



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

## **Auxiliary Sister Naomi Muscha to Serve in the State of North Dakota House of Representatives**



November 6, 2012, was a long day, and night, for all of us as we watched the election results come in across the nation. For those in the Muscha family, it was even more of a nail biter than for most of us. Member-at-large Naomi Muscha, her husband Mike (formerly North Dakota State Legislative Board Chairman for the BLET), their four married children, and 15 grandchildren were not only watching the national election results, but they had their attention on another election as well.

Naomi was running for a position as Representative for District 24 in the North Dakota House of Representatives. Like the National Presidential race, it was a tight one, but Naomi was victorious and will serve on the 63rd Assembly

of the North Dakota House of Representatives.

Naomi, a retired school teacher, says she had been asked to run for the position and, as she considered the opportunity, there were a few factors that she took into consideration that ultimately helped her make the decision to go for it. She wants to do what she can to ensure that her grandchildren have the quality of life that their parents, grandparents, and great grandparents were privileged to experience while growing up in North Dakota. She also realized that, as a person who has always encouraged her children and others to seize opportunities as they come along rather than sit idly by and let others dictate their lives, she needed to practice what she preached. She feels that the state of North Dakota, as well as the country as a whole, have been good to her and her family and sees her service to the state as a great opportunity to give something back.

Naomi has lived in Enderlin, North Dakota, since 1968. Prior to that she lived in Minnesota and a year and a half in Bolivia, South America, where her parents were missionaries. She graduated from Valley City State University in Valley City, North Dakota, with a Spanish major and Social Science minor, and worked as a high school

teacher from 1989 until she retired last year, around the same time that her husband Mike retired from Canadian Pacific Railway. Of those 22 years, 15 were spent teaching senior government in Enderlin. She also was a leader for seven mission trips and 13 student trips to Mexico, Guatemala, and Costa Rica.

When asked what she hopes to accomplish during her tenure in office, Naomi states that she is especially interested in all aspects of North Dakota's educational system, K-12, and higher education. She plans to work for investments in infrastructure, permanent flood control for the Sheyenne River Valley communities, support for veterans and senior citizens, and support for availability of housing and daycare. She believes that a district representative is literally working for the betterment of the citizens of the district and, to that extent, she plans to do her best to carry their concerns forward in Bismarck.

In addition to this huge accomplishment for Naomi this year, she and Mike also welcomed twin grandchildren, a boy and a girl, in late October. With the birth of the twins, son Kamron, a member of BLET Div. 671, and his wife Karli, who live in Thief River Falls, now have five children. Congratulations to all!



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

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Fall has finally arrived and with it the future direction of our nation has been decided! I must admit that I am extremely happy that the 2012 National Election is now history. In the spirit of Thanksgiving, I would be remiss if I did not thank the many people who worked on behalf of our beloved BLET in

order to secure a brighter future for all BLET members and union workers around the country.

I would like to start with the outstanding leadership of BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce who attended many "Get Out the Vote" rallies, continually wrote updates to BLET members advising on how the election was shaping up, what type of policies the candidates had in store for his members and what their future would look like if their vote went to the candidate whose agenda was not in their best interests. He tirelessly traveled from state to state to help support the union message and carefully explained to those who had different opinions just what was at stake for their families. I find that style of hands-on leadership very refreshing, as well as his accessibility to all BLET members.

Thank you President Pierce for putting the hard earned rights of BLET members at the top of your list during this National Election. I thank you for your diligence to the very important issues that past generations fought so hard to acquire for us so that they would remain intact. Your work ethic and leadership are to be admired and for that I am grateful.

I would also like to thank Vice President/National Legislative Representative John Tolman for all his hard work in Washington, D.C. I know Brother Tolman made many trips to all parts of the country to participate in informational meetings, giving speeches, and attend rallies. He was always available to answer any and all questions about the upcoming election and explain the negative implications the Ryan Budget Proposal had in store for railroad workers.

National Treasurer Helen Brand and I had the pleasure of attending two Town Hall Meetings in Kansas City, Missouri, on October 1, 2012, where Brother Tolman was the guest speaker. I want to thank Missouri State Legislative Board Chairman Brian Kelley and Kansas State Legislative Board Chairman Jim Tiede for including the BLET Auxiliary in these meetings. Brother Tolman was a font of information, answering numerous questions from BLET members, dispelling many of the myths surrounding the National Election, and letting members know just how important the results of this election

were for all of us. Thank you Vice President Tolman for working tirelessly on our spouses' behalf. We thank you for a job well done. Keep up the good work!

I would like to thank the National Mobilization Coordinators Kent Confer and Larry James, the National Mobilization team, and all members of the BLET Mobilization Program who worked to mobilize the members and get out the important information on all the issues that were at stake during this election. The Mobilization Program is a wonderful tool and has once again shown its value to the Brotherhood. A big thank you goes to our own Mobilization Coordinator, Gina Forman, for her work in fielding out messages to our Mobilization Teams whenever the BLET asked for our assistance.

