



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.

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Autumn 2019

Kathleen Bisbikis, President • Jodi Lynn Wallace, 1st Vice President • Lawana Poss, Secretary • Terri Fleming, Treasurer
Jessica Cole, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative • www.bletauxiliary.net

HERE WE GROW AGAIN!

Auxiliary 417 Established in Springfield, MO



By Rachel Pharris, President, Auxiliary 417

Springfield Missouri Auxiliary 417 was organized by National Auxiliary President Kathleen Bisbikis and National 1st Vice President Jodi Wallace on June 22, 2019. The organizing meeting was attended by members of BLET Divisions 237, 83, and 567, and SMART Division 303, and their spouses, including Kelly and Phil Short, Al and Candace Malone, Oscar and Gail Sanchez, Brad and Rachel Pharris, Robert and Tricia Taylor, Keith and Laura Hurd, Spencer and Kelsey Epperson, Amy Walters, and Mary Turner. Missouri State Legislative Board Chairman Calvin Goose also joined us to lend his support.

Sister Bisbikis spoke about the importance of the local auxiliaries and what they can accomplish when united. Chairman Goose also addressed the group, emphasizing the importance of unions and two-man crews in the rail industry. Guest Dr. Mary Turner, clinical social worker and therapist at Synergy Counseling & Wellness Center, spoke about mental health issues and the importance of strong families.

The group introduced, inducted, and pinned one another. Elected officers for this newly formed auxiliary include President Rachel Pharris, Vice President/Mobilization Coordinator Gail Sanchez, and Secretary-Treasurer Kelsey Epperson.

Generous donations from Schlichter, Bogard & Denton; Synergy Counseling and Wellness Center, and BLET Divisions 237 and 567 will go a long way to get this auxiliary off to a good start.

These ambitious spouses have already held a fundraiser to raise funds to help out the Humphries family. Ashley Humphries, wife of Springfield Div. 83 member Ben Humphries, was diagnosed with a rare, aggressive form of cancer. The spouses worked together to create a t-shirt design, then sold the men's, women's, and children's shirts locally as well as on-line to purchasers all over the U.S. A check in the amount of \$1700 was presented to Ashley Humphries at the July 22 meeting of Auxiliary 214 (see photo below).

Ashley has recently returned from Chicago where she received treatment for six weeks. She is enjoying time with her family and getting back into the swing of work. Members of Auxiliary 214 extend a great big thank-you to all who supported their efforts in this fundraiser.



A donation in the amount of \$ 1700 was presented to Ashley Humphries at the first meeting of Auxiliary 417 on July 22, 2019. **Front row, left to right:** Rachel Pharris, Ashley Humphries, Gail Sanchez; **Back row, left to right:** Kelsey Epperson, Amy Walters, Laura Hurd, Chelsea Race, Tricia Taylor, Robyn Handley, Heather Williams.

From the President

BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS

"Every time we turn our heads the other way when we see the law flouted, when we tolerate what we know to be wrong, when we close our eyes and ears to the corrupt because we are too busy or too frightened, when we fail to speak up and speak out, we strike a blow against freedom, decency, and justice"

- Robert F. Kennedy

Fall is here, and it's time to say farewell to summer, but not before taking a moment to say thank you to all our Brothers and Sisters who supported us in St Louis, Missouri, and Clearwater, Florida, this year. Thank you for stopping by our table to say "hi," chit-chat, or take your chances to win some of our very exciting raffle prizes, or for putting your tickets in the bowl for our 50/50 raffle. Also, thank you to all the golfers who purchased a mulligan "just in case." All these fundraising events that we hold each summer help to make sure that we can continue to fund our scholarship program and our Care and Assistance Fund. We couldn't do it without you, so it's vital to all of us that you all know how much we appreciate your support and how much we enjoy getting to see familiar faces each summer and meeting new ones!

We also need to thank some extraordinary friends who donated money or items for our raffles. A huge thank you to Cornerstone Assurance Company, and Ed and Andy Haley, for your donation to help us purchase more exciting and desirable raffle prizes. Many thanks to our dear friend Sherry Schirripa with American Time for the beautiful watches that you donate to us each year. The watches are always a hot item; thank you for still being so willing to help us. We appreciate your support each year. And thank you to Autumn Creek for your donation of some wonderful grips in several different styles and colors. We appreciate your generosity over the years. Finally, we cannot forget our own local auxiliaries who donated gift

cards for our gift card tree at both summer meetings. Thank you NorCal 39 in California; Eastern Oregon Auxiliary 362; and Twin Ports Auxiliary

#6388 in Duluth, Minnesota. Our gift card tree has become a favorite raffle item, and it's because of the generosity of our local auxiliaries who donate to it each year.

As we move forward into the last few months left in 2019, please remember the importance of your voice. We have a whole new generation of voters who can make a difference in the outcome of the 2020 election, but we need to ensure they are registered. Consider donating your time, or choose a social media platform to encourage the youth around you to register to vote and to become educated on the issues affecting the middle class. The education about and importance of the union movement needs to start at home. If you run into questions about registration in your area, you can call 866-OUR-VOTE or log on to vote411.org to learn specific laws for each state.

It was just one short year ago I was getting ready to go to our National Convention in Las Vegas, melancholy and unsure if I would still be a national officer when I left Nevada. A year later, here we are celebrating our successes as a great team of national officers. We have taken some chances, and I feel like they have all paid off in favor of the continued success of the Auxiliary. I am so blessed to have such a wonderful group of women with whom to serve. As we head into our second year, I hope that we can continue to recreate the importance of this organization and grow stronger as a team with each passing day.



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Find us on the web at www.bletauxiliary.net
Also...

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THE NATIONAL B.L.E.T. AUXILIARY

Summertime Fun!

