



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 2018

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

Auxiliary is a Blessing for Railroad Families

What the Auxiliary Means to Me

*By Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary Member
Lori Bencivengo*

I was first introduced to the BLET Auxiliary eight years ago, when Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary was established in northern California. When the auxiliary was presented, and I learned why it was important to the railroad families of BLET members, I knew I wanted to become a member. So many times we try to help our friends and family understand the railroad way of life, but they just can't relate. I saw the auxiliary as an opportunity to network with other railroad families who can relate to the lifestyle and support each other. I joined that night.

As a member, I stay informed about important issues that directly impact my family as well as the community. I receive updates from National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Kathleen Bisbikis, who is also a member of Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary. She updates our members about new bills that are introduced in Congress — for example, HR-233, the Safe Freight Act, that would require two-person crews aboard all freight trains in the United States. A companion bill, S. 2360, was introduced in the U.S. Senate in January of this year. We all know how dangerous a one-person crew would be. This could have a seriously detrimental effect on worker safety as well as public safety, not to mention a reduction in workforce. It is important that all voters reach out to the House and the Senate to let our voices be heard. The local and state legislative representatives of the Auxiliary can provide you with the best way to reach out to your local government and have your voice be heard, and National Legislative

Representative Kathleen Bisbikis helps us find out how to connect with our representatives in the U.S. Congress.

The National Auxiliary offers an annual scholarship program that benefits our youth who wish to pursue higher education. My son, Jacob, is a recipient of one of the national scholarship awards. I am so grateful for this contribution to help him meet the goals he has been working so hard to obtain. With a son starting college and a toddler in daycare, every dollar helps our family in our quest to help Jacob to get one step closer to his dreams. Even if you don't have children applying for a scholarship, it is nice to know that a portion of your annual dues helps support the youth of your fellow members.

The sisterhood of the auxiliary has always been a good way to stay connected and promote fellowship with your local railroad families. Our local auxiliary has annual barbecues, bowling contests, raffles, and, new this year, we are having a car show fundraiser. These events are fun and can be full of laughter, but there are also serious reasons to join an auxiliary.

In 2012, tragedy hit one of our own. One of our members faced the loss of a spouse. The sisters were there to support her and help her find answers to important questions like, "Do we have life insurance to help pay for the funeral?" "Will I have still have health insurance?" "What survivor benefits am I



The Bencivengo Family: Jacob, Mike, Brynn, and Lori

entitled to?" These are questions I could not handle on my own if I faced such a sudden loss. It's reassuring to know my auxiliary sisters would be there to help me get the answers.

Through the years, I have watched our local auxiliary grow stronger. I have seen families change and children grow. I am so grateful for what the Auxiliary means to me as a spouse and as a fellow union family. It is important to unite in numbers and support each other. My family and I are blessed to have the support of our railroad family.

Important National Convention Update on Page 10

From the President - BY SEREENA HOGAN

Greetings Everyone,

I hope you all saw the cover story in the Spring edition of the newsletter about the newly formed Music City Auxiliary No. 431 in Nashville, Tennessee. In that article, I mentioned that BLET Division 129 Legislative Rep Jeff Rich and his wife Lisa were the guiding force behind getting this auxiliary started. Although it is true that Jeff had reached out to us about organizing an auxiliary in the Nashville area, I have learned since the article was printed that it was actually Jessie Perkins, Debbie Wright, and Katie Dean who worked very hard for many months to get Music City Auxiliary No. 431 up and running. Many thanks ladies for all your efforts and hard work! In the months since they were first organized, four new members have joined this auxiliary and they are determined in their efforts to grow their membership. They are planning a summer picnic in the month of August, which will be a good opportunity to network with more BLET families in their area. Their legislative representative, Lisa Rich, recently represented the auxiliary at the Tennessee Democratic Party Three Star Dinner and will be attending the Auxiliary National Convention in October as their delegate. We wish them all the best as they continue to grow and work through the intricacies of getting their new organization off to a good start.

Kathleen Bisbikis and I enjoyed our time spent with the National Association of State Legislative Board members in March. They always make those of us who attend on behalf of the Auxiliary feel very welcome at their meetings and, as my term comes to an end soon, I will miss the annual meetings with this great group of gentlemen in the future! We were also honored to be invited to attend the Ohio State Legislative Board Meeting and the California State Legislative Board Meeting, both held in the month of April. Kathleen Bisbikis and Susie Burrola attended the California State Board Meeting in Lake Tahoe, and I attended the Ohio State Board Meeting in Columbus. Congratulations to Ryan Snow on your re-election as California State Legislative Board Chairman, and to Tim Price on your re-election as Ohio State Legislative Board Chairman!

We had an unexpected addition to the scholarship awards this year. In addition to the two \$2500 awards funded by LECMPA, President Susan Tukel generously offered to award some additional scholarships in the amount of \$500 each to applicants who qualified for the LECMPA-sponsored scholarships. Awarding

scholarships to students who are BLET family members is one of the most rewarding aspects of our duties as national officers.