Thank you to our Vice President/National Legislative Representative Sereena Hogan for her excellent monthly updates and for educating us on the important issues that could affect our future, explaining in great detail how we should exercise our right to vote, and for helping us understand that we have a voice and to use it! I would also like to thank the members of Guadalupe Auxiliary 28 for hosting the dinner event in Tucson, which gave the members of Division 28 and Auxiliary 28 a chance to meet the BLET National Officers and ask them about any issues they might have on their minds. This is a perfect example of how a local auxiliary can work together with a division to make things happen!

I am thankful for my husband who works a crazy job while never complaining. No, he doesn't complain, but I suppose I do enough for both of us! I will admit, we were both more than just a little bit concerned about what might happen to Railroad Retirement if the Romney/Ryan ticket came out victorious on election night. I am quite sure that with Paul Ryan being reelected to serve another term representing Wisconsin in the House of Representatives, we have not heard the last about his ridiculous and heartless fiscal plan that the Republicans in the House have stood behind for the past two years. We must keep ourselves informed and educated and not let down our guard in our efforts to protect Railroad Retirement, Social Security, and Medicare.

As 2012 comes to a close, I wish our members and our BLET Brothers and Sisters a glorious holiday season, rich with the many blessings we enjoy. Let's not forget the less fortunate this holiday season as I truly believe it is our duty to help those who cannot help themselves. I welcome 2013... *bring it on!*

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Anita J. Caruso  
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**2012 SWCM**  
**77th Annual Southwestern Meeting Convention**  
**Galveston, Texas - September 9-13, 2012**

By Helen Brand, National Treasurer

The tropical setting of the Moody Gardens Resort in Galveston was quite relaxing as well as picturesque, and a great venue for the 2012 SWCM.

The annual golf tournament was held on Monday with 50 players attending. The BLET Auxiliary hosts the golf tournament at this convention and it is our largest fundraiser every year for our scholarship fund. We worked closely with the golf chairpersons August and Mary Ellen Strebeck to provide prizes, good food, and fun for the participants. We had great sponsors, without whom the event would not have been a success, and we appreciate everyone who helped with donations. Mulligan sales were 100%, but we all know that they were never used!!!

Jack and Shelly Sweeney worked hard to present a great convention and they succeeded. Everything seemed to run smoothly with many educational classes as well as other fun activities.

The BLET Auxiliary's open meeting on Tuesday was very informational. One of our main goals is to educate BLET members and their spouses. We had a vast array of speakers and we cannot thank them enough for coming and sharing important information with us. Speakers included: Geri Clark, Railroad Retirement Board; Charlene Payne, United Healthcare; Susan Tukul, LECMPA; Mark Robb, BRCF; and Paul Aird, former Marine and Vice Chairman of the Wisconsin State Legislative Board. We are more than a social group—we work to keep everyone aware of what railroad workers and their families need to know.

On the last evening at the convention, we were treated to a lovely banquet and great entertainment. Our featured speaker, Jim Hightower, a home-grown Texan, is an American syndicated columnist, liberal political activist, and author, who served from 1983 to 1991 as the elected Commissioner of the Texas Department of Agriculture. He is a great speaker and humorist and everyone enjoyed his lively presentation.

Another great convention with great friends and great times! Looking forward to New Orleans in 2013!



Guest Speaker Jim Hightower provided the entertainment for the SWCM Banquet



Jack Sweeney, Arrangements Chairman for the 2012 SWCM



Helen Brand, Anna Stacia Penrod, and Anita Caruso



Jackie Monroe and David J. Grimes



Anna Stacia Penrod got some help selling raffle tickets from David W. Grimes and Brian Wheeler

*Photos courtesy of John Bentley, BLET National*

**2012 SMA Regional Convention was Magical!  
85th Annual Southeastern Meeting Association  
Orlando, Florida - June 24-29, 2012**

By Lawana Poss, SMA BLET Auxiliary Secretary/Treasurer

The 2012 SMA was held at Disney Coronado Springs Resort and Convention Center. Tropical Storm Debby came as an uninvited guest, bringing heavy winds and pelting rain to the Orlando area and much of northern Florida. She did not, however, dampen the spirits of the members present there in "the happiest place on earth!" The resort was beautiful and all of the Disney staff was, as always, so helpful. I always enjoyed their reply at the end of any conversation: "Have a magical day!"

The opening ceremonies began with the presentation of the flags for each state that is part of the Southeastern Meeting Association. SMA Auxiliary Chairperson Jewell Graben announced each of the state flags and the names of the auxiliary members who carried them. Everyone in attendance greeted their state flag with cheers and applause. Patricia Karper, wife of SMA BLET Chairman Brother Earl Karper, sang a beautiful rendition of the Nation Anthem.