BNSF PICNIC - MANDAN/BISMARCK, ND

Each year, BLET Division 746 in Mandan, North Dakota, organizes a two-day picnic for its members and their families, thus giving everyone a chance to attend at some time during the two-day timeframe. Approximately 250 people attended the 2019 annual picnic held July 17 and 18 at Sertoma Park, a beautiful riverfront park in Bismarck, with trails, art, and an amusement park. The officers and wives of Division 746 members did an outstanding job preparing for and helping to host this popular event, featuring hamburgers, hot dogs, brats, some adult beverages, as well as a root beer keg and sno cones to keep everyone cool and hydrated. Complimentary tickets for the amusement park were given to all the children. Retired engineers Mike Muscha and Dave Storbakken represented the Hunegs, LeNeave & Kvas Law Firm and helped make the event a huge success.

After their recent trip to the BLET Regional Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, in late June, Mike and Naomi Muscha had decided to reach out to the spouses of Division 746 members in the hopes of forming another local auxiliary, as the national and local auxiliaries are very instrumental in supporting two-man crew legislation, Railroad Retirement, and other initiatives to further safety for railroaders and for the communities through which they travel.

To help promote this idea for a new auxiliary, Hunegs, LeNeave & Kvas provided two gift certificates for a manicure/pedicure from Classy Nails to hold a raffle for the spouses in attendance at the picnic. Each day one name was drawn to receive a certificate. The lucky winners were Tara Koster and Amanda Lopez. Naomi, along with Susan Richter, wife of Div. 746 President Myron Richter, visited with the women and obtained contact information from those who were interested in learning more about the BLET Auxiliary. Naomi is following up with attendees to further interest in starting up a local auxiliary in the area. BLET Auxiliary National President Kathleen Bisbikis has been very supportive and we hope to have a new auxiliary organized soon.



Tara Kostner and Amanda Lopez were the lucky winners of the Classy Nails mani/pedi gift certificates at the BNSF Picnic in Mandan/Bismarck, July 17-18, 2019.



FLATROCK AUXILIARY NO. 8 TRASH PICK-UP WALK IN NORTH PLATTE, NEBRASKA

By Katrina Hughes, President, Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8



Flat Rock Auxiliary No. 8 families were on the move again, picking up trash along a five-mile stretch of highway in Lincoln County on May 30. The auxiliary members are committed to do this several times a year. It is a great feeling to contribute to our community, as well as making a little money for the Auxiliary. Thanks to all who participated!



More Fun in the Sun!

Flatrock Auxiliary End-of-Summer Family Day North Platte, Nebraska

By Katryna Hughes, President, Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8

Families of Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8 from North Platte, Nebraska, gathered together on August 9 for our annual Back-to-School Family Day, hosted by BLET Division 388 Local Chairman Travis Kuenning and Auxiliary No. 8 Vice President Gina Kuenning at their lakeside home in North Platte.



Gina & Travis Kuenning hosted Aux. 8 Family Day at their home. **Pictured above, left to right:** Pam Bellew, Mike Bellew, Corban Hughes, Jen Otzel, Travis Kuenning, Gina Kuenning, Jami Comer, Matt Comer, Greg Otzel



Above: James Lampe (Son of Kendra and Andrew Lampe), Molly Morales, and Karson Hahn (Son of Jasmine & Derek Hahn).



Lesha Vieyra and Jami Comer

With the hustle and bustle of everyday life, which becomes even more-so as summer comes to an end and we prepare to send the kids back to school, this gathering is something our whole families look forward to. There is always great food, too many children to count, and plenty of laughter. The kids enjoyed hours

of fun tubing on Lake Maloney behind Travis's boat while the ladies stayed back on the shore to soak up some sun. This year, two new potential members joined our party to see what the BLET Auxiliary is all about, and one of them confirmed that she is in! Welcome Jami Comer!



Above: Travis Kuenning captained his pontoon boat out onto Lake Maloney to the delight of his adult and children passengers.



Good times in Northwest Oregon!



Big “kids” and little kids alike joined in the water fight games!



The country setting of Jessica and Matt Keene’s home was a fantastic place to gather for the barbecue!



Mmmmmmm, s’mores!!!
...and wheelbarrow rides for the little ones! ➡

Pacific Northwest Auxiliary No. 503 2nd Annual Barbecue Dallas, Oregon

By Jessica Keene, President, Pacific Northwest Auxiliary No. 503

A good time was had by all who attended the second annual barbecue of Pacific Northwest Auxiliary 503 on July 13, 2019, held at the home of Jessica and Matt Keene in Dallas, Oregon. BLET members and their families enjoyed smoked tri-tip and an array of favorite picnic sides. There were multiple kinds of yard games, face painting, a kids vs. railroaders water fight, and s’mores around a fire pit at dusk. Some pitched tents and parked campers for an overnight stay. We raffled off a wheelbarrow full of beer as a fundraiser for our auxiliary. Although we are not known for an abundance of sunshine in our state, we enjoyed some great weather for this event, as well as great company, and good times for all who showed up.

Our National Auxiliary 1st Vice President/National Outreach Coordinator Jodi Wallace and her husband Will traveled from their home in eastern Oregon to join us for this event. Thanks Jodi and Will!

A special thanks to Mr. Paul S. Bovarnick, Of Counsel, Rose, Senders, and Bovarnick for the donation of the tri-tip. Already looking forward to next year!





Jessica Cole

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY JESSICA COLE, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE, AND

BECKY SCHNEIDER, ASSISTANT NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE



Becky Schneider

JESSICA'S UPDATE:

This quarter's Legislative Report got a huge head start with the very well-organized and solidly prepared June 20, 2019 testimony of BLET President Dennis Pierce before the House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials.

President Pierce's full testimony is 13 pages long and is a gripping read. I encourage everyone to take the time to peruse it. It is available on the BLET website at: www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/2019-06-20_RR_Subcmte_BLET_Pierce_FINAL.pdf

President Pierce highlighted the flaws and pitfalls of the popular new management style called Precision Scheduled Railroading, a strategy that purports to ensure that shippers can count on their shipments arriving at a guaranteed time. This focus on the customer's needs and convenience seems to speak to enhanced customer service by sending trains at a scheduled time no matter whether they are at capacity or still carrying unused capacity. Under older styles of management, trains did not leave until all their cars were loaded, even if this meant shipment delays.