Our National Secretary Helen Brand, who happens to be an expert seamstress and quilter, has generously donated her skills, time, and materials to make a quilt that will be offered in a special raffle this year. Tickets for the quilt will be sold at both regional meetings and on Facebook, and we will be asking our local auxiliaries to help with ticket sales as well. A live Facebook drawing for the quilt will be held on October 3, 2018, at the completion of the General Session of the BLET Auxiliary at our National Convention.

First Vice President Susie Burrola, 2nd Vice President Kathleen Bisbikis, and I were grateful for the opportunity to see some of our good friends and to meet some new sisters and brothers at the Western Regional Meeting in Monterey, California, during the week of June 17. It's always great to join in fellowship with our BLET and Auxiliary brothers and sisters and their families at these gatherings. More about that meeting will be shared in the next issue of this publication.

Many thanks to Nor Cal 39 auxiliary member Lori Bencivengo for submitting the story on this issue's cover page about what the Auxiliary means to her and her family. We really appreciate hearing from our members and sharing their stories with all of our readers.

Our networking opportunities at this year's legislative meetings, and the regional meeting in Monterey, are helping our organization grow. We have two new auxiliaries forming in Ohio and another one in Oregon. We hope to get these three auxiliaries organized before the end of this year!

Wishing all of our Auxiliary and BLET brothers and sisters a safe and enjoyable summer!

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Behind the Scenes at the National Auxiliary

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

Every Spring, as the days get longer, and the weather begins to warm up, the members who make up the Executive Council of the National Auxiliary gather together, traveling from our home states of Kansas, California, Texas, and Arizona to make plans and brainstorm ideas for the coming year. Our scholarship applications have by that time all been submitted and are reviewed and graded. Each year the number of applications that we receive has increased and become more competitive. Following this year's meeting — held April 18-20 in Manteca, California, at the home of Susie Burrola — ten lucky Auxiliary families will be notified that their son or daughter will be receiving a check in the mail to be applied toward their future tuition cost in the fall.

The Auxiliary has also proudly partnered with Locomotive Engineers and Conductors Mutual Protection Association (LECMPA) for the last two years to offer two additional scholarships in the amount of \$2500 each, that are fully funded by LECMPA. To qualify for these scholarships, an applicant must have one parent who is an Auxiliary member and one parent who is a BLET member as well as a member of LECMPA. For 2018, LECMPA President Susan Tukel has authorized an additional nine scholarship awards in the amount of \$500 each to those applicants who qualified for the LECMPA-funded scholarships but were not selected as recipients of the \$2500 awards.

At our Executive Council meeting, we also review and renew applications for our Care and Assistance Program that helps auxiliary families in need during tough times by making a one-time donation, or by supplementing the monthly income of some of our long-time members who are widowed.

In addition to our regular work this year, we also spent a considerable amount of time planning for our National Convention in Las Vegas this October. Delegates from all qualified local auxiliaries across the country, as well as representatives for the members-at-large, and all of our national officers will come together in early October to review and make changes to the bylaws

that govern our organization, to ensure that they are kept current in changing times. The convention will come to a finale with the election of the new national officers.

Fundraising for our Scholarship Program is always a major topic at our Council meeting. The majority of our fundraising takes place at the annual regional conventions held during the summer months. With the reduction in the number of regional meetings each year, and the loss of our most lucrative moneymaker, the golf tournament at the annual Southwestern Convention, the amount of funds we are able to raise for scholarships has taken a major hit. We continue to conduct a 50/50 raffle as well as a prize raffle at each of the two conventions, and to sell golf mulligans; however, these fundraisers do not bring in nearly the amount of funds that we were able to generate with the golf tournament.

For our prize raffle, we solicit donations of prizes that we hope will be of interest to the guests at the conventions. However, it has become more and more difficult to convince companies and vendors to donate to our cause. We brainstormed some additional strategies for obtaining prizes for the upcoming regional meetings. At the meeting in Myrtle Beach last year, we were asked by some visitors at our table if we could offer more items aimed toward the men. We have happily found some items for this year's raffles that have a more masculine flair.

We continue to be optimistic, and this year we will have an additional opportunity to raise funds for our organization. We will be selling raffle tickets for a custom quilt, hand-made by our very talented National Secretary Helen Brand. Tickets will be available for sale at the regional meetings and at the National Convention in Las Vegas, with a Facebook Live event from Vegas for the drawing and announcement of the winner. This quilt will be a keepsake item for sure!

There is no better feeling than being able to serve in an organization that has proven the test of time, persevering in good times and bad for the benefit our union family. In solidarity, all things are possible!



National Officers, clockwise from front: President Sereena Hogan, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Rep. Kathleen Bisbikis, Treasurer Terri Fleming, Secretary Helen Brand, 1st Vice President/National Outreach Coordinator Susie Burrola



Grading scholarship applications is serious business. National 2nd Vice President Kathleen Bisbikis and National Treasurer Terri Fleming tally the scores for each qualified application that we receive.