Brother Karper welcomed everyone and introduced BLET National President Dennis Pierce who spoke on some of the current issues with the War on Workers. He reminds us to be "Proud to be American, Proud to be Union." President Pierce introduced the other National officers who were in attendance.

Brother Karper introduced Sister Jewell Graben, SMA Auxiliary Chairperson, and Sister Jewell welcomed everyone and then introduced the National BLET Auxiliary President, Anita Caruso. Sister Anita Caruso introduced the other national officer in attendance, National Vice President/National Legislative Representative, Sereena Hogan.

An Auxiliary luncheon was held on Monday following the opening ceremonies. Mark Robb with BRCF talked to the group about the Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund and also the BRCF scholarship. Thank you so very much Mark Robb for donating a beautiful framed print for the SMA BLET Auxiliary raffle! As always you are so kind and generous.

Mr. Mike Collins with the Railroad Retirement Board talked about steps that should be taken for retirement and maintaining a "current connection" with the railroad, then held a question-and-answer session. Mr. Collins, thank you for your time and for sharing and explaining such valuable information.

We were truly honored to have Sereena Hogan, National VP/NLR, talk to us about the Auxiliary Legislative Department and the important legislative issues that we all should be aware of. Each State should have a BLET Auxiliary Legislative Representative. I am proud to be the State Legislative Representative for the state of Georgia. Sister Sereena attends various State Legislative Board meetings, as well as occasionally working in Washington, D.C., advocating for rail workers' rights. She works tirelessly and makes her job look easy, but we know better. Sister Sereena, thank you so very much for everything you do!



SMA Secretary-Treasurer John McClanahan, Committee Member Cathy Appel, and SMA Chairman Ron Appel



SMA Committee Member Patricia Karper and Event Chairman Earl Karper



SMA Auxiliary Chair Jewell Graben and SMA Aux. Secretary Lawana Poss



BLET National Vice President Gil Gore and wife Denise

*Photos courtesy of John Bentley, BLET National*

Our week was busy and informative! We enjoyed the Disney character breakfast, the Magic behind the Steam Trains Tour at Disney, the golf day at Lake Buena Vista, the meetings, the workshops, and a wonderful banquet. The banquet dinner was delicious and awards were presented. Door prizes were given and we had three happy BLET Auxiliary Raffle winners!!

I would like to thank Convention Chairman Earl D. Karper, Sr., Committee Assistant Chairman Michael L. Tanner, Committee President and SMA Chairman Ron Appel, Secretary/Treasurer John McClanahan, Golf Coordinator David "Pop" R. Karper, and committee members Patricia Karper and Cathy Appel, who are also Auxiliary members-at-large. Your hard work was noticed and appreciated more that you will ever know!



Karlee, Wanda, and Ed Hawkins, and Mike and Lawana Poss



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

As I sit with the football games and Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade going back and forth on the television due to Pat having the remote as most men do, my third turkey is finally in the oven and NOW I have a chance to take a break and write for the newsletter. As I reflect on the time we have spent in Hawaii with my extended family and friends who we have known only for a short while, I realize how many blessings we have to be thankful for this day. Although we are away from our biological family members, we feel embraced by this community of native people on the island. This past weekend, we cooked two turkeys for the outreach program at Sacred Heart Church in Waianae. After the cooking was done, it was time to take the turkeys to the church for the final preparation of the trimmings for the rest of the meal, which was served to the needy on Tuesday, November 20. The outreach crew handed out bags of groceries and then we served approximately 325 people.

Since we became retirees, we are very involved with the community and are honored to have been chosen to be the "patron saints" on the Christmas Parade float on December 15. Pat will portray Saint Damien of Molokai and I will portray Saint Marianne Cope who was just canonized this past fall. Pat will also play Santa at the festival before Christmas for the children, or keiki as they are called on the islands. I have also started the RIF (Reading is Fundamental) program at the schools on the island. This nationwide program involves volunteers who read to children in Kindergarten through third grade three times a year and pass out books to the children so they may take them home to keep and share.

We would like to take this time to wish every one of our brothers and sisters a very Blessed and Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year!

### NOTICE TO ALL AUXILIARY SECRETARIES AND MALs

I will send out secretary packets and MAL dues notices after January 1, 2013. Upon receipt of your membership renewal, your new dues card will be sent out with a receipt. **PLEASE** fill your forms out completely so that I am able to keep all of my records updated. Auxiliary National dues are \$25.00 for Retirees (over 60), Widows, and Widowers; Active Auxiliary Members dues are \$50.00 per year. Please remit accordingly.

### SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS

BLET Auxiliary Scholarship applications can be obtained on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net). You may also connect via a link from the BLET website at [www.ble-t.org](http://www.ble-t.org) under "Departments" BLET Auxiliary. Scholarship applications for the 2013-2014 academic school year need to be **POSTMARKED BY MARCH 25, 2013**. This change was made at our executive council meeting in June 2012. **PLEASE BE SURE TO FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTION SHEET COMPLETELY** so you know what documents need to be submitted with your application. Incomplete or late applications will not be considered. If you have any questions, I will be happy to assist you.

You will also find our article along with others pertaining to scholarship opportunities in the BLET Newsletter that is published in February 2013.

From now until May, all mail should be sent to me at 84-688 Ala Mahiku Street #161A, Waianae, HI 96792. Our phone is 808-888-5783. If calling, please remember that we are in the Hawaii-Aleutian time zone where daylight savings time is not observed. I can be reached by e-mail any time at [biddykaili@aol.com](mailto:biddykaili@aol.com).



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

*The days between Thanksgiving and the New Year are always a time for reflection: on what's been accomplished, on what remains ahead of us, and – most importantly – what matters most.*

- June Cohen

### Moving Forward into the New Year

The election is over and we offer our heartfelt congratulations to President Obama and Vice President Biden on their victory in securing another four-year term. And to them we say, "Fire it Up!" for we are fired up and we understand that we have work to do to ensure that Washington does right by BLET members and all working families. We have ended up once again with a Democratic majority in the Senate and a Republican majority in the House, making for a Congress that can't seem to accomplish much of anything. We can only hope that those who have refused to compromise will reconsider their stance and do what is right for the American people, for compromise is the only way we can move forward. In the weeks ahead, our BLET Legislative Department will begin to address some of the issues that are of importance to us as railroad employees and families as they set forth their legislative agenda for 2013.

Many thanks to all of you who took the time to go the polls to cast your vote, as well as those of you who wisely cast your vote early, either by mail or at one of the early voting sites. No matter how you voted in this election, thank you to all of you who did exercise this most basic, yet most empowering right that we possess as American citizens. And now I urge you to continue to engage in the legislative process by keeping yourself educated about the issues that impact every aspect of our daily lives and urging your elected officials to support those issues that are important to us as working families.

### Edge of "Fiscal Cliff" Draws Closer

As I write this update, Republicans and Democrats remain far apart in talks to avoid the across-the-board tax hikes and spending cuts that threaten to throw the country back into a recession. The focus now is on whether to extend the temporary tax cuts that originated under former President George W. Bush beyond their Dec. 31 expiration date for all taxpayers, as Republicans want, or just for those with incomes under \$250,000, as President Obama proposes. At the close of the last week of November, Democrats offered a long-shot effort to force an early tax-hike vote in the Republican-controlled House to break the deadlock. Unless House Majority Leader John Boehner agrees by the first Tuesday in December to bring a bill to the floor allowing taxes on the wealthy to rise, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi said she would undertake the effort.

In addition to raising more than \$1 trillion by ending the tax breaks for the wealthy, President Obama's plan would help lower the national debt by reducing borrowing by more than \$4.5 trillion over the next decade. It also includes money-saving adjustments to Medicare and Medicaid without raising the Medicare eligibility age or requiring vouchers.

### \$50 Billion in Infrastructure Spending

On November 29, President Obama proposed a deficit reduction deal that would provide an infusion of \$50 billion in infrastructure spending in the coming year. Without spelling out the specifics of the spending, the President doubled down on his tactic of pairing decreased spending with increased revenue to protect government investment he argues is essential to economic growth:

*"We're going to have to raise a little more revenue. We've got to cut out spending we don't need, building on the trillion dollars of spending cuts we've already made. And if we combine those two things, we can create a path where America is paying its bills while still*

*being able to make investments in the things we need to grow like education and infrastructure."*

The initial response of the business community has been enthusiastic. With soaring congestion, a maintenance backlog, and rising freight and passenger demand, U.S. companies are becoming increasingly vocal in calling for government leaders to offer a solution to the nation's transportation challenges. Republican leaders have criticized the plan for not including enough cuts—both to discretionary spending and to entitlement programs. House Majority Leader John Boehner commented that the plan is "not a serious proposal." He did, however, indicate that the channels of communication have remained open, telling reporters that a lot of ideas have been put on the table and that he is sure the many conversations that have occurred in the last week of November will continue.

### T&I Committee Hearing on Amtrak

The House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee held another hearing on November 28 to examine Amtrak's ongoing structural reorganization intended to improve the performance and accountability of the railroad.

With so much focus currently being placed on the "fiscal cliff," some are wondering why outgoing T&I Chairman John Mica is spending so much time on Amtrak when the railroad receives such a small fraction of total government spending on transportation. Chairman Mica responded to that criticism, stating that the Committee has a responsibility for taxpayer dollars and \$1.4 billion has been put into Amtrak in the past year. He did, however, acknowledge the necessity of federal spending on Amtrak and passenger rail, seeming to soften some of his past rhetoric on privatization of passenger rail in the U.S.

