



# 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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**Winter 2014**

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

## **2nd Quadrennial Convention: Strength, Solidarity, Action!**



**Delegates and National Officers of the BLET Auxiliary at the 2nd Quadrennial Convention**

**Strength, Solidarity, and Action** was the theme set forth by the BLET National Division for their 3rd National Convention. In keeping with tradition, the BLET Auxiliary adopted the same theme for our 2nd Quadrennial Convention, held simultaneously with the BLET Convention, in Las Vegas, Nevada, September 29 - October 1. Our 19 delegates and 10 national officers accomplished much during our three full days of meetings, deliberating on the 41 resolutions that were presented for consideration, and electing new national officers to lead this organization for the next four years. National Chaplain Darla Fent did an outstanding job opening the General Session each day and offering meaningful and inspiring poems and devotional readings to set the tone and keep us grounded.

One of the major changes that resulted from these proceedings was a change

in the titles of some of the national officers. The national vice president titles were changed to National 1st Vice President, National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative, and National 3rd Vice President. Term limits were revised to allow national officers, excluding the positions of National Secretary and National Treasurer, to serve in the same elected office for two four-year terms, or eight years. The term limits for National Secretary and National Treasurer, who are elected to serve for two consecutive four-year terms at alternate conventions, will remain the same, and these positions are not eligible for reelection at the completion of that eight-year term.

Another major change reduces the membership requirement for application to the Auxiliary Scholarship Program and the Care and Assistance Program from two years to one year.

These changes are reflected in the revised Constitution & Bylaws which will be in print and posted on the website in early January 2015.

Our new national officers include: President Sereena Hogan, 1st Vice President Susie Burrola, Treasurer Terri Fleming, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Kathleen Bisbikis, 3rd Vice President Rachael Grimes, Alternate Secretary Debbie Keele, and Alternate Treasurer Helen Brand. Lawana Poss will remain in her position as National Secretary for the next four years, and Darla Fent was re-elected to serve another term as our National Chaplain. And, of course, Anita Caruso became our

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**Thanks to Jodi and Will Wallace, we have a new website design — still at the same address, [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net) - check it out!**



## From the President - BY SEREENA HOGAN

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### ***On the Verge of a Surge!***

Greetings Everyone!

When I first took a position as a national officer 13 years ago, I never imagined that I would become the author of the "From the President" article for this publication, yet here I am! Many thanks to my fellow national

officers and the delegates at the 2nd Quadrennial Convention for the show of support in electing me to this position. As I mentioned in my acceptance speech at the convention, I did a lot of soul searching before accepting the nomination and, having done so, I am committed to do all I possibly can over the next four years to earn the faith that my Auxiliary sisters have placed in me. I am blessed to have been mentored by Sister Anita Caruso over the past four years and by Sister Becky Schneider in the years before that. Words cannot express how grateful I am to these two sisters for their help and guidance during the last few months since the convention, as I acclimate to the new responsibilities associated with this position. And I am truly grateful for the amazing pool of talent, enthusiasm, and potential that has already been demonstrated to me by our newly elected national officers, who I firmly believe will take this organization to new heights in the years ahead.

I also acknowledge and thank the previous administration of national officers for their dedication and service over the past four years. It has been an honor to serve on the Executive Council with these dedicated women. Our annual Council meetings are always busy and productive as we get together to conduct the business of the Auxiliary and award the scholarships for our own scholarship program as well as those for the International Western Convention. The few days that we meet together are also a cherished time for getting to know each other better, especially during the time we spend together at the end of the work day relaxing and socializing, and strengthening the bonds of sisterhood. Over the years, I have noticed that we have become like true family as we share in each others trials and tribulations and support one another along the way.

So much has happened in the last few months. We are pleased to introduce our all-new and improved, and very much "alive" website, thanks to Member-at-Large Jodi Wallace, who responded to our plea at the National Convention for someone to take over as webmaster. Many thanks also to her very patient and multi-talented husband Will Wallace for sharing his time and talents to design and build the new site for us. Will is the 2nd Vice Chairman for Union Pacific Western Region General Committee of Adjustment and a very busy guy, so we very much appreciate him taking the time to do this for us. And of course we will always be grateful to our previous webmaster Becky

Schneider for creating our original website when she took over as National President in 2006, and for maintaining it well beyond her four-year term as President.

In addition to the ability to post information for our members and potential members, our new site allows us to have meaningful dialogue with our members and others via the blog pages. Please take some time to peruse the new site and be sure to click on the "Officers" link to learn about the newly elected national officers who will serve this organization for the next four years. We hope that you will register on the site and create a profile, and that you will log in often to see what's new and exciting with our ever-growing organization.

The enthusiasm of the highly motivated, and optimistic newly elected national officers during and following the convention has inspired me to come up with a slogan for our administration: "On the verge of a surge!" Merriam Webster Dictionary defines the word surge as "to move very quickly and suddenly in a particular direction," or "to suddenly increase to an unusually high level." With the goal of attracting new members and increasing the size and scope of our organization ever at the forefront of our thoughts and actions as we go about the business of supporting and educating BLET families, and promoting issues that affect the safety and welfare of railroaders, we feel that we are definitely "on the verge of a surge!"

