



# 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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Summer 2015

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](http://www.bletauxiliary.net)

## Two New Auxiliaries Organized in Indiana!

### Indianapolis Auxiliary 121

The Indianapolis Auxiliary No. 121 was organized on March 10, 2015. The guiding force behind the formation of this auxiliary was Indianapolis State Legislative Board Chairman Brian Farkas. Brian is excited about getting the ladies of the three Indiana auxiliaries involved in the legislative process. Photo at right taken during installation of new officers: **Left to right:** Christy Krengel, Secretary; April Dawn Brandon, President and Legislative Rep; Heather Brown, Chaplain; Beth Sturgeon, Treasurer; and Sarah Harris, Vice President. New members not in photo include Ryan Krengel, Matthew Sturgeon, Valorie Farkas, Brian Farkas, and Georgina Gould.



### The Other Women Auxiliary No. 348

The photo below was taken at the Organizing Meeting of The Other Women Auxiliary No. 348 in Elkhart, Indiana, on March 12, 2015. Division 348 Local Chairman Rodney Kanous spearheaded the organizing of this new auxiliary and he is getting its members involved in helping to improve some of the work conditions for the members of Division 348.



**Seated in front:** BLET Auxiliary National President Sereena Hogan and National 1st Vice President and Organizer Susie Burrola. **Standing, from left to right:** Kerri Snodgrass, Martha Seaman, Vice President; Bret Seaman; Allie Strand (in front); John Brandt; Julie Brandt; Tara Schaefer, Legislative Rep.; Ray Webster (S/T for Division 348); Kristine Webster, Secretary/Treasurer; Anna Tice, President; Mark Tice; Rodney Kanous (Local Chairman of Div. 348); Makenna Kanous (in front) and Shawn Kanous, Chaplain.

**ATTENTION MEMBERS-AT-LARGE:** Your membership dues were due on March 1. If you have already sent in your dues, thank you for your continued membership! If you have not sent in your dues, please send a check or money order payable to BLET Auxiliary, to Lawana Poss, National Secretary, 1394 Bywood Court, Suwanee, Georgia 30024. If your dues payment is not received by July 31, your name will be dropped from our membership files and you will no longer receive the newsletter. We sincerely hope you will continue to remain a part of our Auxiliary family!



## From the President - BY SEREENA HOGAN

Greetings members and friends!

This Auxiliary has really been on the move in the last few months. In March, 1st Vice President/National Organizer Susie Burrola and I embarked on an organizing trip in the midwest. We flew into Indianapolis and made a presentation to the members of Div. 121 on the morning of March

10, then met with the members and their spouses at a dinner meeting that evening where we organized Auxiliary 121 with ten charter members (*see story on front cover*). The next day, we traveled to Champaign, Illinois, and made a presentation to the members of Division 402, then went to lunch with them to meet some of their spouses. That evening, we drove to Hammond, Indiana, and made a presentation to the joint meeting of Divisions 302 and 551, after which we drove to Elkhart, Indiana. On the morning of March 12, we made a presentation at a meeting of Division 348 and later that evening, we organized "The Other Women" Auxiliary 348 at a dinner meeting (*see story on front cover*). We are grateful to investigators Tom Gaither and Art Rapp of the law firm of Kujawski & Marcus, LLC, who sponsored the dinner meeting in Indianapolis and then, much to our surprise, made some last-minute arrangements with several division officers in the area to get us invited to their division meetings so that we could spread the word about the Auxiliary. We hope to return to that area in the not-too-distant future to organize a few more new auxiliaries. We were delighted that our trip was even more productive than originally anticipated and, because of the spontaneous nature of it and the road trip aspect, we jokingly nicknamed ourselves the "Thelma and Louise of the BLET Auxiliary." Although we are nowhere near as racey as the characters in the movie, we did cover some ground on that trip and we had some good laughs along the way.

At the end of March, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Rep. Kathleen Bisbikis and I attended the National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen's Annual Meeting held at the beautiful Ventana Canyon Resort right here in my home town of Tucson, Arizona (*see story and photos on page 9*). Local Auxiliary 28 put together welcome bags for the event and hosted some outings for the spouses. I was grateful for the opportunity to be at this event in the presence of the state legislative board chairmen from around the country and to be able to introduce those I have come to know over the years to our new national legislative representative, Kathleen. As always, many thanks to the BLET National for making these trips possible through the funding provided to us for travel expenses.

Our Executive Council Meeting was held April 26-28 and it was my pleasure to welcome the Executive Council Members and their husbands to my home for this meeting. We had a busy agenda to cover and the two meeting days went by quickly. It was nice to have our spouses join us in the evenings for some fun

times getting to know each other better and creating a stronger bond between us. (*See full story on Page 8.*)

A special thank-you is in order for Auxiliary 422 Secretary-Treasurer Jessica Barnard. When she found out in early March that two of the local auxiliary officers had suddenly resigned and that the annual report and dues had not been submitted for her auxiliary, she jumped into action and took on the challenge of researching the situation and getting the auxiliary back on track. After months of work, she has assumed the duties of the secretary-treasurer, opened a new bank account in Kansas City, completed and submitted the report forms and dues for Auxiliary 422, and even recruited three new members. Thank you Jessica for your dedication to and enthusiasm for the Auxiliary and for your perseverance in getting things back in order for your local auxiliary. We wish you and your auxiliary members in Kansas City much success in the years ahead!