At this year's Executive Council Meeting, we were joined by our investment accounts manager Kimberly Korf (center), Managing Director of Edgewood Financial Network, who took over management of our accounts last Fall when our former accounts manager Brian Moland (right) moved on to transition into another career path. Brian wanted us to meet Kimberly in person and she was very interested to learn as much as possible about the Auxiliary and our needs and goals. It was great to meet Kimberly and to see our long-time friend Brian!

Ohio State Legislative Board 16th Quadrennial Convention

By Sereena Hogan, National President

The Ohio State Legislative Board convened in Columbus, Ohio, April 23-24, for their 16th Quadrennial Convention. Ohio State Chairman Tim Price did a fantastic job putting together a great meeting with many opportunities for education, as well as fun and fellowship! The meeting began with a trip for all to the beautiful Ohio Statehouse, where Ohio State Representative Michele Lepore-Hagan (District 58, Youngstown) and the Statehouse tourguide led us on a wonderful guided tour. It was a great opportunity to learn about the history of the Statehouse. We even got to sit in the House Chambers, where Ohio State Representative John Patterson (District 99, Jefferson) joined Michele to tell us about the inner workings of the Ohio House of Representatives. They stressed the importance of reaching out to our members of Congress with phone calls, letters, e-mails, and face-to-face contacts. Of all the different ways to reach out, they both agreed that sending a letter expressing a personal concern or sharing a personal story is the most influential. Michele spoke briefly about three bills now being considered in the State of Ohio that are railroad related, two of which were introduced by her. She also expressed the importance of having women's voices heard regarding the two-man crew issue and other issues that affect not only the safety of rail employees, but the safety of entire communities.

On Monday afternoon, we listened to a great lineup of guest speakers, including the BLET National Officers; representatives from job income protection companies BRCF and LECMPA; disability insurance provider Cornerstone Assurance Group; health insurance provider United Healthcare; Steel and Moss Law Firm; and Coffee, Kaye, Myers, and Olley Law Firm.

On Tuesday, while the Ohio State Board conducted their business meeting and elections, the spouses and family members in attendance were treated to a wonderful, albeit a bit drizzly, day at the world famous Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. A fabulous tour package had been planned for us, which included bus transportation and admission to the zoo, a gift certificate to spend in the gift shop, a souvenir cup, a ride on the fully restored 1914 Mangels-Illions Carousel, and a catered lunch that included an up-close experience with several zoo animals and their handlers who travel with Columbus Zoo Director Emeritus Jack Hanna for media appearances. We had the opportunity to learn about and interact with a surreal looking anteater, a tiny owl, a large tortoise, a very soft penguin, and a scaly armadillo. Thanks so much Tim and the Ohio State Legislative Board for this awesome experience. In addition to being a lot of fun, it was a great way for the spouses to get to know one another!

Congratulations to Brother Tim Price on your re-election to another term as Ohio State Legislative Board Chairman! We will do our best to get an auxiliary started in your state soon!

Photos from top to bottom: Ohio State Chairman Tim Price and Rep. Michele Lepore-Hagan; Ohio Statehouse tour attendees in the House Chambers; zoo-goers doing their best to stay dry at the Columbus Zoo; a very excited Ellie Moore petting the penguin during our personalized presentation at the zoo!



2018 National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen's Meeting

By Kathleen Bisbikis, National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative

The 32nd Annual Meeting of the National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen (NASLBC) convened March 11-14 in "The Big Easy," New Orleans Louisiana. National President Sereena Hogan and I were both in attendance.

On Monday, March 12, opening ceremonies commenced with the invocation and the seating of new members: Wayne Denson (Arkansas) William Fleischmann (New York) and Scott Weeks (Utah). NASLBC Chairman Paul Piekarski then introduced the first guest speaker, BLET President Dennis Pierce. President Pierce spoke about the importance of the upcoming mid-term elections. He also discussed the BLET and SMART union working together in the fight for the two-man crew bill as well as the continued battle against Right-to-Work laws and how some people still don't understand the consequences of this legislation, for the unions and for working people in general.

Vice President Lee Pruitt spoke next, also touching on the fact that elections have consequences and encouraged everyone to "look at the agenda of those running for office and their history." He also spoke about inward-facing cameras.

National Secretary-Treasurer Stephen J. Bruno then provided an update on the union's

finances.

Andy and Ed Haley from Cornerstone Benefits Management spoke to the group about short-term and long-term disability insurance, the upcoming open enrollment, and the website development services they now offer.

Three outstanding brothers who are retiring from their positions were recognized for their dedication and service: Brian Kelley (Missouri), Terry Todd (Arkansas), and Jeff Worthington (Utah). Congratulations were also offered to Jeff Worthington on his recent election to the position of President of the Utah AFL-CIO.