During the week that we were at the convention in Las Vegas, our delegates and officers left the meeting room at the close of business each day and spent their evenings and leisure time talking about the auxiliary and recruiting new members. As reported by National Secretary Lawana Poss in her "Tidbits from the National Secretary" article on Page 5, we have had quite a surge in membership during the last few months of this year. We also have a number of new local auxiliaries in the making. Let's keep up the momentum! I invite all of you who are already members to join us on this upward surge by taking an active part to invite other spouses in your area to step up and join us!

I hope to see many of you at the regional conventions next summer (see schedule, page 11). As you may already know, next year will be the last time that BLET and auxiliary members will have the opportunity to attend four different regional meetings in a single year. The BLET Delegates at their Third National Convention changed the BLET's regional meeting structure so that there will only be two regional meetings per year beginning in 2016.

Wishing each and every one of you a very happy holiday season, and all the best for the new year!

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**BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce addressed the delegates at the Auxiliary National Convention.**

immediate Past President. We are forever grateful to those national officers who served for the previous term, from 2010 to 2014. Your service is much appreciated and we hope that you will all stay in touch!

On the final day of the convention, BLET National President Dennis Pierce, 1st Vice President Lee Pruitt, and soon-to-be retired National Secretary-Treasurer Bill Walpert took time out from their convention to address our delegation, thanking us for the work we do, thanking our previous administration, and congratulating our newly elected officers. President Pierce also spoke of the importance of staying involved in the political process as we may be facing some tough times ahead. Other guest speakers included newly elected BLET National Vice President Jim Louis, who thanked the Auxiliary for designating a scholarship in memory of his mother, Leona Louis, and spoke about how growing up in a strong pro-union home had impacted his life; Richard Gent, State Director of the Nevada chapter of Operation Lifesaver, who encouraged the delegates to get involved in this important safety program; and Mike Collins, Legislative Assistant, U.S. Railroad Retirement Board, who spoke with us about Railroad Retirement benefits. Becky Schneider spoke on behalf of the National Association for Retired and Veteran Railway Employees (NARVRE), and encouraged everyone to become a member, even before retirement, as this is the only federally chartered organization whose sole purpose is the protection of the Railroad Retirement System, something we all look forward to benefitting from after a long career of railroad service.

We extend a great big THANK YOU to the BLET National for all their help before and during the convention and for all that they provided for us to conduct our business on behalf of the BLET Auxiliary. Congratulations to President Pierce and the other members of the BLET Advisory Board who were elected by acclamation, and to all the national officers elected to serve the BLET for the next four years. We especially offer our congratulations to Bill Walpert and his wife Janet who is a long-time member of the BLET Auxiliary, and wish both of them all the all the best for a long and happy retirement!



## **From 1st Vice President Susie Burrola**

### **Honored to Serve**

Returning home from the 2nd Quadrennial Convention in Las Vegas, I was thrilled and honored about my new position. I took a moment to reflect back on what brought me there—attending my first regional convention with my husband Oscar in 2009 and joining as a member at large. Becky Schneider, Anita Caruso, Sereena Hogan, and the other national officers were so welcoming, full of knowledge, and compassionate about what they were doing it inspired me to start a local auxiliary in my area.

With support and encouragement from my husband, Oscar Burrola, Local Chairman of Division 839, and union spouses Kathleen Bisbikis and Heather Barto, we decided to give it a go. California State Legislative Board Chairman Tim Smith and FELA Attorney Ed Pfister, Jr., were instrumental in providing us with the additional support we needed to get organized. With the help of then-President Becky Schneider, we formed Nor Cal 39.

I was invited to the 1st Quadrennial Convention as a delegate and learned more about what goes on at the national level. This inspired me to want to get more involved. In 2013, I was appointed by Past President Anita Caruso to serve as Alternate National Secretary to fill a vacancy in that position. When it came time to attend the 2nd Quadrennial Convention this year, I decided to run for the office of 1st Vice President. I am very passionate about this position to which I was elected. Gina Forman left big shoes to fill and I hope that, with her guidance and support, I can serve you well.

Shortly after assuming my new position, I was invited to speak at the Santa Fe General Committee Meeting in Las Vegas. Nervously, I accepted, and am grateful to General Chairman Alan Holdcraft, the Santa Fe General Committee, President Pierce and the other BLET National Officers, and the beautiful BLET spouses I met there. Their heartwarming support and encouragement confirmed my belief in unity, and how proud I am to be a part of such a fine organization. I look forward to meeting new members and am excited to grow new and old friendships.

That being said, I would like to welcome our new Auxiliary officers, and thank the returning officers and those who served in the previous administration before us. With the help of our new members and officers, and those past members and officers who paved the way for us, I see a bright future!

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# Thank You, Helen Brand, for Your Years of Service!