Thank you also to NorCal Auxiliary 39 sister LeeAnn Chiara for sharing your very personal and inspiring story on Page 4. It is a beautiful testimony to the value of belonging to a local auxiliary of caring, supportive sisters and brothers. The sisters of NorCal 39 did some research and found out about an organization called The John Edgar Thomson Foundation (*see <https://ble-t.org/pr/news/newsflash.asp?id=5475>*) that offers financial aid to daughters of deceased railroad employees and shared that information with LeeAnn following the loss of her husband. Thank you to these awesome auxiliary members for all you have done for the Chiara family and so many others in your area!

In closing, I encourage all of you to be ever mindful of the importance of solidarity and unity amongst all of our union brothers and sisters, not only within the BLET but within all unions in our country. In these times when unions are under attack and states are passing "right to work" laws, we need all the voices we can get to speak out in favor of unions and against unfair labor practices. Make sure that you understand what "right to work" really means and then share it with your families and friends so that they will understand as well, as this carefully crafted terminology can be confused as something that is in the best interest of working people, but it is far from that! Let them know that so-called "right to work" states have lower wages, higher poverty rates, less access to health care, and poorer education for their children. Most importantly, please be sure to let your legislators know that you are against this back-door attempt by America's corporate world to destroy unions and workers' rights. And while you're at it, let your legislators know also that in order to keep the people of their communities safe, it is in their best interest to vote for laws that mandate railroads to keep two crew members in the cab of every locomotive! This is a struggle that has gone on for many, many years, as evidenced by the cartoon on page 10.

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## From 1st VP / National outreach Coordinator Susie Burrola

As I sit here at my computer, composing this article on Memorial Day weekend, I find myself reminiscing about all my childhood memories... school was out, summer was here, dad was getting the barbecue grill ready... life was good!

My father, uncle, and grandfather, all being military veterans, made this weekend even more special. The local VFW post was like the infamous Cheers bar

in Boston... everyone knew my grandparents names! They always had a Shirley Temple or Roy Rodger waiting for us kids, and my dad would always buy me a red poppy to wear in my hair. I smile proudly today, as my son has served his country and returned, and my daughter is thinking about joining the military.

These are not the only great memories from my childhood. My grandparents and parents were hard working union members. Understanding the importance of solidarity was not taught, rather it was just understood in my household.

Needless to say, I married a man much like my father. My husband Oscar is a hard-working, dedicated, and driven union man. He considers his union members to be part of his family. That's why I take so much pride in what I do. At the end of the day, we all have a similar story to share.

The BLET Auxiliary is not only "the better half of the BLET," we are family. While our National BLET officers, local officers, and members are continuously working, the auxiliary is here to lend a helping hand. Our mission and purpose has remained steadfast throughout the years: to educate, provide support, promote issues that affect the safety and well being of our railroaders, and help protect the rights and benefits that so many before us worked hard to obtain for us.

We are thrilled to report that our membership is on the rise. With the support of our national officers, local officers, and current members, we have increased our membership by 49. We are pleased to welcome our two new auxiliaries in Indiana. Thank you Brian Farkas for helping us organize Auxiliary 121, and Rodney Kanous for helping organize "The Other Women" Auxiliary 348. And most especially, thank you to our new local auxiliaries officers and members for being willing to step forward and, rather than complaining about the challenges and problems you and your family face, to stand up and be part of the solution. I commend you for that! You are now part of a much larger family who understands and relates to your lifestyle and shares in your triumphs, your challenges, and your losses. I realize there can be hiccups along the way as you come together to form a strong bond with one another, but all families have these challenges and, through patience and understanding, we will work through them along the way.

As the holiday weekend wraps up, I thank all of our service men and women for serving our country and protecting our freedoms, and all of our union officers and members for protecting the rights and benefits we enjoy as union families.

We are getting ready to head out on another organizing adventure in June - get ready Colorado and Nebraska - Thelma and Louise are on their way!

## In Memoriam

Alexander T. Sassman, a member of BLET Division 692, from Tracy, California, was killed in an on-duty motor vehicle accident near Fairfield, California, on March 16, 2015. Brother Sassman, 51, was one of two railroad employees who were in a taxicab being transported from their train to their off-duty location when the accident occurred. The other passenger survived but sustained major injuries. The taxi was transporting the two Union Pacific employees from San Jose to Roseville.

Brother Sassman is survived by his wife, Destalee, and three sons: Chaim, 22, Liam, 17, and Jaze, 14. A benevolent fund to help the Sassman family during their time of need has been established through U.S. Bank. Donations can be made at a U.S. Bank branch in your area, or mailed to: U.S. Bank, 1080 N. Hills Blvd., Reno, NV 89506 (phone: (800) 872-2657). Checks should be made payable to "Sassman Family Memorial."

It breaks our hearts to learn of this tragedy and we extend our most heartfelt sympathies to the Sassman family.