Amtrak President Joseph Boardman defended the railroad's performance,

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pointing to its recent successes. Amtrak has just set the ninth ridership record in the last 10 years and posted record ticket revenues. Last year, the railroad served 31.2 million riders, up from 18-20 million riders for the last few decades, and that increased ridership has improved financial performance. Boardman stated that “in FY 2013 Amtrak will be getting by with about half as much Federal support as it had in 2004.”

Last year, Boardman introduced a five-year strategic plan intended to streamline the organization, reduce costs, and boost revenue. The reorganization plan, which should be complete by the end of 2013, involves reorganizing Amtrak into six business lines, with each line held accountable for revenue goals and losses. Boardman claims the railroad will look more like a business and less like a government agency when the plan is complete.

Inspector General Ted Alves, who is in charge of oversight of Amtrak, gave an upbeat testimony to the Committee, stating: “Overall, Amtrak has generally taken positive action on our recommendations; the company has implemented many of them, and is in the process of addressing others.” He also had this to say at the hearing: “Amtrak relies on the government for its existence and survival, but I think what’s different now is that there is a focus in the company and in the leadership levels on making the business as efficient as it can be and focusing on the customer.”

The hearing was the fourth in an ongoing series of hearings on Amtrak this year. Two more hearings are planned before the end of the year, one on December 6 to focus on the high-speed intercity rail program, and another on December 13, which will focus on the Northeast Corridor. The panel plans to reauthorize rail programs next year.

### **Bill Shuster to Serve as Chairman of House T&I Committee**

On November 28, Congressman Bill Shuster (R-PA) was selected by the House Republican Conference to be the next Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee. Shuster

has served on the Committee since coming to Congress in 2001 and currently chairs the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials. Shuster will replace John Mica (R-FL), who has chaired the T&I Committee for the last six years. Caucus-imposed term limits prevent Mica from continuing.

### **Medicare Premiums to Rise**

Beginning in January 2013, standard Medicare Part B monthly premiums will increase from \$99.90 to \$104.90, which is less than was expected. Some beneficiaries will continue to pay higher premiums based on their modified adjusted gross income. The monthly premiums that include income-related adjustments for 2013 will be \$146.90, \$209.80, \$272.70, or \$335.70, depending on the extent to which an individual beneficiary’s modified adjusted gross income exceeds \$85,000 (or \$170,000 for a married couple). The highest premium rate applies to beneficiaries whose incomes exceed \$214,000 (or \$428,000 for a married couple). Other changes relating to Medicare Parts C and D will take effect in 2013 as well.

Those railroad retirement and social security Medicare beneficiaries affected by the 2013 Parts B and D income-related premiums will receive a notice from the Social Security Administration (SSA) by December 2012. The notice will include an explanation of the circumstances where a beneficiary may request a new determination. Persons who have questions or would like to request a new determination should contact SSA after receiving their notice. For the complete information and a table that shows the income-related premium adjustments for 2013, please see the entire Railroad Retirement Board press release at: <http://www.rrb.gov/opa/pr/pr1214.asp>.

### **BLET Members Impacted by Hurricane May Qualify for Unemployment Benefits**

Hurricane Sandy negatively affected a huge portion of the nation, severely disrupting railroad operations,

particularly on passenger and commuter lines in the Northeast. This has caused many railroad employees to miss work time and suffer financial losses, possibly making them eligible for unemployment benefits pursuant to the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act (“RUIA”), which are administered by the Railroad Retirement Board (“RRB”).

To determine eligibility or file claims for benefits, affected railroaders should call the RRB’s toll-free telephone number (1-877-772-5772) or visit its website at [www.rrb.gov](http://www.rrb.gov). More information can be obtained from Railroad Retirement Board Form UB 10, which includes an Application for Unemployment Benefits and Employment Service. ([http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Form\\_UB-10\\_2012-031.pdf](http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Form_UB-10_2012-031.pdf)) Those who have lost work time because of the storm can file their application and claims online at the RRB website at [https://secure.rrb.gov/mep/ben\\_services.asp](https://secure.rrb.gov/mep/ben_services.asp). To use online services, the member must have a PIN and Password (PPW) account. The website explains how to open a PPW account.

### **RRB Benefits to Increase in 2013**

Most railroad retirement annuities, like social security benefits, are scheduled to increase in January 2013 on the basis of the rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the third quarter of 2011 to the corresponding period of the current year.

Cost-of-living increases are calculated in both the tier I and tier II benefits included in a railroad retirement annuity. Tier I benefits, like social security benefits, will increase by 1.7 percent, which is the percentage of the CPI rise. Tier II benefits will increase by 0.6 percent, which is 32.5 percent of the CPI rise. The vested dual benefit payments and supplemental annuities also paid by the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) are not adjusted for the CPI rise.