The darker side of Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR) is more sinister from an employee and safety point of view. To quote the Canadian Pacific Rail website:

"CP CEO Hunter Harrison developed the concept of precision railroading more than 20 years ago, departing from the practice of holding trains until they were completely full. The old model, thought to be beneficial to railway efficiency, could often delay customer shipments. By contrast, precision railroading prioritizes delivery of a customer's shipment from origin to destination as quickly as possible. It is similar to the airline industry where a plane will leave at its scheduled

departure time regardless of whether all seats are filled.

Precision railroading demands a schedule and plan that is constantly monitored for every asset. This enables the railway to track progress and optimize railcar and locomotive utilization, and gives the customer the ability to better plan for shipment arrivals and departures.

While simple in theory, successfully executing precision railroading is not easy. It requires the coordination of all aspects of operations, including train and crew scheduling, equipment availability, track and rail car repairs, as well as synchronization with other stakeholders, such as customers and supply chain partners. Employees must be constantly mindful of all aspects of the transportation process to ensure the safe, timely, and efficient arrival of a customer's freight."

Make no doubt about it, an employee is merely an asset, no different than a car or an engine, in this new management equation, and the resulting demands and stress on already fatigued and overburdened workers are unreasonable and dangerous.

As President Pierce reported to the Subcommittee, there is often LESS predictability for employees about when they will report to work, and fatigue-related attendance issues are being handled with harsh discipline that encourages employees to report to work even when not fully rested.

The Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 directed the FRA to regulate fatigue reduction and management, but the FRA has failed to follow through. Passage of safety legislation makes us all cheer, but unfortunately, it is only effective when the administrative agencies mandated to implement it follow through on their responsibility.

An evolutionary consequence of the PSR management technique is the appearance of "long trains" that

sometimes approach an unbelievable three miles in length and are now a discussion topic in nearly every BLET meeting. Distributed Power, in which locomotives may be placed in the center and at the end of long trains, is made possible by telemetry from the lead locomotive to the rear. One engineer at the head of the train is assigned to operate such trains, and yet it is a regular occurrence that communication is lost with the rear cars because of excessive length.

Brake loss with rear cars is also commonplace. President Pierce warned the Subcommittee that, thus far, the FRA has turned a blind eye to the issue of long trains and the increased safety hazards they present.

In addition to the push to squeeze maximum profit out of each asset, the PSR framework has led to multiple new tasks being assigned to engineers and even more monitoring of engineers' actions while operating trains. President Pierce mentioned, for example, the measurement of force of braking applied by an engineer. When strong braking flags are sent to management by monitoring systems, discipline may result. Not surprisingly, this micromanagement of employees may actually result in engineers avoiding strong braking even in situations where it is quite appropriate through no negligence of the employee, precisely because it may result in disciplinary action.

As many new technologies and monitoring protocols are introduced to the rail industry under the guise of providing enhanced safety and accountability, the downside is that often-fatigued employees on skeleton crews are being asked to monitor and account for more and more pieces of technology. This may result in divided attention that takes concentration away from precisely the things that will keep the train, the workers, and the general public safe.

Shippers are no fans of PSR either.

The Class I railroads, with the exception of BNSF, began strictly enforcing its demurrage and accessorial charges (charges incurred if a customer fails to load or discharge a shipment by the agreed-upon time). Railroads say the charges are designed to encourage shippers to turn around freight cars more quickly, reducing the number of cars needed. Shippers counter that it's impossible to avoid the penalty charges when cars are delivered in bunches on the same day. As an example, Dow Chemical shipped nine cars in four shipments over a six-day period in order to match the pace of deliveries with the plant's capacity. All nine cars arrived on the same day, triggering a congestion charge. Railroads say shippers can take steps to limit charges, but when the shippers do, the railroads don't follow the rules. Even shippers with 24-hour facilities have difficulty in meeting the stringent guidelines set forth by the Class I's. The Surface Transportation Board held two days of hearings, at which they heard from both shippers and the railroads. When Board Member Martin Oberman asked if the railroads had ever considered paying customers a fine when they were late returning customers' cars, the representatives remained silent.

The natural extension of this discussion is, of course, the very hot Two-Person Crew issue. The much-touted Positive Train Control (PTC) technology was first mandated by Congress in 2008. The railroads have been given multiple extensions to implement this technology, with the last extension reaching out to December 31, 2020. No further extensions are expected and about 90% of affected tracks now have some version of this technology in place.

However, PTC has been implemented differently by different railroads, and, as President Pierce informed the House Subcommittee, the technology was NEVER intended to replace the human element on a two-person crew. It cannot prevent

all accidents and can't prevent low speed collisions, and it has no effect on reducing accidents involving motorists at road crossings.

The FRA has sided with rail companies who argue that PTC and other advancing technologies can replace the human element by making trains safer with only a one-person crew, but President Pierce clarified that the opposite is true. The FRA has taken the position that rail companies may self-regulate crew size and that the handful of state laws mandating two-person crews may be overridden by the FRA's blanket assessment that companies can self-regulate crew size.

The silver lining in the face of such laxity by the very agency that is supposed to ensure safety is that national two-person crew legislation has gained a huge push as more and more legislators realize the gravity of the situation. H.R. 1748 has gained over six dozen bipartisan cosponsors. A companion bill in the Senate - S. 1979 - has a dozen cosponsors, including both Independent senators. Please support the Safe Freight Act of 2019 and encourage your friends, families, and acquaintances to do the same.

Clearly, the specter of PSR has an almost cancer-like quality in our workplace, spreading through many unexpected and shocking ways to have potentially epic negative consequences for worker security, worker safety, and the safety of the general public as well.

The disturbing news for our rail families doesn't end with PSR, however. In his comments to the House Committee, President Pierce also revisited the recurring issue of Mexican train crews running as many as ten miles into the United States. These crews, less stringently regulated and certified than U.S. crews, are also paid significantly less and hence increase a company's bottom line. President Pierce wrote a letter to President Trump on July 10, 2018, regarding the seriousness of this issue. In his own words:

"I will tell you that I wrote President Trump on July 10th of last year regarding what was happening in Laredo, but I have yet to receive the courtesy of a response. I also will tell you that —

with the assistance of the Teamsters Legislative and Global Strategies Departments — we reached out to Trade Representative Lighthizer to request that the pending United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement include a provision reciprocal to a labor condition granted to Mexico as part of the original North American Free Trade Agreement; this effort has been similarly unsuccessful to date."