### Going Green!

You can help us to save on the costs of printing and mailing this publication and reduce our footprint on the environment at the same time, by going green. As always, our newsletter is available on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://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](mailto:vp3sereena@aol.com) to let us know.



# Supporting One Another During Difficult Times - A Major Aspect of the Auxiliary

By LeeAnn Chiara, Member, NorCal Auxiliary #39



It's been three years since my daughter Jewellee and I had a horrible tragedy occur in our lives. At the time, I was 31, and Jewellee was only five. Just a few months before, I had joined NorCal Auxiliary 39 and started attending meetings. At the time, the importance of what I was doing and why I was doing it had not yet been revealed to me, but I became a member and even decided to take the leap and hold an office in my local auxiliary. Being married to a locomotive engineer from Stockton, California, and having my masters in human resources, I did, however, know a lot about the relationship between unions and companies and had somewhat of an understanding as to why we

were needed -- we were to stand up for human rights and the rights of the employees who worked for the company.

NorCal 39 holds its monthly meetings at Starbucks, which I totally love! We have annual bowling tournaments, summer picnics, and an annual holiday party. Those of us with young children take our children to the meetings, and husbands are welcome if they are not working... it's like an extended family.

In 2012, my husband Brian sustained an injury while doing some work on his parents' home. After a 20-day hospital stay and fight for his life, Brian passed away. Having just lost one of my coworkers two days prior, I was about to engage on the ride of a lifetime. The day I met the lady at the funeral home, I went in to tour the space where we would have the service for Brian and there, laid out in a casket, was the body of my "partner in crime" from work, Tony. We had worked together almost five years.

As I prepared to say my last goodbyes to my own high school sweetheart of over

sixteen years, I now recall that my mind and body were very numb. How would I get through this tough time? My auxiliary sisters stepped in and stepped up, offering help in planning the memorial service. I connected them with my cousin, who in turn worked with these ladies to help me plan a beautiful celebration of life for Brian. Looking back, I'm still not sure how I managed through it all, but I do remember the many ways that my auxiliary sisters were there for me.

We all have a purpose in life's journey. For the sisters and brothers of NorCal 39, I appreciate that they have chosen to be an important part of the big picture - working to keeping railroad employees safe at work; working with our local, state, and national congressional leaders to help push through legislation that will benefit railroaders and their families; helping each other to understand our health insurance, life insurance, unemployment, disability, and retirement benefits; and even sharing ideas and tips on how to navigate all the other challenges in life that present themselves to all families in today's world. It's such a relief to have a

support group to which we can turn when we are confused or overwhelmed. It's a place to go to share the blessings and the "inside scoop" with one another for the benefit of all.

Get involved! It's definitely the key to being part of the union family with whom your loved one is working. Huge companies don't have interactive group events, but we can take advantage of the groups formed to watch out for and help the employees of the railroads. Make a difference... attend a meeting and help ensure your family's future. Keep up with what is going on with companies and the government in our nation. Find out what you can do to help change the things that affect you most.

I will never forget the kind hearts and love extended to me by the wonderful sisters of NorCal 39. Even today, they are here for my family. Once you have gone through such a distressing time and have experienced that kind of love and support, a strong emotional and spiritual bond is formed. I am so grateful for my extended family of auxiliary sisters and brothers and the eternal bond we share!

## **BLET POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE (PAC) FUND** - By Kathleen Bisbikis, National 2nd VP/National Leg. Rep.

Money from the BLET PAC is used to help in the fight on Capitol Hill for issues that impact your family and your future: Railroad Retirement, Amtrak Funding, Federal Employers' Liability Act, Railroad Security, and Railroad Safety. Big Railroads spend big money in Washington to influence members of Congress and push their anti-worker plans. In the last election cycle, Union Pacific donated a whopping \$2,590,882 to federal candidates; BNSF threw in \$2,444,993; and CSX and Norfolk Southern donated \$1,256,931 and \$1,273,796 respectively. Despite this eye-popping spending by the Big Railroads, through aggressive lobbying on Capitol Hill and in State Houses and City Halls across America, our union worked to stop some of the worst attacks on our members. Congress and state legislatures increasingly control vital aspects of the railroad industry and our profession. We must support those in elected office who support us on issues that are important to us, and to our families.

Although federal law does not permit spouses or family members to contribute to the BLET PAC, you still can make a difference by encouraging the BLET member in your family to join the BLET PAC or increase their current contribution. Think about it: \$5 a month is the price of lunch, a few cups of coffee, a magazine, or a few lotto tickets; \$10 is the price of a movie; \$20 and \$50 dollars is a tremendous shot in the arm for our folks fighting in the trenches. **PLEASE ASK THE BLET MEMBER IN YOUR FAMILY TO SIGN UP FOR THE PAC OR INCREASE THEIR CURRENT CONTRIBUTION!**

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## Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

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Summer is almost here and that signals the beginning of the 2015 regional conventions! As you may already be aware, this is the last year we will have four regional conventions. In 2016, there will be only two conventions. I do hope you are able to attend one of these regional convention finales in your area. It is always great to see everyone I know and to have the opportunity to meet new sisters and brothers from across the nation!