*By Anita J. Caruso, Past National President*

The BLET Auxiliary has undergone numerous changes in recent years to keep up with the times. When Helen Brand was elected as National Treasurer at the Eighth Quinquennial Convention in 2006, she realized that much needed to be done to bring the bookkeeping and the duties of the treasurer into the 21st Century. Up until that time, the national secretary was responsible for receiving and documenting each check that was submitted to the Auxiliary, filling out a huge ledger book with a myriad of antiquated information, keeping ledgers and receipts for each submission, and basically performing a great deal of the treasury work herself. This particular duty of the national secretary's job consumed much time and effort on her part. All that changed in 2006 when Sister Helen came on board!

First and foremost, Helen converted the previously handwritten accounting documents into a computerized bookkeeping program and began using e-mail to communicate and share information. Using Quickbooks, she set up a number of expense accounts, including a Regional Convention Account, National Convention Account, Executive Council Meeting Account, Legislative Account, Care and Assistance Program Account, and Scholarship Account, thereby allowing her to keep track of where the funds were being spent. She also set up a number of income accounts to categorize the funds coming into the organization, i.e., membership dues; Care and Assistance Program income; scholarship donations, and other fundraising income. The Quickbooks software allowed her to easily generate cash flow reports to be reviewed at the annual Executive Council meetings and at the national conventions. She was also able to utilize the payroll and check writing features in Quickbooks to generate expense reimbursement and payroll checks, keep track of withholding updates, and prepare the federal forms associated with having employees on payroll. Prior to Helen's term, the Auxiliary was spending a considerable amount of funds to retain an outside bookkeeper to keep track of our funds. Consequently, having Helen take over these duties has amounted to a substantial savings, allowing the Auxiliary to preserve more of our precious funds.

The yearly financial report lines up with the sections of the IRS Form 990, which is our yearly report to the IRS for a nonprofit federal income tax exempt organization. With this information in place, we can file these reports without the expense of a CPA, which was a major expense in the past.

The national secretary works very closely with the national treasurer; one even might say their jobs are intertwined. They have many duties that overlap and provide for a checks-and-balance system in the bookkeeping, which is why these two positions are elected at alternating conventions for two consecutive four-year terms, or eight years. The bookkeeping duties of the national secretary have been drastically reduced since Helen took over the treasurer's position.

Sister Helen joined the Helen Gould Auxiliary #235 in Osawatomie, Kansas, in 1979. Over the years, Helen has served as president,

past president, and secretary/treasurer of her local auxiliary. At the national level, she served as Alternate International Treasurer from 2001 - 2006, prior to being elected by acclamation in 2006 to serve as National Treasurer.

In addition to her duties as National Treasurer, Sister Helen has served as the chairperson for the annual SWCM Golf Tournament since it became a fundraiser for the Auxiliary in 2009. I

have enjoyed working together with her on this lucrative fundraiser for our Scholarship Fund. Helen sends out letters to prospective donors to sponsor holes for the tournament and, for the past two years, she has directly received the golf registration fees and put together the teams. She also makes arrangements for transportation and golf club rentals for the golfers, as well as setting up meals for the golfers before and after the tournament, and providing prizes for the tournament winners. Not bad for someone who knew almost nothing about golf before she began this endeavor! We are most grateful to Sister Helen for her efforts, dedication, and hard work on this arduous fundraiser that has netted a great deal of income for our Scholarship Program.

When Sister Helen closes out the books at the end of this calendar year, she will then turn over the duties of her position to our new National Treasurer, Terri Fleming. She will help Sister Terri familiarize herself with the duties of her new position and train her in the many details associated with the accounting practices that have been set up during her tenure.

It has been my honor and privilege to work with Sister Helen Brand for the past eight years. We have enjoyed having her on the Executive Council, attending regional conventions with her, and she and I have enjoyed a wonderful, treasured friendship that will remain with us forever! Thank you, Sister Helen, for your many years of devotion, dedication, and work for the BLET Auxiliary. We are happy to know that you will still be serving as a national officer in your capacity of Alternate Treasurer and that you are available to call upon should we need to tap your brain or draw on your experience. We are also grateful to you for your willingness to stay involved with the SWCM golf tournament fundraiser. But most of all, we hope that you will keep in touch with us and we look forward to running into you at one of the upcoming regional conventions.

***Good luck, Helen, in all of your future endeavors!***



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# Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

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Thank you to all the delegates and national officers who attended the 2nd Quadrennial Convention of the BLET National Auxiliary in Las Vegas, Nevada. We appreciate all of your hard work before and during the convention. The General Session was very educational and informative and we were able to accomplish many things!

## Scholarship News:

Thank you to everyone who pitched in to support the Auxiliary Scholarship Fund this year by making donations, purchasing raffle tickets, sponsoring golf holes, purchasing mulligans, and participating in the SWCM Golf Tournament. A scholarship can change the life of a child and your support means the world to us.

We have a new scholarship application form posted on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net), along with detailed instructions pertaining to the BLET Auxiliary Scholarship Program and the IWC Scholarship Program. Scholarship applications for the 2015/2016 school year are due in my office **no later than April 1, 2015**. Late applications will not be considered. If you are applying for a scholarship, please take the time to read and follow the instructions carefully so that your application may be accepted and considered by our Executive Council at our annual meeting next year.