BLET National Vice President/National Legislative Rep. John Tolman spoke passionately to us about topics such as Positive Train Control, two-person crew issues, as well as the state of affairs in Washington, D. C., and the need to pick up seats in the house in the upcoming mid-term elections. Monday's other guest speakers included Director of Regulatory Affairs Vince Verna and Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Bob Hagan, both from the Washington, D.C. office.

Tuesday, March 13, started with guest speaker, National Auxiliary President Sereena Hogan, who gave everyone an update on the state of the auxiliary as well as her recent trip to Nashville,



Tennessee, to help form our newest local auxiliary, Music City Auxiliary No. 431. She also thanked all the state chairman who continue to pay for subscriptions to the Auxiliary's quarterly newsletter.

My presentation followed, with a reminder to everyone that one of the hardest jobs is being a railroad spouse and that we need to remember to educate everyone on the issues that affect our families and our union.

Brothers Tim Carver, Brian Kelley, and Dave Brown all offered favorable comments about the Auxiliary and "passed the hat" around for donations to help support the auxiliary and the work we do. We are very grateful for the generosity of the brothers who make up the NASLBC.

Much to our surprise, Brother Paul Pearson (Colorado) moved that the names of the auxiliary members in attendance be

added to the roll call for future NASLBC meetings. The motion was seconded and passed

Newly-confirmed Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration Ronald L. Batory delivered remarks to the group, giving an overview of his background and credentials, and promising a new day safety awareness for both the railroads and BLET members.

J. Alan Holdcraft, BNSF General Chairman, spoke about promoting solidarity and how important it is for General Chairmen to work together with the State Legislative Board Chairmen.

Also in attendance were Jesse Taylor, President of the Brotherhood's Relief & Compensation Fund, Rod Kidder from LECMPA, Tom Gaither from Kujawski & Marcus Law Firm, Will Moody from Moody and Associates, and Anthony Petru from Hildebrand McLeod & Nelson.



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE



"There will always be a place for us somewhere, somehow, as long as we see to it that working people fight for everything they have, everything they hope to get, for dignity, equality, democracy, to oppose war and to bring to the world a better life."

-Harry Bridges, American activist and union leader

BLET Ratifies Amtrak Contract

By better than a 9-to-1 margin, members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) ratified a new collective bargaining agreement with Amtrak on April 2, 2018. The final tally was 90.5% in favor and 9.5% against, with nearly 65% of eligible members casting a ballot.

The five-year deal protects all existing work rules and provides members with general wage increases of 18.84% compounded over the life of the contract. It runs through December 31, 2021, with full retroactive pay dating to July 1, 2015. Employee health care contributions are frozen at \$228.00 per month over the life of the deal. The new contract provides much-needed improvements for employees entitled to paid time off for active duty in a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.

The agreement governs more than 1,400 locomotive engi-

neers who operate Amtrak's passenger and commuter trains over its 21,000-mile, 46-state route system.

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce thanked BLET members for participating in the balloting and ratification process. He also thanked Amtrak General Chairman Mark Kenny and his negotiating team for their diligent work at the bargaining table.

(BLET Newsflash, April 3, 2018)

POTENTIAL FRAUD ALERT United Healthcare Members Receiving Scam Calls

Don't respond to any calls from phone numbers you don't recognize.

It has been brought to our attention that some members have received unsolicited phone calls from Tennessee and Georgia area codes from individuals posing as United Healthcare representatives. These calls have been identified as a SCAM. The caller from the Georgia area code used the number 678-384-4965 to make the calls, and left a message to call back on 888-315-7524 and ask for United HealthCare options. The caller also asked for personal information, such as the member's social security number.

Members could receive calls from other area codes claiming to be United Healthcare. They should not answer/respond to any of these calls or provide any personal information.

United Healthcare does not place calls to members asking them for their social security number. Do not provide any information to these callers. It is important to

be diligent about any phone call that seems suspicious. If you receive an unexpected call or text from any area code/phone number you don't recognize, never answer it. If it's someone with a legitimate inquiry, they will call back or leave a message. If you do answer it and you believe the call is suspicious, call the Member Services number on the back of your medical ID card to speak with a Customer Service Representative.

Always be sure to review your phone bill carefully and contact your carrier about any suspicious charges. If you or someone you know becomes a victim of a phone scam, you can file a complaint online with the Federal Trade Commission (<https://www.ftc.gov/>) and the Federal Communications Commission (<https://www.fcc.gov/>) under the "For Consumers" tab.

(United Healthcare Press Release – March 14, 2018)

Operation Lifesaver Offers Online Safety Training for First Responders

Every day, 80,000 emergency response vehicles travel the nation's roads; there are 200,000 railroad crossings on those roads. National rail safety nonprofit Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (OLI) wants to help first responders safely travel to emergencies and stay safe when responding to rail-related incidents with its interactive e-Learning program.