For additional information on this issue, please see Becky's portion of the update.

*Sources: www.ble-t.org, www.cpr.ca, www.transportation.gov, *Trains Magazine**

REGIONAL NEWS

Oregon Crude Oil Spill Response Bill Passed and Signed into Law

The Oregon Legislature approved a bill requiring railroads transporting large amounts of crude oil through Oregon to develop spill response plans and submit them to the Department of Environmental Quality for review and approval.

This represents a step toward greatly enhanced public and environmental safety through better accident preparedness.

Source: Freight Waves and Jessica Keene, Oregon BLET Auxiliary

Jessica Cole lives in Baraboo, Wisconsin. She can be reached at jcts1987@gmail.com, or 262-672-9742.

BECKY'S UPDATE:

Recently, I have been reading a book, *The President is Missing*, by James Patterson and Bill Clinton. Without the need for a spoiler alert, the book "sheds a stunning light upon the inner workings and vulnerabilities of our nation as it pertains to cyberterror." No one likes to talk about cyberterror, but putting our heads in the sand will not make it go away. It is becoming more and more clear that the possibility of its occurrence not only exists, but is truly an existential threat to our society. Our nation's critical infrastruc-

ture, including electric power grids, communication networks, nuclear power plants, transportation systems, financial services, etc., in this world of computer-controlled everything is vulnerable to those who can manipulate the system. Hollywood has made movies and numerous books of "fiction" have been written, but honestly it's really not all that fictional anymore. Those with the skills and abilities can wreak havoc with our society, and that includes trains. Clive Cussler wrote a book called *The Wrecker*, set in the early 1900s, where trains were derailed and disrupted, but those actions had to be within physical proximity. Nowadays, with the ever-increasing technology and connectivity, disruptions can and have occurred from the other side of the world.

Technology can be a very positive thing, but we need to be realistic about whether the measures being taken are enough to thwart evil doers. In an article by *Trains Magazine*, dealing with PTC vulnerabilities, Jesus Molina, Director of Business Development for Waterfall Security Solutions, said, "unlike other critical infrastructure, such as energy or water management systems, rail networks have avoided specific cybersecurity regulations as lawmakers have focused many of their efforts on safety due to high profile crashes." He goes on to say, "There is no question that a PTC roll-out without managing the cybersecurity risk will open new attack vectors due to increased connectivity and new software added to the networks onboard the train . . . PTC may actually decrease the safety of passengers due to an unacceptable increased risk of cyberattacks that may lead to accidents." PTC is not the only vulnerability to attacks, just the newest.

Today's trains are controlled or tracked by computer systems. Adding loss of situational awareness because of task overload adds to the mix. To avoid being fired by trying to do everything "right" according to the computer, any kind of technology failure, whether malicious or mechanical, would make the situation that much worse. As President Pierce stated in his testimony before the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials, all of these technologies that monitor the different

"labor-saving" (or more appropriately "labor-replacing") devices can "lead to the degradation of engineers' train handling skills over time." So, when the technology inevitably fails at some point, not only does there need to be two humans on the lead unit, they need to still have the skills to deal "old school" with situations.

Sources: Trains Magazine/ BLET Newsflash/Dennis Pierce Congressional Testimony

Budget Passes

Before disappearing from Washington for five weeks, on Thursday, August 1, the Senate passed, by a 67-28 vote, a two-year bipartisan budget deal that was signed by the President on Friday, August 2. The House of Representatives voted by a margin of 284-149 to approve the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019 with 132 Republicans voting against the measure despite the President's endorsement. One significant provision of the plan, which was negotiated by Speaker Pelosi and Secretary Mnuchin, was suspending the debt ceiling through July 31, 2021, effectively allowing the Budget Control Act to expire on schedule. This means that the automatic sequestration mechanism that mandated \$125 billion in spending cuts will no longer be a threat, and will avoid the annual fight to raise the debt ceiling that has previously resulted in government shutdowns. Some House Republicans pushed for a last minute amendment to the title of the bill to "A Bill to Kick the Can Down the Road and Other Purposes," but in a 47-384 vote the House chose to stick with the original title.

While passing with bipartisan support, budget hawks in both Houses believe the bill to be irresponsible, ignoring fiscal integrity and resulting in a \$1 trillion budget deficit. According to the New York Times, "With spending levels set, the bare-bones budget deal will allow lawmakers to begin filling in the details of spending bills that would fund the government agency by agency and program by program beyond October 1 when the new fiscal year begins." If those appropriations bills are not passed, there still could be budget fights, but the debt ceiling fight is off the table for a while. The

— continued on Page 14



Family Barbecue in Eastern Oregon

Eastern Oregon Auxiliary First Annual Family Barbecue

By William Wallace, Member, Auxiliary 362

On August 17, Eastern Oregon Auxiliary No. 362 held our First Annual Family Barbecue at the Rotary Pavilion in La Grande, Oregon, from 3 p.m. until 9 p.m. The auxiliary provided hot dogs and hamburgers with the works, and everyone who came brought a side dish to share.



Auxiliary Member and BLET Div. 362 Legislative Rep Steve Baldwin participating in a corn hole match.



Olivia George, daughter of Jamie George, Vice President, Aux. 362, and Mark George, Div. 362 Local Chairman.

We had a great time playing corn hole while the kids played a duck pond game, had an egg-on-a-spoon race, and got temporary tattoos. It was a great fellowship of friends and family. By the end of the night, we counted a total of 41 attendees who showed up to enjoy the event. We also held a 50/50 drawing fundraiser and the winner donated the money back to the auxiliary.

Throughout the day, we shared information about our newly founded auxiliary, and our purpose and mission. We look forward to an even better turnout at next year's barbecue!



Div. 362 member Steve Krick (left) chatting with auxiliary member and Div. 362 member Joe Willis (wearing straw hat).



Kennedy Wallace, daughter of auxiliary members Tucker and Nicole Wallace, had fun playing the duck pond game.