## Cookbook Sales:

We are still selling BLET Auxiliary Cookbooks! We have a limited quantity of the first edition MAIN LINE COOKING and we also have MAIN LINE COOKING II. Keep this in mind as the holidays approach, as these books make wonderful gifts. The cookbooks can be shipped directly to you. Contact me for more information.

## Welcome New Auxiliary Members!!

**Auxiliary #31 - Fort Worth, TX** new members: Rachael Brown, Jessi Conner, Bianca Hall, Angela Lilley, and Shereen Bailey

**Auxiliary #3 - Niagara, NY** new members: Margaret Smeeding, Cindy Koester, Amy Koester and John Murphy

**Auxiliary #28 - Tucson, AZ** new members: Heidi Sprague, Monica Perez, and Cindy Cota.

## Welcome to Our New Members-at-Large:

Timothy Dunn, Mt. Vernon, IL; Ryan and Verna Snow, Bakersfield, CA.; Shawn Barber, Bakersfield, CA; Valerie Young, Colorado Springs;

CO; Royce Ann Wiggins, Eddy, TX; Maria Miranda, Fort Mohave, AZ; Shelby Jones, Lubbock, TX; Jennifer Mueller, Newton, KS; Kayla Holdcraft, Burleson, TX; Shelly Cunningham, Burleson, TX.

## Care and Assistance Program (CAP):

Established in 1921, the CAP is our organization's way of saying thank you to long-time members. These members are usually elderly and their incomes are such that some of life's little pleasures are out of their reach. The CAP provides financial assistance to qualifying members and helps them to maintain a little bit more of the dignity they deserve. Our CAP recipients are grateful for what we do.

If you know of someone who has been an auxiliary member or member-at-large for at least one year, and who might benefit from this program, please contact me for an application!

## Members-at-Large:

Dues notices will be mailed in December. Please make sure that all of your contact information is correct. Dues payments are due in my office **on or before March 1, 2015**.

## Auxiliary Secretaries:

You will receive your Auxiliary Packets in December. Please have these back to me **BEFORE March 1, 2015**. If you have any questions about the forms, please call or e-mail me. I will be more than happy to assist you in getting these forms properly filled out and processed.

Please let us know when there is a death of a member or the death of one of their family members. We want to be able to send our condolences to the family. We would like to also share in the joyful things that happen in the lives of our members! Please let us know of any exciting happenings!

We have a new grandson in our family! Congratulations to the proud family! Sarah, Kyle and brother, Ali welcomed baby Thomas William in September. Thomas and our granddaughter, Carrera, born in February, are with me on weekdays. Our Chaplain Darla Fent and her husband Larry also welcomed a new grandson into their family. Evan Matthew Reed was born on November 21st. He joins his two other brothers. Larry and Darla's daughter Heather calls them "my 3 sons." Congratulations to the happy parents and grandparents!



*Lawana Poss can be reached at 770-497-8898, by e-mail at [Lewp2007@bellsouth.net](mailto:Lewp2007@bellsouth.net), or by mail at 1394 Bywood Court, Suwanee, Georgia 30024.*

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

I send warm wishes for a beautiful Christmas and a safe, Happy New Year!!

— Lawana



## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE

***Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.***

—Henry Ford

It is a great honor that I have been elected by the delegates to the 2014 BLET Auxiliary National Convention to serve as your 2nd Vice President and National Legislative Representative. Sister Sereena Hogan has moved to the position of our National Auxiliary President and it's her shoes that I attempt to try and fill over these next four years. I hope that with her guidance and help, and my desire to serve and enthusiasm to learn, I can continue the great work she did during her term as National Legislative Representative.

Below are some of the most recent news items that affect all of us. Please feel free to share these with your local auxiliary. If you have information you would like to share with me for future updates, please send it to me at [bletauxiliarylr@gmail.com](mailto:bletauxiliarylr@gmail.com).

### **Railroad Retirement**

Good news for retirees in 2015. Effective January 1st retired employees will be receiving a \$34.00 a month increase in their annuity,

and for those with combined benefits for the employee and the spouse the increase will be approximately \$48.00 per month. In late December, the Railroad Retirement Board will mail notices to all annuitants providing a breakdown of the annuity rates payable to them in January 2015.

Also beginning in 2015, the amount a rail retiree can earn without deduction to their benefits will rise. For those under full retirement age throughout 2015, the exempt earnings amount rises to \$15,720 from \$15,480 in 2014. For beneficiaries attaining full retirement age in 2015, the exempt earnings amount, for the months before the month full retirement age is attained, rises to \$41,880, from \$41,400 in 2014.

### **Mid-Term Election News**

The mid-term elections have changed the face of the Senate as the Republicans have now taken control. This could potentially affect us all negatively on important railroad issues such as Amtrak, high speed rail, and two-person crews.

In a post-election day article by Frank N. Wilner (author of several books on railroads, rail labor, and Amtrak) that appeared on the Railway Age website, stated: "Rail labor most certainly is the biggest Election Day loser. With a new round of national contract negotiations about to commence, the increased number of anti-labor conservatives in both chambers portends

treacherous shoals should an impasse lead to a threatened work stoppage and congressional intervention."