If you are at one of the conventions, please stop by the auxiliary table in the display area and say hello! And don't forget to purchase tickets for the raffle drawings and buy an auxiliary cookbook!! We will also have t-shirts for sale at our table at the Southeastern Convention and we know you are going to love them!! Thank you to everyone for supporting the BLET Auxiliary by purchasing raffle tickets, t-shirts, cookbooks, and participating in these worthwhile fundraising opportunities.

At this year's Southeastern Meeting Association (SMA) Convention we will auction off the state flags that have been used in the opening ceremonies at this convention for many years. The SMA Auxiliary presides over the annual presentation of the state flags for each of the states represented at this convention, a tradition that dates back nearly 100 years. States flags presented in the ceremony include Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

As President of the SMA Auxiliary, I will be there and I do hope you plan to attend! I look forward to seeing you! Please check the BLET web site <http://www.ble-t.org> for locations and dates.

### COOKBOOKS

We have a limited quantity of the first edition MAIN LINE COOKING and we also have copies of MAIN LINE COOKING II. These cookbooks are great collector items and make wonderful gifts and can be shipped directly to you. Please contact me for more information.

### ANNUAL DUES REMINDERS

Thank you to all of you members-at-large who have sent in your dues. Second notices have been mailed. If you have not already done so, please mail your dues for calendar year 2015 to me and I will send your membership card and

receipt to you. Those MALs who have not remitted their dues by July 31 will be dropped from our membership files and will no longer receive the quarterly newsletter. We don't want to lose you as a valued member of our auxiliary family, so please don't let this happen.

We also have some local auxiliaries who have not yet sent in the annual report and dues payments for your local auxiliary members. Please send your report and dues remittance to me as soon as possible. If you need help filling out the forms, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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

### NEW MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Jennifer Laveing, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania; Jacqueline Runion, Cheyenne, Wyoming; and Bill Schandelmeir (Associate Member-at-Large) Chicago, Illinois. Welcome to each of you!

### WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST AUXILIARIES!!

Auxiliary 121 – Indianapolis, Indiana: Christy Krengel, Ryan Krengel, April Brandon, Beth Sturgeon, Matthew Sturgeon, Heather Brown, Sarah Harris, Valorie Farkas, Brian Farkas & Georgia Gould.

Auxiliary 348, "The Other Women," Elkhart, Indiana: Anna Tice, Makenna Kanous, Shawn Kanous, Martha Seaman, Alexandra Strand, Tara Schaefer, Kristine Webster, Kerri Snodgrass, Jess Runyan, Melissa Ottavi, Natalie Tavernier & Julie Brandt.

Please call or e-mail me, or any national officer, when there is a death of a member or the death of one of their family members. We want to be able to send our condolences to the family. We would like to also share in the joy! Please let me know of any exciting happenings! I hope you all have a safe and fun-filled summer!



*Lawana Poss can be reached at 770-497-8898, by e-mail at [Lewp2007@bellsouth.net](mailto: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



***Solidarity is not a matter of sentiment but a fact, cold and impassive as the granite foundations of a skyscraper. If the basic elements, identity of interest, clarity of vision, honesty of intent, and oneness of purpose, or any of these is lacking, all sentimental pleas for solidarity, and all other efforts to achieve it will be barren of results.***

— Eugene V. Debs

## **Two-Person Train Crew Issue**

**U.S. Court ruling in favor of two-person crew:** The BLET's position on the two-person train crew issue was recently vindicated by a ruling in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. The court ruled that the use of managers in place of conductors on the Wheeling & Lake Erie Railroad (W&LE) constitutes a major dispute under the Railway Labor Act.

In September 2013, the BLET went on strike over the W&LE's repudiation of collective bargaining agreements that cover the locomotive engineer and trainmen operating crafts. Specifically, W&LE ignored longstanding crew consist agreements and operated single-person operations in an effort to eliminate trainmen.

The W&LE challenged the strike and the District Court ruled the dispute to be a minor one, granting the Carrier a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO), and BLET members returned to work. The District Court conditioned the TRO "on WL&E's agreement not to use supervisors or other management employees in place of engineers or conductors in the operation of its trains." The TRO was later converted into an injunction.

A unanimous three-judge panel for the Sixth Circuit reversed the District Court, finding that W&LE's "claim that the Trainmen Agreement allowed it to man trains without union conductors is frivolous or obviously insubstantial, and the dispute is major." The Court of Appeals also vacated the injunction and remanded the case back to the District Court with instructions to dismiss the W&LE's complaint. This is a major victory for all BLET members, especially those at the W&LE.

**Two Person Crew Bill introduced:** In a continued joint effort, the BLET and SMART-TD Unions are working together to secure the safety of the railroad industry with the announcement of H.R. 1763 being introduced in the 114th Congress. H.R. 1763 requires a minimum of two crew members on all freight trains in the U.S. — a certified engineer and a certified conductor. The bill was introduced by Congressman Don Young (R-Alaska) on April 13, 2015. In a statement by the BLET marking the introduction, Na-

tional President Dennis Pierce said, "The BLET continues to oppose and condemn single-person freight operations as adverse to worker and public safety. . . . All parties involved must understand that as things stand today, there are only two ways to end one-person train operations: federal laws or regulations that outlaw this dangerous practice, or collectively bargained contract language that requires two crew members on every train. We will continue to work to protect contractual language to defend two-person crews, and it also is our goal to protect the safety of railroad workers and the general public by advocating for passage of H.R. 1763."