WESTERN REGIONAL MEETING

St Louis, Missouri - June 24-28, 2019

By Kathleen Bisbikis, National President

The Hilton at the Ball Park served as a beautiful location for this year's BLET Western Regional Meeting. The hotel is just minutes from the famous Gateway Arch; Busch Stadium, home to the St. Louis Cardinals; and a multitude of unique and delicious restaurants.

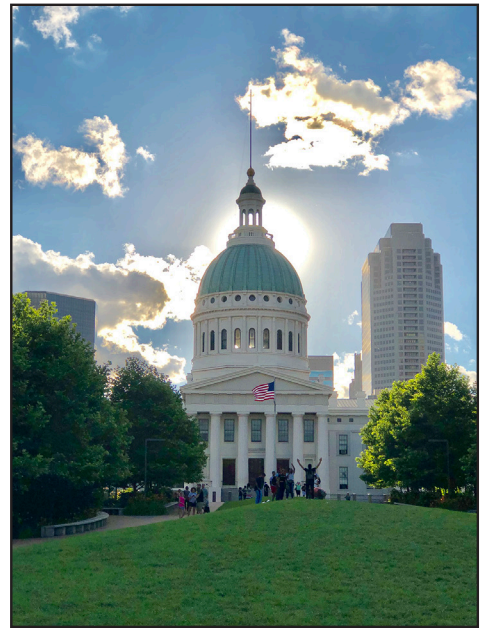
On June 25, the opening ceremonies commenced with the presentation of the colors by the First Marine Division Association (St. Louis Chapter). President Pierce spoke to those in attendance about the consequences of elections for those in middle-class union families and asked everyone in attendance to help spread the word and enlist the help of every member who is willing to pitch in and do their part to stop the anti-worker movement in the legislative halls across the country. "We must seek out and elect politicians who will work for working-class America," he stated. "We must support politicians who know that a vibrant working middle class is what makes American great." Guest speakers included a welcome by St. Louis mayor Lyda Krewson; International Brotherhood of Teamster Vice President and Rail Conference Director John Murphy; John Bragg from the Railroad Retirement Board; International Brotherhood of Teamsters Trustee Jim Kabell; and yours truly. A slideshow presentation followed, listing the names of those brothers and sisters who left us too soon. It's always a tear-jerker and a reminder of the dangers that we sometimes forget come with the jobs in the rail industry.

The Auxiliary meeting, open to all in attendance, was held on Tuesday afternoon. First Vice President Jodi Wallace and I were so happy to see some of our sisters from the local auxiliary in St. Louis, and enjoyed talking to everyone about ideas for spouses to be involved through the auxiliary, as well as recruitment ideas. We also discussed the importance of our members-at-large and ways they have made a difference across the country.

Convention attendees enjoyed a baseball game at Busch stadium Tuesday evening. We were all easy to spot in the crowd, wearing our Cornerstone red t-shirts that were handed out earlier in the day, in keeping with the St. Louis Cardinals colors.

Throughout the week, Jodi and I could be found at our table in the vendor area where we were fortunate to have lots of help from some of our Oregon members who were in attendance at the meeting. Thank you Jessica Keene and Chris Baldwin from Oregon, and Pat Leyshon from Nevada, as well as our spouses Jason Bisbikis and Will Wallace. We are so thankful to all our friends, both old and new, who dropped by to say "hi" and purchase prize raffle and/or 50/50 tickets.

Our week in St. Louis came to a close with a banquet held in an upstairs dining room at the hotel, with floor-to-ceiling glass windows that boasted views of the Gateway Arch, the Mississippi River, and all the beautiful sights of downtown. Jodi and I left St. Louis feeling grateful, refreshed, motivated, and excited to get back to work reminding everyone of the importance of our union.



Photos, *clockwise from left*: 1) Auxiliary Meeting; 2) Missouri State Capitol Building; 3) Gateway Arch; 4) Auxiliary members, *front to back*, Jessica Keene, President, Pacific Northwest Auxiliary 503; Jodi Wallace, 1st National Vice President; Nor Cal 39 member Jason Bisbikis; Pacific Northwest Auxiliary member Matt Keene.



BLET Auxiliary Scholarship Awards for School Year 2019-2020

Congratulations to all of our scholarship winners. We wish you all the best in the year ahead as you pursue your goals for a successful future!

RECIPIENTS OF \$1000 AUXILIARY AWARDS



CALEB SAMPLE

Will be attending the Appalachian College of Pharmacy as a Senior. His father Joel Sample is a member of Division 37 and a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.

KEVIN LOGAN

Will be attending Pennsylvania State University as a Junior. His father, Clarence Logan, is a member of Division 207. His mother, Wai Logan, is a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.

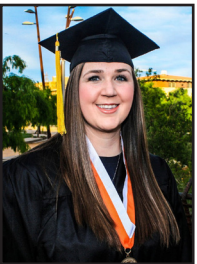


ANNA CORDES

Will be attending Chapman University as a Freshman. Her father is Scott Cordes, a member of Division 758. Her mother, Janet Cordes, is a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.

KATHRYN TRUMBLE

Will be attending Western Michigan University as a Sophomore. Her parents are Brant and Juliette Trumble. Brant is a member of Division 33 and Juliette is a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.



DANIELLE FINCHAM

Will be attending the University of Nebraska as a Sophomore. Her father is Fredrick Fincham, a member of Division 224, and her mother, Nancy Fincham, is a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.

JACOB HOLDEN

Will be attending Sacramento State University as a Sophomore. He is the son of Michael and Lori Bencivengo. Michael is a member of Division 839 and Lori is a member of BLET Auxiliary 39.



WILLIAM CHENCHAR

Will be attending the University of Wyoming as a Junior. His father is Mark Chenchar, a retired member of Division 115, and his mother, Marta Chenchar, is a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.

MICHAEL CORDES

Will be attending the University of Washington as a Senior. He is the son of Scott and Janet Cordes. Scott is a member of Division 758 and Janet is a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.



RACHAEL STRUBE

Will be attending Minnesota State University as a Junior. She is the daughter of John Strube, BLET member, deceased. Rachael is a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.