"Our free online Rail Safety for First Responders program brings attention to the choices first responders often make around tracks and trains and is intended to help them safely

traverse highway-rail intersections," said OLI Interim President Wende Corcoran.

"While it can take extra caution to navigate a railroad crossing while heading to an emergency, ambulance drivers, law enforcement officers, firefighters, EMTs, and dispatchers can mitigate the risk by knowing what to do," Corcoran said. Operation Lifesaver's e-Learning Program, developed with input from fellow first responders, has four interactive sections:

- Railroad Basics – identify train cars, signs and signals
- Crossing Challenge – puts the user behind the wheel for a 'virtual' trip to an incident
- Safety Search – respond effectively to railroad safety risks
- Incident Response – manage an emergency on railroad tracks

"First responders and emergency vehicle drivers are an extremely important target audience because of the high consequences of an emergency vehicle-train collision. We are grateful to our safety partners at the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Railroad Administration for funding development of this important safety tool for emergency response personnel," Corcoran concluded.

More information about the e-Learning program and other safety resources for first responders is available on the OLI website.

(Operation Lifesaver, April 2, 2018)

FRA – Autonomous Trains Five Unions Respond

While we are still in the midst of fighting to keep two-people crews on trains, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a Request For Information (RFI) on March 29, on “the future of automation in the railroad industry.”

“Secretary Chao is placing considerable emphasis on autonomous vehicle development, and prospective use of automation technologies across all modes of transportation,” FRA spokesperson Warren Flatau told Railway Age. “This solicitation is part of U.S. DOT [Department of Transportation] efforts to advance the safe deployment of such technologies.” Comments on the RFI were due on May 7, 2018. Five unions responded, including the BLET and SMART Transportation Division.

Bill Introduces Bill that Would Make Assaulting Rail Crews a Federal Offense

On the one-year anniversary of the shooting of an Amtrak conductor in Naperville Station, just outside of Chicago, Illinois, Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) introduced a bipartisan bill on May 13, 2018, that would make assault or intimidation of passenger rail crew members a federal offense, which could lead to tougher penalties.

A news release from Sen. Duckworth’s office stated that the bill, co-sponsored by Senator John Hoeven (R-ND), would provide the same federal protections to passenger rail engineers, conductors, and other on-board service personnel, as are provided to airline crew members. Currently, any assault against a rail crew member is handled under the laws of the local jurisdiction where the crime is committed

The bill, called the Passenger Rail Crew Protection Parity Act, is

being introduced one year after the shooting of Michael Case at the Naperville train station. Case, who suffered extensive internal injuries and spent 10 weeks in the hospital, was one of 73 victims of recorded assaults on Amtrak crew members since 2015, Duckworth’s office said.

The man who shot Case, Edward Klein, 80, formerly of West Allis, Wisconsin, was charged with attempted murder but found to be unfit for trial after exhibiting signs of dementia, and committed to a private facility in suburban Milwaukee. Case, 46, has said that he and his family supported the way the incident was resolved.

Having assaults adjudicated under federal law would mean that penalties would be tougher and more consistent across county and state lines, according to Duckworth’s office. “No one in America should experience what Amtrak conductor Michael Case endured while just doing his job,” Duckworth said in the news release. She is a member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation.

Robert Guy, State Director of the SMART Transportation Division, a union representing Amtrak and other rail workers, said in a statement that, given the interstate nature of passenger rail, “it only makes sense” to give rail workers the same federal protections enjoyed by aviation employees.

(Chicago Tribune, May 16, 2018)

BNSF Files for PTC Deadline Extension

BNSF Railway, citing interoperability issues, has filed a request for a two-year extension of the Positive Train Control (PTC) deadline with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). As of

December 2017, BNSF had fully installed and was operating under PTC on all mandated subdivisions in advance of the Dec. 21, 2018 deadline. BNSF explains that the extension request was filed and is required due to FRA’s current interpretation of the law that full implementation status cannot be achieved until all non-BNSF trains and/or equipment operating on its PTC-equipped lines are also PTC-compliant.

“BNSF has succeeded in the adoption of this key safety technology. Even with this request for a deadline extension, BNSF’s PTC network is installed and we are currently running, and will continue to run, more than a thousand trains daily with PTC as we continue to refine the system and resolve technological challenges,” said Chris Matthews, BNSF Assistant Vice President, Network Control Systems.

As reported, BNSF completed the installation of all mandated PTC infrastructure at the end of 2017, including 88 required subdivisions covering more than 11,500 route miles on its network. However, to be considered fully implemented requires that all other railroads operating across any of BNSF’s PTC-equipped lines must be capable of operating with BNSF’s PTC system. BNSF explains that this interoperability of PTC systems between Class I, commuter, and shortline rail carriers remains a challenge.

BNSF has successfully demonstrated interoperability with several railroads that operate on its network, including commuter railroads and Amtrak. However, BNSF says not all railroads that operate on BNSF will have completed their PTC installation by the end of 2018.