**States calling for two-person crew legislation:** While HR 1763 has been introduced into the 114th Congress to protect two-person crews nationally, some states are fighting individually at home to mandate laws in their areas at a hopefully faster rate than perhaps what Congress may be able to do. Nebraska and California have been hard at work trying to protect the movement of freight by rail by keeping the conductor and engineer in the cab of all locomotives. Safety is the biggest concern and, while technology like Positive Train Control may help cut down on the amount of certain types of accidents that occur, it will not replace the safety of having the vital second individual on the train.

Recently in Nebraska, Resolution LR338 was adopted by a 36-4 vote. LR338 states:

"That the Legislature urges the Federal Railroad Administration to adopt a rule requiring a train crew of at least two individuals whenever a train or light engine is used in connection with the movement of freight."

In an article that appeared in the *Journal Star* newspaper on May 28, 2015, BLET Nebraska State Legislative Chairman Pat Pfeifer was quoted as saying: "The more critical issue is what happens when a train derails or breaks down. . . . It's about public safety, it's not about jobs." Brother Pfeifer has every right to be concerned. Nebraska has two of the nation's largest railroads running through it daily and the largest rail yard in the nation, located in North Platte. With the BNSF and Union Pacific hauling hazardous material through the heartland, the safety of the public and the safety of the crews in these locomotives have to be at the forefront.

Meanwhile in California, Brothers Tim Smith and Ryan Snow are fighting their own two-person crew battle in the California Senate with their introduction of SB 730. "SB 730 would prohibit, on and after February 1, 2016, a train or light engine used in connection with the movement of freight, as specified, from being operated unless it has a crew consisting of at least two individuals. The bill would authorize the Public Utilities Commission to assess civil penalties against any person who willfully violates this provision."

To date, SB 730 has passed on the Senate floor by a vote of 22 for, 11 against, and



7 non-votes. Brother Smith reports that they also have gotten a Republican vote making the bill bipartisan. SB 730 is now headed to the California Assembly. California is also home to the BNSF and Union Pacific railroads and transports approximately 50% of the nation's seaborne cargo arriving from ports in Long Beach, Los Angeles, and Oakland.

### **Confidential Close Call Reporting System**

Metra employees will now be able to report near accidents and incidents, safety, or rule violations without the fear of facing sanctions by Metra or the FRA. Leaders of four rail unions and the transit system signed an agreement earlier this month with the FRA to adopt a "Confidential Close-Call Reporting System."

The intent of the program is to collect data so that corrective steps can be taken in training, safety rules, and operating procedures. To ensure confidentiality, calls will be handled by a third party, NASA, who will compile the data, remove all identifying information, and then forward it back to a labor peer review team, Metra management, and the FRA.

### **Obama Vetoes GOP Bill on Union Elections**

On March 31, 2015, President Obama vetoed a Republican effort to overturn union voting rules, telling reporters, "I think it's a bad idea." Earlier last month, Congress passed a resolution of disapproval of a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruling that shortened the timeline for holding union representation elections after workers had expressed interest in representation, dubbing it an "ambush election" rule and

arguing it would allow unions to place undue pressure on workers and employers.

The Republicans deliberate misinformation about labor unions is clearly on display with the "logic" they rely upon in this anti-worker resolution. The Republicans simply ignore the fact that unions and workers are the same group of people. Essentially, Republicans complain that workers are placing pressure (to vote) on themselves when in fact the streamlined process actually relieves the pressure on the workers that the employers always use in unionizing decision elections. However, it is also clear they are unhappy with the pressure organized employees will place on employers to treat their workers fairly.

This is only the fourth veto of his presidency. President Obama stated that the Republican resolution would reverse 'common-sense, modest changes to streamline' the union voting process. . . . One of the freedoms of folks who live in the United States is if they choose to join a union they should be able to do so," he added. "We shouldn't be making it impossible for that to happen."

### **Tank Car Ruling**

On May 1, the Department of Transportation announced new rules for tank cars hauling flammable liquids. Included in these new regulations are enhanced building standards for tank cars as well as an upgraded electro-pneumatic braking system that deploys faster than the air brakes that are currently used on freight trains. In addition, trains with 35 or more cars of flammable liquid will be required to use a second locomotive to help

with braking. As a result of the aggressive, risk-based approach, the final rule will require replacing the entire fleet of DOT-111 tank cars for Packing Group I, which covers most crude shipped by rail, within three years and all non-jacketed CPC-1232s, in the same service, within approximately five years. The new tank car rules were announced in Washington by U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx and Canadian counterpart, Lisa Raitt. The two countries consider this a joint effort to improve the safety of crude by rail as these trains move across the continent.