Despite the disappointing election results overall, four states took a stand and voted to raise the minimum wage for American workers. Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota all said yes to raising the minimum wage amounts in their states. Also, in California the city of San Francisco voted to raise their minimum wage up to \$15.00 an hour to be phased in by 2018.

### **Federal Railroad Administration**

Joe Szabo, Chief of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Railroad Administration, will be stepping down effective January 2015. Szabo has served in his current position for six years and is the first Administrator of the FRA who came from the ranks of the rail workers.

In a recent statement, Szabo said, "In 2008, the year before I came to FRA, 26 rail workers perished in on-duty fatalities – a rate of more than two per month. Through your good work, we drove that down to a record low number of 14 employee fatalities in 2013 – still too many, but a remarkable improvement. Now, 10 months into 2014, we are at five fatalities for the year and getting so close to the ultimate goal of zero. I'm counting on the practices we've put into place, particularly proactive programs like Confidential Close Calls Reporting, to get us to zero in 2015."

### **Credit for Military Service under the Railroad Retirement Act**

Many railroad employees have at some time served in the Armed Forces of the United States. Under certain conditions, their military service may be credited as rail service under the Railroad Retirement Act.

The intent behind the crediting of military service under the Railroad Retirement Act is to prevent career railroad employees from losing retirement credits while performing active duty military service during a war or national emergency period. Therefore, to be creditable as compensation under the Railroad Retirement Act, service in the U.S. Armed Forces must be preceded by railroad service in the same or preceding calendar year. With the exceptions noted later, the employee must also have entered military service when the United States was at war or in a state of national emergency or have served in the Armed Forces involuntarily. Military service is involuntary when an employee is required by law, such as Selective Service System conscription or troop call-up from a reserve unit, to leave railroad service to perform active duty military service.

Only active duty military service is creditable under the Railroad Retirement Act. A person is considered to have been on active duty while commissioned or enrolled in the active service of the Armed Forces of the United



States (including the U.S. Coast Guard), or while ordered to Federal active duty from any reserve component of the uniformed Armed Forces.

More information on this topic can be found at [http://www.rrb.gov/opa/qa/pub\\_1410.asp](http://www.rrb.gov/opa/qa/pub_1410.asp).

### **SEPTA Agreement Reached**

After nearly five years of negotiations, a tentative agreement has been reached between the 200 locomotive engineers of Division 71 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and SEPTA, the commuter rail system. This new tentative agreement was reached only after a one-day strike in June that ended with a Presidential Emergency Board appointed.

The tentative agreement will include a pay increase of 13.32 percent, the first pay increase since 2010. SEPTA also dropped its demand that engineers wear a uniform, which has been a point of contention during the negotiations. There are still pending safety issues, however, BLET Vice President Steve Bruno stated, "We still have critical safety concerns related to fatigue caused by long hours and inadequate training for new engineers. We will now seek resolution through federal regulators and public hearings rather than through collective bargaining with SEPTA."

It is estimated that nearly 126,000 people ride the SEPTA commuter trains daily.

### **Delegates Pledge Support for Two-Person Crews**

In October, the delegates at the 2014 BLET 3rd National

Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, stood together in a show of solidarity when they adopted a resolution pledging the BLET's support for two-person crews for the employees of the Wheeling & Lake Erie Railroad (W&LE), where the fight has gone on for years. As stated in a BLET Newsflash dated October 2, 2014, the resolution declares that the delegates resolved to "pledge our unwavering solidarity and assistance to the members of Division 292 to win this fight."

The resolution also calls upon all BLET members and all railroad workers to provide aid and support as necessary in the coming months and years in order to ensure victory. Following our recent midterm elections and the change in power in the Senate, it will be more important than ever to continue to support the work of the union in the effort to keep two-person crews on all trains. To see the resolution in its entirety, please go to <http://www.ble-t.org/pr/news/newsflash.asp?id=5636>

### **New Jersey Economic Group Shows Support for H.R. 3040**

New Jersey Economic Group NJ SEED has announced its support for two person crews. The NJ SEED issued a letter to legislators expressing its backing for H.R. 3040. In a BLET Newsflash, NJ SEED is quoted as saying, "NJ SEED is committed to working to preserve two-person crews for the ... safety of our railways and citizens," wrote Michael K. Drulis, Executive Director of NJ SEED. "The stakes are too high to do otherwise; the safest and securest workplace for the nation's railroads, their

employees, and the public-at-large is one that includes a minimum of a two-person crew."

"Both the engineer and conductor are critical to train operations – working symbiotically – dependent on one another for proper and sound procedures," according to NJ SEED's letter of support. "Paramount to the issue of crew size for train operations is ensuring safety on the nation's rails. Instances in the past have proven that two-person crews play a vital role in working with first responders to protect the public and work in effort to guarantee safe practices."

Thank you NJ SEED for recognizing the importance two-person crews play in the safety of rail workers and the communities they serve, not only in New Jersey but across the U.S.