(RT&S - June 14, 2018)

Supreme Court Rules Against Workers Rights

In a case involving the rights of tens of millions of private-sector employees, the U.S. Supreme Court, by a 5-4 vote margin, delivered a major blow to workers, ruling for the first time that workers may not band together to challenge violations of federal labor laws. Writing for the majority, Justice Neil Gorsuch said that the 1925 Federal Arbitration Act trumps the National Labor Relations Act and that employees who sign employment agreements to arbitrate claims must do so on an individual basis — and may not band together to enforce claims of wage and hour violations.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, writing for the four dissenters, said that the 1925 arbitration law came well before federal labor laws and should not cover these arm-twisting “take-it-or-leave-it” provisions that employers are now insisting on. The inevitable result, she warned, is that there will be huge underenforcement of federal and state statutes designed to advance the wellbeing of workers.

She urged Congress to correct the court’s elevation of the arbitration act over workers’ rights. Notably, Ginsburg’s dissent is five pages longer than the majority’s opinion. And Gorsuch spends time in his opinion to respond point-by-point to the minority’s arguments.

The ruling came in three cases — potentially involving tens of thousands of non-union employees — brought against Ernst & Young LLP, Epic Systems Corporation, and Murphy Oil USA, Inc. Each required its individual employees, as a condition of employment, to waive their rights to join a class-action suit. In all three cases, employees tried to

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California State Legislative Board 8th Quadrennial Convention

*By Kathleen Bisbikis, National 2nd Vice President/
National Legislative Representative*

The beautiful town of Lake Tahoe served as the backdrop to the California State Legislative Board's (CSLB) 8th Quadrennial Convention, April 23-26, 2018. BLET Auxiliary 1st Vice President Susie Burrola and I attended the convention. Susie and I both live in northern California, and were honored to be invited to our home state's legislative meeting.

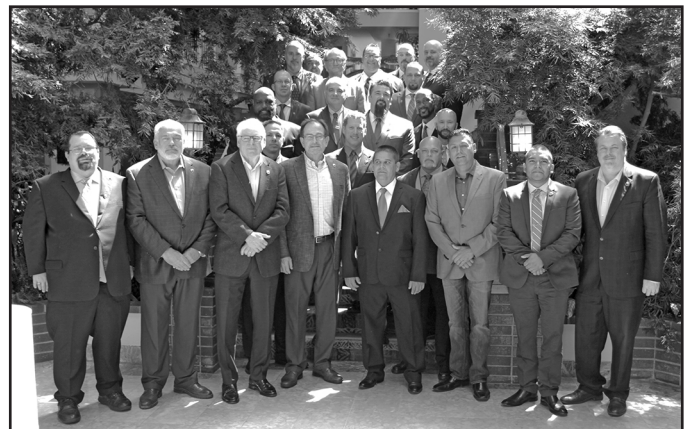
The events kicked off with an evening reception on April 23, hosted by Andy Haley, President of Cornerstone Assurance Group. It was a very relaxed crowd, enjoying a great selection of food and drinks and each other's company.

The next morning started with the opening ceremonies, several committee reports, and guest speakers, including Jesse Taylor from the Brotherhood Relief and Compensation Fund (BRCF); Andy Haley from Cornerstone; and Doug Bloch, the political director from Teamster Joint Council 7. Following lunch, which was hosted by the BRCF, I was given the opportunity to address those in attendance about the benefits and challenges of being a railroad spouse and the solidarity the auxiliary can bring to that oftentimes challenging lifestyle. Brian Lewis, from the National Association of Retired and Veteran Railway Employees (NARVRE), also spoke, encouraging all members to join their organization and help in the ongoing battle to protect Railroad Retirement. Matt Parker, Nevada State Legislative Chairman, and parliamentarian for the convention, then spoke, telling everyone in attendance about the time and dedication that is needed for anyone wishing to be a state legislative chairman. The rest of the afternoon was spent in closed session for the CSLB to conduct their business and election of officers.

The meeting resumed Wednesday morning with the BLET National officers, President Dennis Pierce, 1st Vice President Lee Pruitt, National Legislative Representative John Tolman, and National Secretary/Treasurer Steve Bruno all addressing the members. A common thread in their remarks was a message of concern regarding the upcoming elections in June and the long-term effects that those elections could have on all of us. Lunch was hosted by the Locomotive Engineers and Conductors Mutual Protection Association (LECMPA), and a presentation by guest speaker Bob Brown, Marketing Director for LECMPA followed the luncheon. The convention concluded with a dinner banquet and awards ceremony later that night, hosted by Hildebrand Law Firm.

Congratulations to Brother Ryan Snow on his re-election as the California State Legislative Board Chairman. The Auxiliary truly appreciates the support that Brother Snow and his wife Verna have given us over the years and we look forward to working with you in the future.