### **Positive Train Control**

Positive train control (PTC) is a technological safety net that is designed to enforce track movement authority, prevent train-to-train collisions, derailments caused by excessive speed, unauthorized trains into areas of track where maintenance is taking place, and movement of a train over a track switch left in the wrong position. In short, PTC saves lives... the lives of the public and the lives of the crew members aboard the train.

The federally mandated deadline for implementation of PTC is December 31, 2015; however, legislation has been proposed for Congress to extend that deadline through the passage of S. 650, the Railroad Safety and Positive Train Control Extension Act. This bill would extend the current deadline to December 2020 with the possibility of an additional two-year extension until December 2022.

Although Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx has said that the Obama administration is opposed

to extending the PTC implementation deadline, and that the DOT plans to "hold the industry's feet to the fire" in getting PTC done as quickly as possible, as opposed to allowing a blanket extension, certain railroads have convinced their "friends" in Congress to propose just that.

As stated by BLET National Vice President and National Legislative Representative John Tolman, "Each death caused by the delay of PTC implementation is one too many, and Congress capitulating to the railroads for this broad extension is most certainly not in the public interest."

One June 2, BLET National President Dennis Pierce testified before the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee at a hearing titled "Oversight of the Amtrak Accident in Philadelphia." President Pierce's testimony covered several core elements of the railroad industry, stressing that two-person train crews backed by PTC would go a long way toward preventing future accidents. While PTC would help mitigate accidents, it should not be used to replace crew members who work inside the cab of America's locomotives.

He went on to say: "PTC is no silver bullet; it's not designed to prevent every accident and any claim that PTC renders the second crew member unnecessary is just not true. PTC can't replace the second crewmember. It doesn't provide a second set of eyes and ears trained on the road ahead or monitor the 'left' side of the train for defects like hot wheels, stuck brakes, or shifted lading, or observe the 'left' side of

— continued on page 10

## Annual Executive Council Meeting took place in Tucson, Arizona, April 26 - 28, 2015

The five ladies who comprise the Executive Council for the BLET National Auxiliary met in Tucson at the home of National President Sereena Hogan, April 26-28. The council began the practice of holding annual meetings in the homes of the council members beginning in 2006 in order to save the travel and lodging expense for one officer and to eliminate the costs associated with renting meeting space. In keeping with tradition, a welcome reception and dinner was hosted by Sereena and her husband Ken on the day of arrival.

On Monday morning, April 27, council members began to tackle the many items listed on the agenda, from reviewing the financial status of the organization, to revisions to the information packets distributed to prospective new members and newly forming auxiliaries, to establishing new policies and procedures for expense reports, recordkeeping, and follow-up with existing local auxiliaries.

Eight qualifying scholarship applications were received by the National Auxiliary and were reviewed and rated. The council members also reviewed and rated the 25 qualifying International Western Convention (IWC) scholarship applications, a practice that began at the inception of the IWC Scholarship Program in the late 90s. The names of the scholarship recipients for the Auxiliary will be listed in the next issue of this publication and the names of the recipients of the IWC scholarship recipients will be announced at the conclusion of this year's International Western Convention in late August.

The annual evaluation forms for the Care and Assistance Program recipients were reviewed and all three ladies were approved to continue in the program. We are pleased to be able to offer these deserving long-time



Executive Council members: Front row, seated: National 1st Vice President Susie Burrola, National President Sereena Hogan, back row: National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Rep. Kathleen Bisbikis, National Secretary Lawana Poss, and National Treasurer Terri Fleming.



Council members met around the dining room table at the home of National President Sereena Hogan to discuss the status of the Auxiliary and make plans for the future.

members a small token of financial relief each month.

Other topics covered at the meeting included plans to increase membership, fundraising strategies, plans for the 2015 regional conventions, ideas for articles for the Auxiliary and BLET publications, and plans for improving

the website and utilizing the blog section of the site.

In addition to working hard during the few days spent together, the council members managed to have a little fun and a lot of laughs, especially during the evenings when joined by the husbands.



## Auxiliary 28 Members Honored at International Women's Day Event

Auxiliary 28 members Kathy Hurst and Joanna Zappia were honored at the 5th Annual Celebration of International Women's Day to honor women in labor, on March 5, 2015, in Tucson, Arizona. Both of these women received the Mother Jones Award for Outstanding Contributions for their tireless service and contribution to the betterment of the lives of the members of BLET Division 28, one of the largest divisions within the National BLET. Kathy Hurst was a founding member of Guadalupe Auxiliary No. 28, chartered on March 21, 1998, and served as President from that date until January 2015. She also served as Vice President/Assistant National Legislative Rep for the National Auxiliary from 2010 - 2014.