In January 2013, the average regular railroad retirement employee annuity will increase \$32 a month to \$2,386 and the average of combined benefits for

an employee and spouse will increase \$45 a month to \$3,417. For those aged widow(er)s eligible for an increase, the average annuity will increase \$19 a month to \$1,249. However, widow(er)s whose annuities are being paid under the Railroad Retirement and Survivors' Improvement Act of 2001 will not receive annual cost-of-living adjustments until their annuity amount is exceeded by the amount that would have been paid under prior law, counting all interim cost-of-living increases otherwise payable. About 35 percent of the widow(er)s on the RRB's rolls are being paid under the 2001 law.

If a railroad retirement or survivor annuitant also receives a social security or other government benefit, such as a public service pension, the increased tier I benefit is reduced by the increased government benefit. However, tier II cost-of-living increases are not reduced by increases in other government benefits. If a widow(er) whose annuity is being paid under the 2001 law is also entitled to an increased government benefit, her or his railroad retirement survivor annuity may decrease.

However, the total amount of the combined railroad retirement widow(er)'s annuity and other government benefits will not be less than the total payable before the cost-of-living increase and before any increase in Medicare premium deductions.

For most beneficiaries covered by Medicare, the standard Part B premium generally deducted from monthly benefits is likely to increase from the 2012 amount, with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services expected to announce the 2013 soon.

In late December, the RRB will mail notices to all annuitants providing a breakdown of the annuity rates payable to them in January 2013.

*Source: Press Release from Railroad Retirement Board, posted October 22, 2012.*

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## National Treasurer's Note



I had been trying to find the time to scratch out something to e-mail to friends in this Holiday Season, but no ideas were coming to me until I received the following in an e-mail from a close friend. It was one of those "send it on" things, which I usually never do, but the poem that was with it really spoke to me, so I am sending it along with a heartfelt Christmas wish from my husband Charlie and me to each of you, my Auxiliary sisters and brothers . . .

*Around the corner, I have a friend,  
In this great city that has no end,  
Yet the days go by and weeks rush on,  
And before I know it, a year is gone.*

*And I never see my old friend's face,  
For life is a swift and terrible race,  
He knows I like him just as well,  
As in the days when I rang his bell.*

*And he rang mine, but we were younger then,  
And now we are busy, tired men.  
Tired of playing a foolish game,  
Tired of trying to make a name.*

*"Tomorrow!" I say, "I will call on Jim,  
Just to show that I'm thinking of him."  
But tomorrow comes and tomorrow goes,  
And distance between us grows and grows.*

*Around the corner, yet miles away,  
"Here's a telegram sir," "Jim died today."  
And that's what we get and deserve in the end.  
Around the corner, a vanished friend.*

Remember to always say what you mean. If you love someone, tell them. Don't be afraid to express yourself. Reach out and tell someone what they mean to you, because when you decide that it is the right time, it might be too late. Seize the day; never have regrets! And most importantly, stay close to your friends and family, for they have helped make you the person that you are today.

*Merry Christmas!*

*Until we meet again,*

*Charlie and Helen Brand*



## **IWC 2012**

### **72nd International Western Convention**

### **Billings, Montana - July 29 - August 1, 2012**

**By Sereena Hogan, National Vice President, BLET Auxiliary**

The Billings Crown Plaza was the perfect site for the 72nd International Western Convention, IWC 2012, co-hosted by D.B. Kenner and Craig Gilchrist. Pre-registration began on the afternoon of Sunday, July 29, and the registration desk was open all day on Monday, July 30. Golfers departed early Monday morning for Pryor Creek golf Course and Country Club. Many thanks to Rusty Hagadone for chairing the golf tournament, and to his wife Kileen, who played in the tournament and also volunteered to sell Mulligans at the golf course for us! Kileen is now a member-at-large of the Auxiliary and is helping new member-at-large Runa Kenner get a local auxiliary started in the Billings area. A welcome reception was held that evening after the golfers returned.

The Opening Ceremonies on Tuesday were well attended and featured guest speaker Walter Barrows, Labor Member of the Railroad Retirement Board, as well as presentations by those who had generously sponsored the convention: Mark Robb, International President of BRCF; Susan Tukul, President of LECMPA; and FELA attorneys Randy LeNeave, Fred Bremseth, Ed Pfister, and Thomas Flaskamp. Attorney Paul Bovarnick was also a sponsor, but was unable to make it to Billings until after the opening day.

After lunch, the Auxiliary Meeting was conducted while the BLET members had their closed meeting. A lineup of speakers shared important information with attendees, including FELA Attorney Fred Bremseth; Mark Robb, BRCF; Susan Tukul, LECMPA; Charlene Payne, United Healthcare; and other vendors.