Photos from top to bottom: Kathleen Bisbikis addresses the CSLB; the beautiful Lake Tahoe Resort; Nevada State Legislative Board Chairman Matt Parker; attendees at the California State Legislative Board's 8th Quinquennial Convention.



Tidbits from National Secretary Helen Brand

What happened to spring? We went from cool weather, 30s and 40s, to upper 80s, 90s, and a few days that reached 100. I guess summer is officially here, at least in Kansas.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

We held our annual Executive Council Meeting, May 18 to May 20, 2018, at the home of 1st Vice President Susie Burrola, in Manteca, California. Thank you, Susie, for being a gracious host!

REGIONAL MEETINGS

The Eastern Regional Meeting will be held in Washington, D.C., August 13 – 17, 2018. It is being held at the Capital Hilton, 1001 16th Street NW, Washington, D.C.

Convention registration, as well as hotel registrations, can be made through the BLET website at www.ble-t.org. You should make plans to attend a regional convention; they are informative and a great way to meet other railroad families. One of these regional meetings might even make a great family vacation.

OTHER DATES TO REMEMBER

The BLET National Convention will be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, October 1-4, 2018. The Auxiliary will conduct our general session October 1-3 at this convention. We will elect new officers and go over proposed changes for our Constitution and Bylaws.

August 2, 2018, is the deadline for submission of Resolutions for the 2018 National Convention. Please send them to me as soon as possible, but not later than August 2.

If you have been elected to be a delegate for this convention, you should have received a letter with some preliminary information about the convention. A second letter will be sent to you in August, along with copies of the resolutions to be considered at the convention. We look forward to meeting you and working with all of you.

MAL REMINDER

Thank you to the members-at-large who have sent in their dues. Some are still outstanding. Second notices were sent and a few have responded.

Please let me know if you no longer wish to belong to the Auxiliary so I can keep our records current.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Music City Auxiliary No. 431 has added four new members: Stephanie Mikus, Samantha Rich, Jay Wright, and Daniel Perkins. Welcome!

We also have a new member-at-large - welcome to Holley M. Whited, Marion, Arkansas!

CONGRATULATIONS...

to all students graduating from High School or College. This signifies a new beginning in your life. No matter what path you take—college, job training, or military—may you be a success!

THOUGHTS AND CARING

We send caring thoughts to Cactus Ken Gleason and Rusty Lovell, associate members of Auxiliary 28 in Tucson, as they have both suffered from declining health in the last couple of years. Ken has been recovering from a fall he took last year, which has really slowed him down.

CONDOLENCES

We send heartfelt condolences to the family of Auxiliary 37 member Faye Skinner, who passed away May 12, 2018. Sister Faye is survived by three children: Janet McNew, Sidney Skinner, and Sarah Rhoads. Sympathies can be sent to her family in care of Sid Skinner, P.O. Box 572, Lonoke, AR, 72086.

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.

Please check to see if someone in your Auxiliary may be eligible and encourage them to apply. Members-at-Large are eligible as well. Contact me if you have questions and for applications.

Have a great Summer!



Helen Brand can be reached by phone at 913-256-2741, by mail at 38768 Crescent Hill Road, Osawatomie, Kansas, 66064, or by e-mail at hybrand51@gmail.com.

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!!

— Helen

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE - continued from Page 7

sue together, maintaining that the amounts they could obtain in individual lawsuits were dwarfed by the legal fees they would have to pay as individuals to bring their cases under the private arbitration procedures required by the company.

The employees contended that their right to collective action is guaranteed by the National Labor Relations Act. The employers countered that they are entitled to ban collective legal action under the Federal Arbitration Act, which was enacted in 1925 to reverse the judicial hostility to arbitration at the time. A study by the Economic Policy Institute shows that 56 percent of non-union private-sector employees are currently subject to mandatory individual arbitration procedures under the 1925 Federal Arbitration Act, which allows employers to bar collective legal actions by employees. The court's decision means that tens of millions of private non-union employees will be barred from suing collectively over the terms of their employment.

(WFPL News – May 21, 2018)

Transportation Industry Asks OSHA for Whistleblower Improvements

Raising awareness of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) whistleblower rules would improve the agency's enforcement of laws banning retaliation against employees in the rail and trucking industries, business and worker representatives said. At issue is OSHA's plan to upgrade its whistleblower protection program. On June 12, at the Department of Labor headquarters in Washington, OSHA took its first step under the Trump administration, holding a session where transportation industry and labor representatives made their cases.

"OSHA could do more to explain to workers who qualifies to make a claim," according to Abigail Potter, manager of safety and occupational health policy for American Trucking Associations in Arlington, Virginia. "Better information would lead to fewer complaints being filed that don't meet OSHA's criteria to open an investigation," Potter said.

Jay Grimes, federal affairs manager for the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association in Grain Valley, Missouri, said few of the drivers he represents are aware of OSHA's whistleblower rules. "Instead, they file complaints with Department of Transportation agencies," Grimes said.