**Linda Hatfield, President, Communications Workers of America Local 700; Auxiliary 28 members Joanna Zappia and Kathy Hurst, and Cassandra Becerra, Congressional Aid to Representative Raul Grijalva, U.S. Representative for Arizona's 3rd Congressional District**

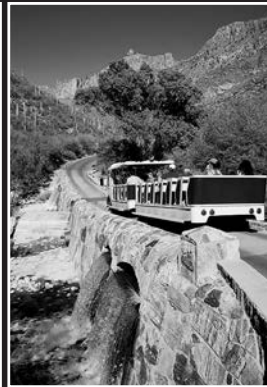
Joanna Zappia represented Auxiliary 28 as its delegate at the National Convention in October 2014 and served as a teller at the convention. She also served as Vice President of Auxiliary 28 from 2013-2015. She is always first on the scene to help with all local auxiliary events and her easygoing, congenial personality make her a joy to be around. The theme for this year's Women's Day event was "Make it Happen," and these are two women who always give their all to do just that! Congratulations Joanna and Kathy!

## 2015 NASLBC Meeting

The 29th Annual National Association of state Legislative Board Chairmen's (NASLBC) Meeting was held in Tucson, Arizona, in late March. National President Sereena Hogan and National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Kathleen Bisbikis were both in attendance. At the reception on Sunday evening, Kathleen and Sereena welcomed the attendees with cactus-shaped and chili pepper-shaped cookies that Kathleen had spent many hours baking and decorating, and welcome bags from the Arizona State Legislative Board and Guadalupe Auxiliary No. 28.



**NASLBC Meeting, March 29-31, 2015  
Tucson, Arizona**

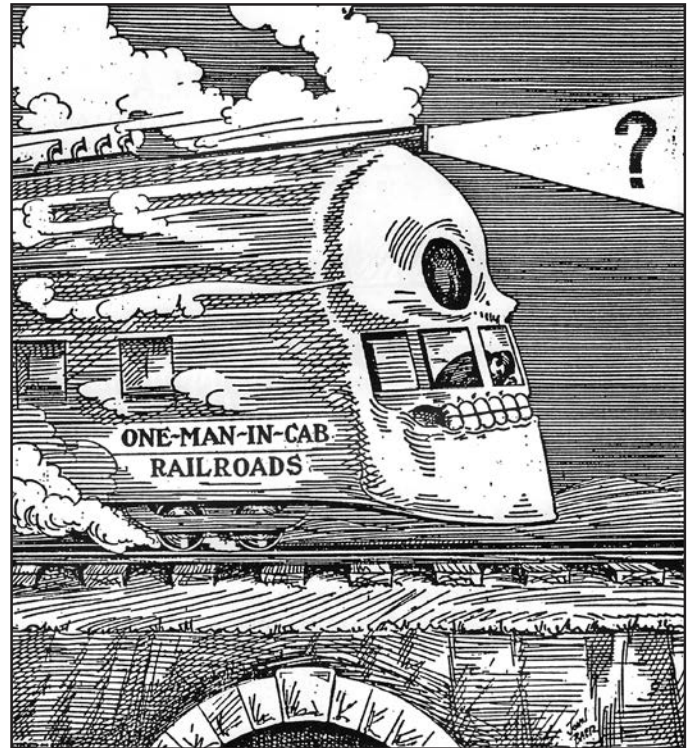


On Monday, March 29, guest speaker Sam Wercinski, Executive Director of the Arizona Advocacy Network, spoke about the clean elections campaign, voting rights, and the attacks on unions by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and notoriously anti-labor Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker. BLET National President Dennis Pierce gave an overview of the many issues

being addressed by the BLET Legislative Department, including positive train control, two-man crews, cab security, inward-facing cameras, and the railroads' denial of employees' access to family medical leave. BLET National Vice President & Legislative Rep John Tolman discussed the national budget, the Medicare voucher system, the Safe Freight Act, and the PAC Fund, urging Auxiliary members to help encourage PAC participation nationwide. BLET National Special Rep Paul Aird gave an inspiring speech about the dangers of apathy and encouraged all to become involved in the legislative process. Kathleen delivered a speech on the importance of buying American-made products and Sereena gave an update on the status of the Auxiliary.

On Tuesday, the Auxiliary hosted two outings for the spouses in attendance — a morning outing to nearby Sabino Canyon that included a narrated tram ride, and an afternoon outing to the DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun, with a guided tour of the art gallery, gift shop, and historic district created by Ted DeGrazia, known for his colorful images of Native American children and western scenes. Those who participated in these adventures received a “sun survival bag” filled with water, Arizona sunscreen, prickly pear lip balm, and a sugar cookie decorated with the Auxiliary logo. It was a fun day and those who went on the outings seemed to enjoy themselves.

Next year's NASLBC Meeting will be held in Little Rock, Arkansas.



This cartoon was created in 1936 by RLEA's Labor paper cartoonist John Baer. The all-too-familiar problem is still an issue today.

### **Legislative update cont'd from Page 7**

highway-rail grade crossings for drivers who fail to stop, or separate stopped trains that block crossings to allow first responders to cross the tracks.”

Also at the June 2 hearing, Sarah Feinberg, Acting Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration, told the congressional panel: “FRA feels strongly that the deadline of December 31, 2015, is an important mandate for the implementation of PTC and our agency intends to enforce it.”

Now is the time to contact your Senators and let them know that you are strongly opposed to S.650. The following link will take you directly to a listing by state of Senators in your area to contact. Let your voice be heard!