A representative from the Billings Convention and Visitors Bureau then gave a presentation on what attendees might want to see and do during their free time at the convention. Special guest Kevin Kooistra, Historian of the Western Heritage Center in Billings, then presented a very enlightening slideshow and talk entitled "The Railroad Shapes Our Town." It was interesting to learn how cities and towns originated and grew up around the places where the major railroad lines were constructed way back in the 1800s.

Tuesday evening we boarded buses and headed to nearby Dehler Park for a family barbecue and pro baseball game between the Billings Mustangs and the Great Falls Voyagers. A thunderstorm ensued during the game, adding a little drama to the evening.

Educational workshops were conducted all day on Wednesday, followed by the banquet with entertainment provided by the Wilbur Rehman Quintet, a union band. Co-host of the event, Craig Gilchrist, who is now retired, was honored for his service to the BLET and for the years he spent as Montana State Legislative Board Chairman.

Many thanks to DB Kenner and Craig Gilchrist, their lovely spouses Runa and Jane, and the entire committee for all the work they did to put together a great convention. Thank you also to Dave Ditzel for all the work he did "behind the scenes" to make the event run smoothly. We all had a great time and look forward to meeting up again next year in San Francisco!



IWC Co-Chairmen Craig Gilchrist and DB Kenner



Christine and Scott Palmer, Tom and Sonnie Perkovich



MAL Pat Leyshon sold raffle tickets to "last minute buyers" at the Banquet



Runa Kenner, Jodi Wallace, Sereena Hogan, Anita Caruso

*Photos courtesy of John Bentley, BLET National*

**2012 EUMA  
74th Annual Eastern Union Meeting Association  
Atlantic City, New Jersey - September 9-13, 2012**

**By Linda Maher, National Secretary**

We had a great EUMA this year in New Jersey. Bally's Atlantic City opens out right on the boardwalk, so we had easy access to many restaurants, shops, and entertainment. We are grateful that we had the opportunity to experience all this before Hurricane Sandy destroyed much of it.

Registration opened on Monday, August 20, followed by a welcome reception in the Mountain Bar, with "wild west" type atmosphere. The convention committee had posted wanted posters of BLET officers and members on the walls. Afterward, attendees scattered out to enjoy the rest of the evening on their own. Throughout the convention, the committee hosted a hospitality room where attendees could gather to visit and enjoy complimentary drinks and snacks.

On Tuesday, after breakfast in the Diamond Club, the opening session ran until lunchtime. During the afternoon, while the BLET members held their closed meeting, the Auxiliary Open Meeting was conducted. Thank you Brother Matt for your assistance in lining up some great speakers for our meeting; it was very informative for those who attended. Amongst other things, we learned about some of the health issues that can affect our spouses.

On Wednesday, the golfers took off for the annual golf tournament while others spent the day exploring the city. Thursday was a day of workshops followed by the gala banquet, which featured a special honoring of BRCF International President Mark Robb. Mark and his family had recently become U.S. citizens, and the entire assembly waived American flags to the tune of the song "Coming to America." Congratulations Mark and family!

Although my husband Pat and I were both a little "under the weather" that week, having been in charge of the fundraising activities for the Auxiliary Scholarship Program kept me pretty busy during my time there. We had some great raffle prizes, and Jim and Janet Louis kept up their ongoing tradition of donating \$500 for the "Leona A. Louis Memorial Scholarship." Thanks so much for your generosity to this important endeavor!

The convention was a good time to get reacquainted with old friends and make some new ones. There was time to sit and talk about the upcoming elections and what is at stake for railroaders, especially with regard to Railroad Retirement. The regional conventions are a great time for us to be there with our spouses and significant others to make sure we get all the information that we need to ensure that our union members are treated fairly by the railroads. We need to be there for them!!!

Thank you so much to Arrangements Chairman Matt Kronyak and his committee for putting on a great convention and for all the hospitality and generosity extended to the Auxiliary. And thank you to everyone who took the time to attend this important function. I look forward to seeing all of you again in Baltimore in 2013!!!!!!



2012 EUMA Arrangements Chairman Matt Kronyak and his wife Kathy



Linda and Pat Maher



Mark and Leslie Robb



BLET National Vice President and Auxiliary Associate MAL Mike Twombly

*Photos courtesy of John Bentley, BLET National*

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



Season's greetings to all! I hope this article finds each of you in good health and spirits as we prepare to close 2012 already! As we begin the holiday season, I realize that much of what makes this season special are the traditions we have with family and friends, and the memories we make as we practice these traditions year after year. At our house, we love making the night special by watching some of our favorite Christmas movies while eating fresh baked goodies. One thing that I enjoy about all of the movies is the message that comes through, or even more so, the theme that family is important, love is a great healer, and that we should take time out of our busy schedules to help others in need. I firmly believe that if we would all make a commitment to do this all year long, the world will be a much better place.