RECIPIENT OF \$1000 AUXILIARY AWARD IN MEMORY OF LEONA A. LOUIS



JARED BISBIKIS

Will be attending the University of San Francisco as a Freshman. His father, Jason Bisbikis, is a member of BLET Division 839. His mother, Kathleen Bisbikis, is a member of Auxiliary 39 in Stockton, California.

RECIPIENTS OF LECMPA \$2500 AWARDS

NATALIE KING-SHAW

Will be attending San Diego State University as a Freshman. She is the daughter of James and Linda King-Shaw. James is a member of Division 158 and a member of LECMPA. Linda is a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.



RECIPIENT OF DIVISION 14 \$1000 AWARD



BRANDON SAMPLE

Will be attending Virginia Tech as a Sophomore. His father, Joel Sample, is a member of Division 37 and a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.

CAMI PRICE

Will be attending Lake Erie College as a Junior. She is the daughter of Timothy and Tetianna Price. Timothy is a member of Division 607 and a member of LECMPA. Tetianna is a BLET Auxiliary Member-at-Large.



North American Railway Foundation®

founded by the BR&CF



Many thanks to the North American Railway Foundation (NARF) for sponsoring our newsletter and making it possible to share educational articles and information with our members across the nation, to keep railroad spouses and their families up-to-date on changes affecting benefits, and to educate our members about important legislation that helps promote safety on the nation's railroads.

The North American Railway Foundation, founded by the Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund (BR&CF), was formed on October 22, 1996, as a nonprofit organization (a private operating foundation). Its purpose is to explore, nurture and support railway safety, efficiency, and technology, and to educate about and preserve the history of railroads in the United States and Canada. The goals of the Foundation are achieved by providing direct and active financial support to deserving non-profit institutions and projects, which exemplify the Foundation's purpose.

The Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund, a non-profit corporation established in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was founded on June 12, 1912, by Luther G. Smith, a locomotive engineer for the Pennsylvania Railroad, to provide job income protection to railroaders throughout the United States and Canada who were "held out of service" due to suspension or dismissal. Brother Smith did not object to the railroads using a method to discipline employees when such discipline was necessary, but he did not see the logic in innocent family members having to suffer when the head of the home made an error in the performance of his duties that resulted in a suspension or dismissal.

North American Railway Foundation

Philip J. Sullivan II, Executive Director

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Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

(717) 695-0284, narf2216@gmail.com

Brotherhood's Relief & Compensation Fund

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Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

(717) 657-1890

Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

Fall will be arriving soon and cooler weather along with it. Just when I think things will calm down, I realize that the holidays are just around the corner. Whatever is happening in your life, remember to relax, breathe, and enjoy every moment.

The Eastern Regional Meeting was held in Clearwater, Florida, in July. It was wonderful to see everyone who was able to attend. Thank you so very much to all who stopped by the Auxiliary table to purchase raffle tickets and 50/50 chances. Thank you for your generous support, and congratulations to all the winners!

The Auxiliary officers held our annual Executive Council Meeting in Clearwater. We also held an Auxiliary meeting open to everyone on Monday. Thank you to the guest speakers and all who attended.

WELCOME SPRINGFIELD 417 AUXILIARY!

Welcome Auxiliary 417 in Springfield, MO!! New members: Rachael Pharris, Kelsey Epperson, Robyn Handley, Laura Hurd, Candace Malone, Chelsea Race, Gail Sanchez, Kelly Short, Tricia Taylor, Amy Walters, Heather Williams, and Shana Zbaren.

SENDING THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

Rose Surchik, President of Wisconsin Twin Ports Auxiliary 6388 is recovering from surgery. We send out love, hugs, thoughts and prayers for a speedy recovery!

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 the Auxiliary's help. In some instances, we can also provide temporary assistance to eligible members who find themselves in a financial crisis due to illness or injury of the railroader in the family, or other such incidents that cause him or her to be unable to work for an extended period of time. Please check to see if someone in your Auxiliary may be eligible and encourage them to apply. Members-at-Large are eligible also. Contact me for applications!

Please let us know what is happening in your life!! Thank you for your support and membership!



Lawana Poss can be reached at 770-497-8898, or Lewp2007@bellsouth.net

The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.

— W. Shakespeare

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EASTERN REGIONAL MEETING

Clearwater Beach, Florida - July 22 –25, 2019

By Lawana Poss, National Secretary

Over 300 members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and their families were in attendance for the opening ceremonies of the BLET's Eastern Regional Meeting at the Hilton in Clearwater Beach, Florida. BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce called the meeting to order. American Legion Post 273 Color Guard presented the flags. Brother Chris Hyde, Vice Chairman of the BLET's CSXT Eastern Lines General Committee of Adjustment and member of Division 314 delivered the invocation.

Ken Hall, General Secretary-Treasurer of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters; John Bragg, Labor Member of the Railroad Retirement Board; Representative Charlie Crist, U.S. House of Representatives (D-FL); BLET Auxiliary National President Kathleen Bisbikis; and Brother Dave Lavery, former Chairman of the Florida State Legislative Board were the guest speakers.

The Auxiliary held an open meeting after lunch. It was wonderful to see new and familiar faces at the meeting. Guest speakers were Mike Terranova with Cogan and Power (Chicago, IL) and Mia Farrell with Health Advocate. Ms. Farrell explained a new program called Health Advocate to us. They will assist you with your claims for medical, dental, and prescriptions. In addition, they can also assist you with your spouse's, children's, and even your parents' claims. Please check out their website, Healthadvocate.com, for more information on this extremely helpful program.

A discussion on HR 1748, the Safe Freight Act of 2019, that would require a minimum of two certified crew members on all freight trains, was held. At that time, the bill had 98 co-sponsors. Fundraising ideas were then discussed and, before the meeting concluded, door prizes were awarded.

The rest of the week was filled with workshops and informational meetings. The Auxiliary sold raffle tickets for many wonderful items. Auxiliary members also sold "mulligans" for the golf tournament to raise funds for the Auxiliary.

The Clearwater Beach regional meeting concluded with a banquet on Thursday evening and the Auxiliary 50/50 raffle drawing. Many thanks to everyone who participated in our fundraising efforts!