"A lack of resources is a crucial problem," said Azita Mashayekhi, an industrial hygienist with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters in Washington, D.C. This could be resolved by doubling the federal whistleblower budget.

The program receives about \$17.5 million annually from Congress. The Trump budget for Fiscal Year 2019 proposes \$17.4 million in funding with level staffing of 121 employees. OSHA enforces the anti-retaliation provisions of 22 laws from worker safety to financial malfeasance. Investigations of ground transportation whistleblower complaints accounted for 22% of the 3,303 cases that OSHA opened in fiscal year 2017, according to agency data. Three federal laws — the Federal Railroad Safety Act, the Surface Transportation Assistance Act, and the National Transit Systems Security Act — extend whistleblower protections to railroad, trucking or transit company workers.

(Bloomberg News, June 13, 2018)

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.

NATIONAL CONVENTION

By Sereena Hogan, National President

In the Spring edition of this publication, the dates announced for the upcoming National BLET Auxiliary Convention were not quite accurate. The actual meeting dates will be October 1-3, with September 30 and October 4 set aside as travel days for most of the delegates and national officers. Letters to the delegates have been mailed, outlining information about the convention, instructions for making travel arrangements, committee assignments, and a Delegate Credential Certificate form that must be completed and signed by the delegate as well as the president and secretary of the local auxiliary. The completed form must be returned to the National Secretary of the BLET Auxiliary as soon as possible, but no later than August 2, 2018. If you are the delegate for your local auxiliary and have not received a letter, please let us know as soon as possible..

A new section entitled "National Convention" has been added to our website, www.bletauxiliary.net, with general information about the convention, information for delegates, instructions on how to submit a resolution, and information about the election of national officers that takes place at each quadrennial convention.

We are hoping that some of our local auxiliary officers and members-at-large will step up to the next level and run for a position as a national officer. For a description of the duties of each national officer position, please refer to Article II of our National Bylaws, which can be found on our website. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact one of our current national officers.



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

No matter the occupation, when we look at the history of union auxiliaries over the years, they all seem to have the same goals... educating their members and their families, working toward gaining favorable legislation,

providing assistance to their members, and fundraising to provide scholarships for higher education.

The BLET Auxiliary was established in 1887 to bring cohesiveness to small groups of locomotive engineers' wives scattered across the United States and Canada who were getting together to discuss safety issues and to find ways to help their husbands elevate themselves and their families, educationally, economically, and socially. That still stands true today. While maintaining the importance of unity, the auxiliary has evolved with the times by adding programs and fundraising for scholarships.

Unity, solidarity . . . what is that if you don't include the whole family unit? Unions grow stronger when families are involved. During the General Motors strike in 1936, families pulled together to provide first aid and child care, and collected money and food for the strikers. Encouraging and educating families to be involved can only make us stronger. Even with different political views, at the end of the day, we should all be in agreement that helping to maintain a safe work environment, protecting benefits and wages, and improving the quality of life for our BLET members and their families is worth our time and energy.

Susie Burrola can be reached at 209-915-1512; efax: 1-855-806-7870; 1723 Rail Street, Manteca, CA 95337; or BletAuxiliaryvp@yahoo.com.

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

**Sereena Hogan, Publisher
BLET Auxiliary News
520-297-0944
vp3sereena@aol.com**

The next issue will be published in September 2018. Please have your submissions to Sereena on or before August 25, 2018.

Going Green

With the distribution of each issue of this publication, a few more of you choose to "Go Green" and help reduce our footprint on the environment by receiving your newsletter in digital format. If you would like to receive your newsletter as an e-mail attachment sent to you each quarter, please e-mail publisher Sereena Hogan at vp3sereena@aol.com to let us know. If you have already opted to receive your newsletter by e-mail, please let Sereena know if you change your e-mail address so she can update it on her list.

As always, our newsletter is available on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net even before the copies are mailed out.

DATES TO REMEMBER:

August 2, 2018 - Deadline for Submission of Resolutions for the 2018 National Convention

All resolutions reflecting requested changes to the Constitution and Bylaws must be submitted to the National BLET Auxiliary President no later than August 2, 2018. Please refer to Page 5 of this publication for more information about how to prepare and submit resolutions.

Eastern Regional Meeting - Washington, D.C. August 13-17, 2018

**Capital Hilton, 1001 16th Street NW, Washington, D.C.
20036, 800-774-1500.**

Convention registration as well as hotel registration can be made through the BLET's regional meeting website, www.bletregionals.org. If making reservations by telephone, you must mention the group code "BLET."

2018 National Convention - Las Vegas, NV October 1-3, 2018

Rio Hotel & Casino. More information and details forthcoming on the BLET National Auxiliary Website at www.bletauxiliary.net, the BLET Website, www.ble-t.org, and our Facebook Page, "The National B.L.E.T. Auxiliary."



BLET Auxiliary

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