[http://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm?OrderBy=state](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm?OrderBy=state)

### **Amtrak to Heighten Safety Measures Following May 12th Derailment**

The FRA has ordered Amtrak to take immediate action to improve safety in the Northeast Corridor where the May 12 derailment that killed eight people took place. Amtrak stated that it would have an Automatic Train Control (ATC) in place on the curve in Philadelphia where the May 12 derailment occurred before that section of track is reopened to the public. Amtrak CEO Joseph Boardman stated, “That the accident would not have happened if the braking system had been in service on the northbound track.” ATC was in place on the southbound track, but had not been installed on the northbound section where the derailment occurred. It is reported the train had reached a speed of 102 mph when it left the track.

Amtrak has also announced that

it will be installing inward-facing video cameras to record the actions of the engineer. Initially, 70 cameras will be installed in locomotives in Amtrak's most traveled corridor, which services trains between Washington D.C. and Boston, as well as New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. While inward-facing cameras, if they are crash-worthy and can withstand the impact of a derailment, may help in reconstructing what happened to cause the derailment, they are not a solution in the effort to prevent potential derailments of either Amtrak or freight trains and, in fact, may be considered an invasion of privacy in many circumstances in freight train cabs.

Despite speculation of many sources and news stories, the probable cause of the Amtrak derailment has not been determined and it could take up to twelve months for the National Transportation Safety Board to complete its investigation and issue a report.

### **Good News from Missouri**

On June 4, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon vetoed legislation that would have made Missouri the 26th Right To Work state in America. In a statement regarding his veto of House Bill 116, Gov. Nixon said: “This extreme measure would take our state backward, squeeze the middle-class, lower wages for Missouri families, and subject businesses to criminal and unlimited civil liability. Right To Work is wrong for Missouri, it's wrong for the middle-class - and it must never become the law of the Show-Me-State.” Many thanks to Missouri State Legislative Board Chairman Brian Kelley and all of the BLET and Auxiliary brothers and sisters, and their families, for their efforts to lobby against this anti-worker legislation.

*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](mailto:biz4413@gmail.com).*



## **Greetings from your Editor, Susie Burrola**

Our motto for this year, "on a verge of a surge," could not be more accurate. Over the past six months, our Executive Council officers have been up and running full force and we are making great progress in so many areas of the organization, from recruiting to fundraising to setting goals for our future. Learning the duties and responsibilities of our new positions and getting to know each other has been such an enjoyable process. We have a lot of work to do, and I could not ask for a better group of sisters to share it with. The enthusiasm of the group is at an all-time high and having a little fun with one another along the way makes all of our jobs a lot more pleasant. That being said, I am excited to get back out there to recruit more new members and organize new auxiliaries around the country!

In April, we gathered for our Executive Council meeting in Tucson, Arizona, hosted by our National President Sereena Hogan, with the help of her "arm candy," Ken Kroeger. During the course of our two days of meetings, we were able to conquer our agenda and develop new policies and procedures to coincide with the current issues at hand. We are continuously evolving and are always open for suggestions and ideas. Please feel free to contact any of your national officers for assistance or to offer your ideas for strengthening our organization and moving it into the future.

We are gearing up for the regional conventions and would like to invite everyone to our business meetings there. Our meetings are held right after lunch on the same day as the opening ceremonies and are open to all spouses in attendance at the convention. We have important information to share about benefits for railroad families, legislative issues, and Railroad Retirement—and it's a great way to meet spouses and family members from your area as well as other areas around the country. We usually try to incorporate a little fun and laughter into our meetings as well. At least two national auxiliary officers will be at each convention, so please come by and say hello so we can get to know you.



*"I can do things you cannot*

*You can do things I cannot*

*Together we can do great things!"*

~ Mother Teresa



## **2015 Regional Meeting Schedule**

### **77th Annual Eastern Union Meeting Association (EUMA) Boston, Massachusetts - July 25-31, 2015**

Arrangements Chairman Kevin J. Moore, Springfield Terminal/Delaware & Hudson General Chairman and Legislative Representative of BLET Division 191 (Lunenburg, Mass.), will host the 2015 EUMA at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel in historic downtown Boston.

### **75th Annual International Western Convention (IWC) Denver, Colorado - August 17-20, 2015**

Co-Chairmen Jim Wilmesher, Chairman of the Colorado State Legislative Board, and Cory Runion, Chairman of the Wyoming State Legislative Board, will host the 2015 IWC at the Embassy Suites Hotel in downtown Denver.

### **80th Annual Southwestern Convention Meeting (SWCM) Tulsa, Oklahoma - September 13-17, 2015**

Co-Chairman Dana Marlow, 1st Vice Chairman of the Union Pacific-Southern Region General Committee of Adjustment, and Jeff Tryon, Local Chairman of Division 179, will host the 2015 SWCM at the Hard Rock Casino and Resort in Tulsa.

### **Teamsters Women's Conference**

The 2015 Teamster Women's Conference will be held August 27 - 29 in Boston, Massachusetts. This is an opportunity for Teamster women and men to take advantage of great speakers, educational workshops, and to network with other dedicated Teamsters, all of whom make a difference! For more information and to register online, please go <http://ibt.io/womensconf>.

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

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