National President Kathleen Bisbikis delivered a speech on behalf of the Auxiliary at the Opening Ceremonies.

Pictured above (top): Sand Sculpture in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel welcomes guests as they arrive; (bottom): National 1st Vice President Jodi Wallace presents raffle prize winner Fred Cox, Vice General Chairman, Norfolk-Southern (Southern Lines), with the HotLogic portable food warmer he won. Many thanks to you, Fred, and to all of you who participated in the prize raffle this year! It is because of you that we can continue to offer scholarships to the children of Auxiliary & BLET members.

Legislative Update

Continued from Page 7

Democrats have agreed not to insert “poison pill” policy language into the individual agency appropriations bills, so bills like the Hyde Amendment that bans federal funding for abortions, among others, will remain in place.

Unsettling, however, was the President’s tweet sent out the day of the vote which read: “Budget Deal is phenomenal for our Great Military, our Vets and Jobs, Jobs, Jobs! Two-year deal gets us past the Election. Go for it Republicans, there is always plenty of time to CUT!” Just my opinion, but sending our country even further into debt just to get past the 2020 election doesn’t seem right.

Sources: Politico/Washington Post/New York Times

Cross-border Rail Traffic

As Jessica previously mentioned, in President Pierce’s Congressional testimony on June 20, he also addressed the subject of cross-border trains. Up until a little over a year ago, trains were exchanged between U.S. and Mexican crews at the border. When a northbound train enters the U.S., it undergoes an abbreviated FRA safety inspection and is then moved to the Laredo yard, approximately 10 miles away, where the full FRA required inspections are performed before the train can continue into the interior U.S. Kansas City Southern decided that our Tex-Mex crews would be replaced by Mexican crews from their Mexico subsidiary performing the safety inspection and for right now delivering the train into the Laredo yard. As President Pierce points out, this is a complex issue with complex disputes that are being contested. He also pointed out “certain facts” the Committee should be aware of as set forth in his testimony below:

- “You will be told that cross-border rail operations can create significant delays for automobile and pedestrian traffic in Laredo. This is true.
- You also will be told that this is largely because of the crew change at the border. This is

demonstrably false; the tests and inspections mandated by the FRA waiver still must be performed, and there is an extremely low speed limit in effect when the train is scanned by the Customs/DHS VACIS system;

- You will be further told that this Union has been obstructionist; the truth is that we made multiple suggestions how to either eliminate any delay for crew change altogether, or shorten it from the 2-3 minutes the change typically requires.”

President Pierce goes on to explain the main reason for the delays is Customs and Border Protection, not the exchange of crews. Just like anywhere along the Southern U.S. border interior rail lines, if the Border Patrol suspects something, the train must be stopped and physically inspected.

An alternative to those being pursued would be to pass legislation requiring trains operated in the U.S. be operated by U.S. citizens or naturalized citizens. Having this requirement would level the playing field for U.S. crews since the requirement for Mexican nationals only to operate trains in Mexico was passed with NAFTA 25 years ago. The request to President Trump was made to include a similar provision in NAFTA 2.0, but a response was never received.

On July 23, 2019, H.R. 3896, the “Protection of American Jobs in Cross-Border Rail Operations with Mexico Act,” was filed by Daniel Lipinski (D-IL) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) to require that crews operating trains in the U.S. be operated by U.S. citizens.

Sources: BLET Newsflash/Dennis Pierce Congressional Testimony/Library of Congress

Amtrak

The House Appropriations Committee passed a Fiscal Year 2020 transportation budget on June 5, despite a presidential veto threat for the entire budget because Amtrak was not “defunded,” eliminating the national network. Passenger rail received an increase of \$146 million over last year’s funding levels for passenger rail and \$60 million more for transit.

According to the Rail Passengers Association, appropriators used report language to chastise Amtrak for “ignoring congressional intent on customer-facing issues like station agents and long-distance trains, and strongly support maintaining a truly national long distance network . . .”

The Committee reminded Amtrak that the United States Code requires Amtrak to operate a national passenger rail system and urges Amtrak to seek out potential changes to increase ridership in rural areas, improving service for long-distance customers.

Gary Faley, NARVRE’s National Legislative Director, states, “appropriators included strong criticisms in this bill and chastised Amtrak leadership for their intentional neglect of the many Congressional mandates from the statute that governs Amtrak. The House proposal also directs Amtrak to begin following the law when making any decisions regarding change in about every aspect of Amtrak.” He goes on to say, “The report was adamant that a bipartisan Senate is demanding that Amtrak follow the law, as they will expect management to work towards the expansion and growth of rail passenger service in America.”

The Committee restricted the U.S. DOT from clawing back previously approved grant agreements between the FRA and the California high-speed rail project. It also directed Amtrak to provide a station agent, a position that was eliminated in FY 2018, and to communicate with communities when making staffing decisions. With regard to charter trains, private cars, call centers, food and beverage service, and law enforcement, the Committee expressed their desire for Amtrak to seek input on these matters since they all impact ridership, employees, and the communities they serve. Europe and Alaska recognize the value of excursion trains and private cars that provide services national passenger systems may not offer.

In keeping with his pattern of nominations of people who hold opposite views of the entity they would be representing, President Trump nominated former congressman Todd Rokita of Indiana to serve as a member of the Amtrak Board of Directors. The

former Congressman voted twice to defund Amtrak and, at his confirmation hearing on July 24, 2019, he advised Senate Commerce Committee members that he cast those votes to send a message to Amtrak to exercise fiscal responsibility. Senator Blumenthal (D-CT) and others pressed Mr. Rokita, who responded that his view would be different now, and that he would be fully committed to Amtrak. The Committee will have up to a few weeks to send its recommendations to the full Senate for confirmation.

Sources: NARVRE Newsletter/Rail Passengers Association

Oil Train Safety Bill Introduced in the U.S. Senate

On July 31, 2019, Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) introduced S. 2402, The Crude Oil Advanced Tracking Act, to address safety concerns regarding the transport of oil via railways, and to better prepare and employ local communities in the event of an accident. The bill would require railroads to share information with state emergency responders pertaining to oil shipments so they are aware of the risk they face when responding to accidents or spills, and to allocate financial assistance towards emergency preparedness and risk reduction in local communities.