### **BLET-PAC**

Is your spouse a member? As things begin to change with the new Republican-controlled Senate, now is a great time to sign up to help in the fight on Capitol Hill. Funds from the BLET-PAC are used to help support our friends in Washington who are willing to fight on behalf of all of us on issues that impact our families and our livelihood:

- Railroad Retirement
- Amtrak Funding
- Federal Employers' Liability Act
- Railroad Security
- Railroad Safety

If you are interested in supporting the BLET-PAC Fund or would just like more information about it, please click on this link: <http://www.bletdc.org/action/PAC/>. It's money well spent!

### **CP Holiday Train is Underway**

The Canadian Pacific Railroad is making Christmas a little nicer for those communities in which it serves this holiday season. The beautifully decorated holiday trains left Montreal, Canada, on November 27th for their journey across Canada and the US to raise money, gather food, and give back to those in need. The Canadian Pacific railroad website states, "Since 1999, the program has raised close to \$9.5 million and 3.3 million pounds of food. Each Holiday Train is about 1,000 feet in length with 14 rail cars decorated with hundreds of thousands of technology-leading LED lights and a modified boxcar that has been turned into a traveling stage for performers."

You can log on to the CP website at [www.cpr.ca](http://www.cpr.ca) to see pictures of these beautifully decorated trains and to check their route to see if they will be stopping in your area. The holiday train entertainment is free; they only ask those who come to visit the train or watch the entertainment to make a donation of a non-perishable food item.

As 2014 comes to an end and we celebrate the holidays with our families and friends, I hope you each have the one thing that any railroad family appreciates the most... time with each other. I wish each family a deadhead home, good weather to get back safely, and lots of wonderful memories made.

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## Small, Steady, and Consistent Wins The Race (Sometimes!)

by Jessica Cole, Wisconsin State Legislative Representative

We had a disappointing recent election here in Wisconsin, with the Republican candidates dominating most races, and, unfortunately, our very anti-union, pro-big business governor, Republican Scott Walker, being re-elected by a big margin. Walker has run one of the most corrupt, government-for-sale-to-the-highest-bidder administrations we have ever seen in this state. With one ethics scandal after another plaguing his tenure as governor, it's hard to fathom how we can still have so many "stupid people" who would vote him back in, but slick ads and all that money can sway a lot of ignorant people.

One small bit of encouragement came to me from watching our own district's Assembly race, however. Incumbent Democrat, the incredibly popular and upstanding Fred Clark, had decided to retire and not run again. This left the doors wide open, and we feared that Republican Ashton Kirsch would win this seat too.

Democratic candidate Dave Considine had no political background, but is a close family friend. My parents, both retired, helped him from the outset of his campaign. Honestly, it depressed me to watch it at the outset. Early "meet and greet" meetings were very poorly attended by potential voters. One held at my parents' home had no visitors at all. I felt embarrassed for Dave, but he held his head cheerfully up and went on to the next one. Gradually, over the summer, he gained some momentum and he did a good job of fund-raising, but he was still a very small fish. He went to his debates and did well. He talked to voters, one by one, going door to door and holding the small meet-and-greets, and spending that time with whatever handful of voters showed up.

My parents and a handful of other people helped staff his campaign office as volunteers. They made and distributed signs. They helped him prepare for debates, discussions, and

public appearances. Probably less than ten people constituted the core of his volunteer staff, but they all worked hard. There were no accurate polls to say how this race was going, so on election day, we all went to vote, and then all waited with baited breath.

I went to his election night party not knowing what to expect. There were maybe 20 people left in the room by the time I got there. I thought, "Man, this is SMALL for a guy running for something as important as State Assembly!" Now apparently there had been more there earlier, but most of them fizzled out early. Again, I felt kind of sorry for Dave—all that grass roots effort and just not that much interest from voters for all his enthusiasm, sincerity, and hard work.

But guess what? Dave Considine WON that Assembly seat! And I couldn't help but look back at how the whole thing had been so small, but so committed. So chin up in the face of what appeared to be discouragement. He will be a friend to the BLET, and my husband, Wisconsin State Legislative Board Chairman Tony Dimond, has already had a couple of good discussions with him about BLET concerns.

What's the lesson in all this? Keep going no matter what! Believe in your cause and believe in the grass roots. Get out and do something constructive. If you don't care to run for office, help someone whose ideas you can support. In the end, the work of a few is going to shape the future of many, and in this case, all of the work, right down to the last sign put up or posted, made a difference.

*Member-at-Large Jessica Cole lives with her husband, Tony Dimond, in Baraboo, Wisconsin. She is an Independent Brand Partner for Nerium International skincare products and has a successful business training and boarding horses. Jessica has served as Wisconsin State Legislative Rep for the BLET Auxiliary for the last three years, and recently served as a proxy delegate for Generosity Auxiliary #37 at the 2nd Quadrennial Convention of the BLET Auxiliary in October.*

## Our National Chaplain Darla Fent, also known as "Gramma Darla"



Congratulations to Darla Fent on her reelection to a second term as our National Chaplain at our 2nd Quadrennial Convention. And congratulations also, Darla, on the birth of your grandson Evan Matthew Reed, born on November 21st!

One of the duties of the National Chaplain is to preside over the opening of the General Session of the National Auxiliary and introduce the national officers. It is also customary for the chaplain to offer some prayers or spiritual readings at the National Convention. Darla shared some wonderful readings from a book entitled *Personal Prayers for Women*. She also does a great job all year long sending sympathy and get-well cards to members of the Auxiliary and the BLET. Thank you, Darla, for all you do!