One of our favorite movies is "A Charlie Brown Christmas." While some may view it as a story about some kids squabbling to put on a play, I like to see it as a philosophical lesson for life. Sometimes, it does not take much effort or money to change a person's life for the better. Many times, it can be someone in our close circle who needs the outreach. Other times, it could be our community, our schools, churches, food banks, shelters, parks, or other programs that need our help. Perhaps, instead of a tree that needs our help to be noticed and find a place in this world, it could be one of these things I mentioned. We need to pull our resources together and turn a hardly noticed person or cause into someone or something that you cannot help but notice, and something that others desire to help make great as well.

After such a brutal and bitter election season, there is much healing that needs to take place in this country. That healing starts with you and I deciding to put our differences aside and pick up our tools to begin to restore our nation. Inch by inch, and city by city, we can become a nation that shines with love and pride. I suggest that every one of us make a commitment to go forth and find someone or something that will benefit from our kindness and willingness to help them along. Everyone has a role to play in this production, so go find where you belong.

Please realize that I know we are all busier now than ever, so if you cannot give time, perhaps you can give money. If I could pick just one wish to come true this holiday season, my wish would be that apathy would disappear forever and be replaced with peace and good will. Until such time that my wish comes true, I hope we can all do our part to change the legacy we leave behind. Please have a wonderful Holiday season and a safe and Happy New Year!

Gina Forman can be reached by phone at 765-432-1050, by e-mail at [tweetys95@sbccglobal.net](mailto:tweetys95@sbccglobal.net), or by snail mail at 63 S. Hood Street, Peru, Indiana 46970

## Greetings from the Editor, Sereena Hogan

Many thanks to John Bentley of the BLET National Public Relations Department for allowing us to use some of the photos he captured at this year's regional meetings in this issue of the newsletter. And to Member-at-Large Naomi Muscha, congratulations on being elected to serve in the Montana House of Representatives. On Monday, December 3, as I worked on the layout for this issue, I received several e-mails throughout the day from Mike Muscha letting me know that he and Naomi were in Bismarck for her swearing-in ceremony and the exact minute that she was taking the oath to serve her state. We are so very proud of you, Naomi... *You go girl!!!*

Congratulations are also in order for the BLET members in the state of New Mexico who once again have an active State Legislative Board, thanks to the tireless efforts of Chairman Pat Lynch. Thank you Pat for your perseverance, and thank you to Barbie Lynch for representing the Auxiliary at the Board's first meeting in November. You and Pat are one dynamic duo!

I was fortunate to have been able to spend four weeks in late October and most of November in Washington state with my daughter and her family. They welcomed their second son, Avery River Smith on October 25, two weeks earlier than expected. It was a joy for me to share this special time with them.

Helen Brand's "National Treasurer's Note" on page 8 of this issue reminds us to make time to connect with family and friends throughout the year. I recently ran across a story by a woman named June Cohen that appeared on my e-mail sign-in page entitled, "If Your Life Were to End Today... What Can We Learn from Near-Death Choices." It was on a day when I was feeling kind of funky and I decided to click on the link and check it out. It featured five videos by some fascinating people who had very inspiring stories to share. Their stories really made me think about what is important in life and lifted my spirits to new heights. I invite you to take the time to visit the site yourself and be inspired: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/june-cohen/near-death-experiences\\_b\\_2213630.html?icid=maing-grid7%7Cmaing7%7Cd15%7Csec1\\_Ink3%26pLid%3D240280](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/june-cohen/near-death-experiences_b_2213630.html?icid=maing-grid7%7Cmaing7%7Cd15%7Csec1_Ink3%26pLid%3D240280).

Wishing you all a Happy Holiday Season and all the best for the New Year!

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

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

# Mark Your Calendar Now for the 2013 Regional Conventions

## 86th Annual Southeastern Meeting Association

**June 23 - 28, 2013**  
**Richmond, Virginia**

Arrangements Chairman Troy Bryant, Local Chairman of Division 532, welcomes all BLET members to historic Richmond/Short Pump, Va., for the 2013 SMA.

## 73rd Annual International Western Convention

**July 14 - July 18, 2013**  
**San Francisco, California**

Co-chairmen Luis Chavez Jr. and Oscar Burrola welcome all BLET members to the Hilton San Francisco Financial District Hotel for the 2013 IWC. To make hotel reservations, go to: <http://www.iwc2013.org/>

## 75th Annual Eastern Union Meeting Association

**July 28 - August 1, 2013**  
**Baltimore, Maryland**

Arrangements Chairman Fred Cox, Local Chairman of BLET Division 52, welcomes all BLET members to Baltimore for the 2013 EUMA.

## 78th Annual Southwestern Convention Meeting

**August 25 - 29, 2013**  
**New Orleans, Louisiana**

Arrangements Chairman Arlin Todd, Chairman of the Louisiana State Legislative Board, welcomes all BLET members to the Loews New Orleans Hotel for the 2013 SWCM.

*Look for more detailed information about the 2013 regional conventions in the next issue of this publication!*

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