Source: BLET Newsflash

Liquid Natural Gas – Freedom Molecules?

A green light has been given to the Administration’s executive order to open up the transportation of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) by railroads in tank cars that can hold 30,680 gallons, with as many as 100 cars per train. Secretary Rick Perry proclaimed LNG as “freedom molecules” that will break the Russian sole supplier hold over Eastern European countries. LNG has been transported by trucks for years, but if something happens that’s one tank car, not 100.

Source: Florida Bulldog

Railroad Retirement

With passage of the budget bill, the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) is in line to get some desperately needed funding to counter their decades-long underfunding. Gary Faley, National

— continued on Back Page

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In Memoriam

We offer our most sincere condolences to the family and friends of Bruce A. Dominique Jr., a Union Pacific engineer and member of BLET Division 219, in Shreveport, Louisiana, who was killed in a railroad accident on September 6, 2019. He was 36 years old.

According to media reports, Brother Dominique was severely injured when an 18-wheeler collided with his train at a grade crossing in Shreveport on September 26. He was taken to Ochsner LSU Health hospital where he died later that day.

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

Jodi Wallace, Editor
BLET Auxiliary News
541-663-6966
jodi_wallace@bletauxiliary.net

The next issue will be published in December 2019. Please have your submissions to Jodi on or before November 15, 2019.

Greetings from your Editor, Jodi Wallace



Sisters and Brothers,

As I sit here writing my editor's article, we are in a transition period with our newsletter. We are moving to a full color publication for the digital version of the newsletter. The hard copies will remain black and white as full-color printing costs are out of reach for our organization.

We very much appreciate the photos and articles that our members and other readers submit for our newsletter, so please keep them coming. Regarding the photos, in order for the photo files to be of high enough quality for inclusion, I would like to pass on some tips to keep in mind.

When taking photos, please use a quality digital camera if possible. Although you can use a cell phone to take photos, like so many of us do today, a stand-alone digital camera generally offers a better lens and a higher resolution.

If you are going to use a cell phone to take photos, please make sure that it has at least a 5-megapixel camera. The higher the resolution camera the sharper the image will be. Make sure that you use the settings for the largest picture size and the highest resolution possible. This will ensure that your photo is crisp and not pixelated or fuzzy. And, most importantly, when sending the photos to us, please make sure you choose the largest file size available. (When you e-mail or text a photo with an iPhone, a menu automatically pops up asking what size photo you wish to send.)

Another tip is to get as close to your subject as possible and fill in most of the frame. This will reduce the amount of cropping and zooming in that we must do, which can reduce the quality of the photograph. If possible, take multiple shots and from different angles so that you will have multiple pictures to choose from when making your selection.

Although you may not always know at the time of an event that you are taking a photo that will later be used in the newsletter, following these simple tips when you can will greatly increase the sharpness of your images. In any case, please send us what you have and we will work with you to create the best possible image for inclusion in the newsletter.

If anyone has any questions, please e-mail me at jodi_wallace@bletauxiliary.net.

Jodi Wallace can be reached at 1-541-663-6966, jodi_wallace@bletauxiliary.net, or by snail mail at 1804 Washington Ave., La Grande, Oregon, 97850.



BLET Auxiliary

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Legislative Update — continued from Page 14

Legislative Director for NARVRE, reported that the RRB's staffing levels have decreased along with closures of field offices and threats of losing more. In addition, "Technology systems are badly outdated, and many programs are obsolete. Small items like password changes and address updates are impossible and their IT services are running on a 40-year-old legacy mainframe that cannot protect and maintain data information. All beneficiaries have reason to be concerned about our own individual and personal information." He goes on to report that additional funding for FY 2020 will focus "on the IT modernization efforts on transforming the outdated systems and building modern digital services." Full funding would include additional funds for staffing levels. "NARVRE agrees with the Association of American Railroads and Rail Labor Division that the time is now to properly fund the RRB agency."

For those who may not be aware, the RRB is an independent federal agency charged with administering retirement, survivors, and disability benefits. The retirement benefits are self-funded through employer and employee contributions and no additional money for benefits is received from the general fund. However, the RRB does require federal funding for administration purposes in order to distribute those benefits.

In other news, the RRB has issued Statements of Service for all active railroad employees with reported 2018 compensation. If you haven't received a BA-6 form yet, please contact the RRB at 1-877-772-5772. The information shown on these forms provides employees with a record of their railroad retirement service and compensation, and everyone should review not only the creditable compensation amounts, but also personal information to make sure it is correct. If there are any discrepancies, they should be reported to the RRB. The amount of \$128,400 in annual earnings is the maximum amount for RR Retirement

purposes, so if an employee makes more, it will not be reflected on the form. Military service will also be indicated as creditable service under RR Retirement.

The RRB website is an excellent source for many questions that may arise regarding retirement, sickness, and disability benefits. In July, the RRB issued a publication entitled "Unemployment and Sickness Benefits for Railroad Employees," answering many of the more common questions railroad workers have. In addition, in a press release dated June 19, 2019, the RRB issued a Q&A for reporting events than can affect retirement benefits both following retirement and if receiving disability or spousal/widow benefits.

Sources: NARVRE Newsletter//www.rrb.gov, BLET Newsflash

George H. W. Bush Funeral Train Documentary

A programming note, UP is releasing a documentary of the story of George H.W. Bush's funeral train, "United America: The President's Final Journey." The train was America's first presidential funeral train in 50 years, since Ike Eisenhower's in 1969, and will include never-before-seen footage and behind-the-scenes looks at the UP employees instrumental in executing the funeral train's 70-mile journey from Spring, Texas, to his final resting place in College Station, Texas. The first airing will occur on August 11 on the Discovery Channel, before this newsletter is published, but other airings will be on the Science Channel on October 1, and the American Heroes Channel on October 5.

Source: BLET Newsflash

Becky Schneider lives in El Paso, Texas. She can be reached at beckybat@att.net, or 915-581-1373.
