNIFER ANDERSON

Will be attending Brigham Young University as a Junior. Her father, Mark Anderson, is a member of BLET Div. 333, and her mother, Nancy Anderson, is an Auxiliary member-at-large.



MICHAEL CORDES

Will be attending the University of Washington. His father, Scott Cordes, is a member of BLET Div. 758, and his mother, Janet Cordes, is a member of Fort Vancouver Auxiliary No. 72 in Vancouver, Washington.



JAZMINE HALL

Will be attending Baylor University as a Freshman. Her father, Norman Hall, is a member of BLET Div. 18, and her mother, Bianca Hall, is an Auxiliary member-at-large.



TYLER KUENNING

Will be attending Nebraska Wesleyan University as a Senior. His father, Travis Kuenning, is a member of BLET Div. 388. Both his mother, Gina Kuenning, and his father are members of Flat Rock Auxiliary No. 8 in North Platte, Nebraska.



JOCELYN LAVEING

Will be attending Penn State University as a Freshman. Her father, Tim Laveing, is a member of BLET Div. 325, and her mother, Jennifer Laveing, is an Auxiliary member-at-large.

DILLON MARTIN

Will be attending Otero Junior College in La Junta, Colorado, as a Freshman. His father, Troy Martin, is a member of BLET Div. 430, and his mother, Lisa Martin, is an Auxiliary member-at-large.



RACHEL McWILLIAMS

Will be attending Fresno State University for her first semester as a graduate student. Her father, Robby McWilliams, is a member of BLET Div. 126, and her mother, Kathy McWilliams, is an Auxiliary member-at-large.



ALLYSON ROOF

Will be starting her 5th year as a PhD student at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. Her father, James Booth, is a retired member of BLET Div. 28, and her mother, Anne Booth, is a member of Guadalupe Auxiliary No. 28 in Tucson, Arizona.



KARMA JADE UNDERWOOD

Will be attending Boise State University as Junior. Her father, Jim Underwood, is a member of BLET Div. 228, and her mother, Lori Underwood, is an Auxiliary member-at-large.



CHANDLER WRIGHT

Will be attending Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas, as a Freshman. His father, Jason Wright, is a member of BLET Div. 502, and his mother, Heidi Wright, is a member of KC Shield Auxiliary No. 422 in Kansas City, Missouri.



JACOB WRIGHT

Will be attending Kansas State University as a Junior. His father, Jason Wright, is a member of BLET Div. 502. His mother, Heidi Wright, is a member of KC Shield Auxiliary No. 422 in Kansas City, Missouri, and Jacob himself is an Auxiliary member-at-large.





Greetings from your Editor, Susie Burrola, 1st Vice President

Making Time for the Auxiliary!

It's that time of year again - the hustle and bustle at the mall as we shop for new school clothes and school supplies for the kids; trying to establish a household routine for the family, balancing work, getting your children off to school, and keeping up with their activities. You may find yourself wondering how you're going to find time to volunteer, go to your auxiliary meetings, or attend other events. Then you blink and your children are all grown up. You think that now you will have all this free time. This is the first year in a very long time that I don't have to go school shopping. My children are all in college, but to my surprise I am still busy like crazy, trying to find time in the day to finish all my work, keep my house together, and make it to my meetings. But I wouldn't change it for the world. I have been very blessed to have developed such great friendships through the auxiliary, not only at a local level but at a national level as well. I know I have a family that understands my crazy schedule and indecisiveness with plans. I no longer feel like I have to put the auxiliary meeting on my calendar. We have developed a family. We look forward to seeing one another. We come together with the same goals in mind - to help railroad families. We are the same kindred souls - volunteers, active people, workers, whatever you want to call yourselves. When you're a giver, it's in your blood. You will never have enough time in life to do everything that you feel needs to be done, but you can enjoy your time doing what you can.

Our organization has so many great volunteers - people wanting to help one another, giving their time, energy, and support to help railroad families. A prime example is our very own National BLET Auxiliary President Sereena Hogan. I look and see this beautiful person, who has a hundred reasons not to volunteer, but she gives herself unconditionally. She gets knocked down, gets back up, and still fights for our cause. She gives relentlessly and asks for nothing in return. She is truly a rare breed. Thank you Sereena.

Volunteers
DO NOT
Necessarily have the
TIME;
They Have The Heart

— Elizabeth Andrew

PTSD Checklist

— continued from page 13

5. Having physical reactions (e.g., heart pounding, trouble breathing, sweating) when something reminded you of a stressful experience?
6. Avoiding thinking about or talking about a stressful experience or avoiding having feelings related to it.
7. Avoiding activities or situations because they reminded you of a stressful experience.
8. Trouble remembering important parts of a stressful experience.
9. Loss of interest in activities that you used to enjoy.
10. Feeling distant or cut off from other people.
11. Feeling emotionally numb or being unable to have loving feelings for those close to you.
12. Feeling as if your future will somehow be cut short.
13. Trouble falling or staying asleep.
14. Feeling irritable or having angry outbursts.
15. Having difficulty concentrating.
16. Being "super-alert" or watchful or on guard.
17. Feeling jumpy or easily startled.

Source: http://static1.squarespace.com/static/54c0117fe4b09474f2e4d227/t/555f690fe4b0577e78910d6c/1432316175529/PCL+test+ptsd_self_assessment.pdf

*Wishing all of our BLET
Auxiliary sisters and
brothers a very
Happy Thanksgiving!*



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

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