### Notice of Apology:

We have an unfortunate situation that needs to be addressed regarding the Autumn 2014 edition of our newsletter. Sister Anita Caruso used some wording in the fourth paragraph of her article entitled "In Memory of Sister Julia Carter" on Page 3 of that publication. She "borrowed" some language from a piece previously composed by Auxiliary 3 member Pat Murphy and submitted to the Editor of the *Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen Journal* as an "Open Letter" to BLET National Secretary/Treasurer Bill Walpert in response to his column in the Spring edition of that publication in which he addressed the 10-year growth of the National Railroad Investment Trust. Sister Anita offers her deepest apology to Sister Pat for not citing her as the original author of the apt wording she used to describe the brave actions taken by our departed Sister, Julia Carter.



# 79th Southwestern Convention Meeting

*By Helen Brand, Alternate National Treasurer and SWCM Golf Tournament Chair*

The 79th Annual Southwestern Convention Meeting (SWCM) was held in St. Louis, Missouri, at the Hilton St. Louis at the Ballpark, September 7 - 11, 2014. The convention was hosted by Dave Grimes and the members of Division 42. We appreciated all their hard work and thanked them for doing a great job.

The SWCM had a great lineup of activities planned for the week. Sunday evening, they held a poker tournament to help raise funds for the SWCM Scholarship Program. Monday was the golf tournament, sponsored by the BLET Auxiliary. For those not playing golf, they planned a trip to the Museum of Transportation. The day wrapped up with a welcome reception sponsored by ARLA.

Sam, Anita, Charlie, and I arrived on Saturday, September 6, in order to begin preparations for the golf tournament. We all got together on Sunday to fill the goodie bags for the players, update the hole sponsor signs, fill gift bags, bring raffle prizes, and tend to anything else that needed to be done beforehand. Then we loaded our cars and drove to the golf course to unload the boxes and hole signs for the next day and make sure everything was set up and in place for early Monday morning.

The Far Oaks Golf Course is in Caseyville, Illinois, a short drive from St. Louis. Fortunately, the weather held and the day was sunny and nice – a great day for golfing. We are grateful to the hole sponsors and all the players for making the golf tournament a success. We appreciated the catered barbecue lunch, which was sponsored by the law firm of Eric Holland and Steve Groves. The meal was enjoyed by all in attendance. We thank Dave Grimes for arranging this luncheon, thereby saving us precious funds for our scholarship program. We are also grateful that the SWCM Committee allows the BLET Auxiliary to chair this golf tournament as our annual fundraiser.

Opening ceremonies began on Tuesday, with the BLET closed meeting after a lunch sponsored by the FELA attorneys. The BLET Auxiliary held our open meeting at the same time. It was well attended and we played a game called, "Know your Auxiliary," which was fun and informative. We discussed the upcoming National Convention and conducted a question-and-answer session. Dinner for the evening was planned to be on the field at the St. Louis Cardinal Ball Park, but it rained that evening, so the dinner was held inside. Tours of the stadium were given and it was still a fun evening.

At the banquet on Wednesday evening, we were treated to a concert by an Eagles tribute band called "Take It To The Limit," from Branson, Missouri. It was a very enjoyable experience and a fine ending to the convention.

Hope to see you all next year in Tulsa, Oklahoma!



The Auxiliary gifted Past President Becky Schneider (left) with a railroad-themed quilt as a thank-you for her work on the 2nd Quadrennial Convention - presented by Helen Brand (right).



Congratulations to the 2014 SWCM Golf Tournament winners Fernando Paz, Scott Piekarski, Kent Kirk, and Dave Brown.



Cheri Brown, Anita Caruso, Sam Caruso, Debbie Kurtz, and Joyce Piekarski visited the Budweiser Brewery in St. Louis.

# 76th Annual Eastern Union Meeting Association

*By Sereena Hogan, National President*

This year's Eastern Union Meeting Association (EUMA) convention was held at the Westin Hotel in downtown Cleveland, Ohio, August 4 - 7, 2014. The convention was hosted by Patrick Redmond and the members of BLET Division 607. During registration hours on Monday, August 4, registrants were invited to tour the BLET National Headquarters, a few blocks away. That evening a welcome reception with music and hors d'oeuvres, sponsored by Cornerstone Assurance Group, was held at the House of Blues.

Opening Ceremonies on Tuesday morning included a presentation of the flags by the Color Guard from the Naval Reserve Center of Akron, followed by a selection of music from four members of the Cleveland Firefighters Memorial Pipes & Drums. Terry Joyce, wife of BLET Art Director and Associate Editor Bill Joyce was one of the bagpipe players! Guest speakers included Teamsters International Vice Presidents John Murphy and Al Mixon, as well as Walt Barrows, Labor Member of the Railroad Retirement Board. Following a lunch sponsored in part by BRCF, BLET members gathered for their closed meeting and auxiliary members met for an open meeting, with guests welcome. The meeting included an educational game using a questionnaire that attendees were to complete using informational posters on the walls about subjects of importance to BLET spouses. President Anita Caruso then gave a presentation about the Auxiliary - who we are and what we do. Guest speakers at the meeting included Michael Collins, Legislative Assistant from the Railroad Retirement Board; and Jonathan Knetsch from Optum Health, who shared information about Railroad Health Link. That evening we were treated to a Cleveland Indians vs. Cincinnati Reds baseball game sponsored in part by Railroad Marketing Specialists.

On Wednesday morning, golfers headed for the Manakiki Golf Course in Willoughby Hills, Ohio. Non-golfers were free to explore downtown Cleveland. That evening, convention attendees had an opportunity to get together to socialize and enjoy drinks and appetizers at The Cleveland Grill.

Numerous educational workshops were conducted by the BLET on Thursday and auxiliary members and other guests were invited to attend a dreamcatcher workshop sponsored by the Collins & Collins Law Firm and presented by Jeanne Pontolillo. Jeanne taught us all how to make dreamcatchers and all attendees had the opportunity to create their own dreamcatcher using the variety of wrap, beads, and feathers that Jeanne furnished. Associate MAL Woody Taylor's granddaughter was the lucky winner of the door prize — one of Jeanne's beautiful custom dreamcatcher creations. Thank you Jeanne for donating your time and expertise to us — we had a great time! Lunch for all workshop attendees was sponsored by LECMPA.

The banquet that evening featured a wonderful buffet dinner followed by music provided by Chris Colton from Cornerstone Assurance Group, who just happens to also be a great disc jockey!

Many thanks to Judi Sereni, Sales Manager at Caesars Entertainment Corp. in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for providing the prizes for our auxiliary meeting as well as donating a hotel stay and dinner package for our scholarship raffle. Thank you also to Jim and Janet Louis for the \$500 cash prize for the raffle; to Collins & Collins, LLC, for the beautiful BLET pocket watch; and to Sandy Blum, Lawana Poss, Jennifer Laveing, and Debra Kertesz for their help selling raffle tickets. And of course, much gratitude goes out from all of us to EUMA Chairman Mark Kenny, Arrangements Chairman Pat Redmond and his wife Jesse, and all of the committee members for putting together a great conference. Next year's EUMA will be held in Boston, Massachusetts - see you there!



**Sereena Hogan, Anita Caruso, Jennifer Laveing, and Debra Kertesz sold raffle tickets and cookbooks at the Auxiliary Information Table.**



**Jeanne Pontolillo taught us how to make Dreamcatchers at the Dreamcatcher workshop sponsored by Collins & Collins, LLC.**

**Your Auxiliary national officers extend our best wishes to all of our readers for a very safe and happy holiday season!**



## **2015 Regional Meeting Schedule**

### **88th Annual Southeastern Meeting Association (SMA) Atlanta, Georgia - June 14-19, 2015**

Arrangements Chair Teresa Bryant, Local Chairman of BLET Division 30, will host the 2015 SMA at the Lake Lanier Islands Resort just north of Atlanta.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Greetings from Editor Susie Burrola**

Welcome to a new season! As I assume the duties of my new position as 1st Vice President, one of those duties is to serve as editor of this publication. Sereena Hogan will continue to serve as the publisher. Please continue to send your submissions for the newsletter to Sereena at [vp3sereena@aol.com](mailto:vp3sereena@aol.com). If you have questions, suggestions, or comments about the newsletter, or something you would like to contribute, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at [bletauxiliaryvp@yahoo.com](mailto:bletauxiliaryvp@yahoo.com) or 209-915-1512.

During this time of year, it's so easy to forget the importance of being humble. With the stress of the holidays, to adjusting your family's plans to the schedule of the railroad – something that never seems to get easier even as the years pass – to understanding how hard our railroaders work and sacrifice to make an honest living, this time of year can be a rough one for many. A railroader's life can be quite trying at times, not only for himself or herself, but for the entire family. If you find yourself feeling upset or angry about the circumstances in which you find yourself, remember you are not alone. As an auxiliary and/or BLET member, you have the support of so many others who share the same lifestyle. Pick up the phone and give a call to one of your sisters or brothers and bring some cheer to both of your lives. After all, who else can better understand your lifestyle? Sometimes it's easier when we can commiserate with one another and even find some humor in the situations in which we find ourselves.

Railroaders spend half their lives with their coworkers. Why not make those coworkers a part of your "family"? Invite them to socialize with you and to join in the group activities planned by your union and your auxiliary? Before you know it, you blink and ask where did the time go? Don't wait for the blink! Have some fun, make memories, and learn to be spontaneous – it's contagious! Happy Holidays!

**Pay it forward** — Save your shampoos, conditioners, and lotions from hotels to make care bags. Use a gallon Ziplock bag and fill it with a pair of socks, a bottle of water, crackers, a travel toothbrush and toothpaste (ask your dentist to donate a few), and donate it to your church, or share it with a homeless person. Put a smile on someone's face this holiday season!

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

**Sereena Hogan, Publisher**  
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**The next issue will be published in March 2015. Please have your submissions to Sereena by February 25, 2015.**





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