



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.

Volume 6, Number 4

Winter 2015

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

Auxiliary Members Volunteer in Community Efforts



Games for Hunger Food Drive Volunteers Bill Burchett, John Knowles, Alicia Titus, Jeff Kurtz, Dena Burchett, Carla McEntee, Stacie Harl, Kade Harl, Katie Sciumbato, Tony Sciumbato

Games for Hunger Food Drive, Fort Madison, Iowa

by Stacie Harl, President, Fort Madison BLET #391 Auxiliary

On Saturday September 26, 2015, the newly formed Fort Madison BLET #391 Auxiliary took part in the Games for Hunger Food Drive that benefited local food pantries in three states. This food drive was a little different from a normal food drive as it was sponsored by nine different local unions and, instead of just collecting food items, the different unions received donations to sponsor game booths and bounce houses for kids, with the cost of admission being one non-perishable food item! There were five inflatable bounce houses, slides, and obstacle courses for the kids to play on, along with ten carnival game booths. Also, there were free hot dogs, chips, popcorn, cotton candy, and drinks available to all who attended. There was also a silent auction for the adults. Over 12,000 food items were collected as well as over \$6,000.00 in cash donations.

The Fort Madison Auxiliary No. 139's next project will be a winter coat drive for local families and schools that have children in need. We are also currently accepting both donations and written nominations for our "Adopt a furloughed railroad family" project! This is a special project that was decided on by the members where they have opened it up to railroad families nationwide and the goal is to help a railroad family that has been furloughed and in need of a little extra help to give their family a Merry Christmas! If you are interested in donating to this cause, please send your donations to Stacie Harl, BLET Auxiliary #391 President, P.O. Box 101 Niota, IL, 62358. Checks should be made payable to Auxiliary #391. You can also mail your nominations and wish lists for the family to this same address or you can e-mail them to blet391auxiliary@yahoo.com! We plan to help at least one furloughed family, but if enough donations are received we will spread it out to multiple families!

See Page 4 for more on Auxiliary members volunteering in their communities.

Expanding Our Horizons!

In this edition, we are premiering a new venture we have entered into with FELA attorneys who support our organization and the BLET, and vendors who offer goods and services that benefit our readers. We are grateful to the law firm of Kujawski Marcus, LLC, and to Cornerstone Assurance Group for being the first to participate and kick off this new venture with us.

The attorneys and vendors who participate will submit articles that support our goals of educating and informing our readers about topics that are of interest to BLET members and their families, while at the same time introducing our readers to the services and products specifically for railroaders that they offer. One FELA attorney and one vendor will be featured in each issue of the newsletter, on a first-come, first-served basis. Although we truly appreciate the support, we have no allegiance to any of the participants in this program and will strive to offer fair and equal representation of each one who chooses to participate. We will also be happy to include a link from our website to our participants' websites if they wish for us to do so.

We hope that this new venture will be mutually beneficial to those who choose to participate and to our readers. For more information about participating, please contact Editor Susie Burrola, 209-915-1512, or bletauxiliaryvp@yahoo.com; or Publisher Sereena Hogan at 520-297-0944, or vp3sereena@aol.com. We look forward to hearing from you!



From the President - BY SEREENA HOGAN

Happy Holidays everyone!

At this time of year when we count our blessings, I find myself with so much to be thankful for. It's been quite a year for the Auxiliary - we've laughed a lot; we've cried a little, but mostly we have forged ahead with great determination. We have had the opportunity to meet many

wonderful BLET officers and members and their families in our travels this last year that have taken us from coast to coast. Traveling to the four regional meetings, each with its own "flavor" and uniqueness, is always an adventure, and this year was no exception. With this year's meetings being the last-ever for each convention, it seemed that attendance and enthusiasm was at an all-time high at each one. I hope you will enjoy reading the thoughtfully written synopses of each convention by our national officers in this issue.

As Editor Susie Burrola and I worked together on the collage of photos featured on page 9, it was fun to relive the memories of so many good times. I am eternally grateful to have such a creative and fun-loving group of sisters to work with all year long. We work hard and accomplish much, but we incorporate fun times and good laughs into everything we do.

During this last quarter, we welcomed two more new auxiliaries, in Richville, Michigan, and McCook, Nebraska. Susie and I made a presentation to a small group of spouses and BLET members in McCook on our trip to Colorado and Nebraska last summer and, although they were not quite ready to organize at that time, the seed was planted. In the months that followed that trip, Susie's tireless efforts to nurture that little seedling along until it was ready to blossom earlier this month were not in vain. Many thanks to Sarah Uerling and Bree Jones for being the guiding force to recruit enough members for a charter in McCook. I am so impressed that this auxiliary to a division with only about 40 BLET members already has 13 members, all spouses! Thank you also to our Past National President Anita Caruso and her husband Sam for briefly coming out of retirement to travel from their home in Omaha to McCook so that Anita could install the new officers of Red Willows Auxiliary No. 623 and help them get off to a good start.

A big thank you also to Audrey Wallis, who reached out to us in mid September, asking how she could get an auxiliary started in eastern Michigan following a meeting she had attended where Michigan State Legislative Board Chairman B.J. Trumble had spoken about the advantages of having a local auxiliary. We had a great meeting in Richville and welcomed eleven new members and officers into the Great Lakes Auxiliary No. 327. Thanks B.J. for your belief in

the Auxiliary and for your help in getting us connected with Audrey! On that trip, we also

met with Division 542 Local Chairman Ed Donnelly in the Detroit area and Division 4 Local Chairman Tim DuBois in Toledo, Ohio, and some of their members, to plant more seeds. We hope to be back to see both of these fine gentlemen in the not-too-distant future to get the spouses in their areas organized. I can't thank Susie enough for courageously making "cold calls" to division officers throughout the year to set up additional meetings in the areas where we know we will be traveling. We try to make the most of every travel opportunity to spread the word about the Auxiliary and recruit new members. With the addition of nine new local auxiliaries and over 150 new members this year, these efforts have been rewarded.

Beginning with this edition of the newsletter, we have increased its size from 12 to 16 pages to accommodate the article/advertisements from the Kujawski Marcus Law Firm and Cornerstone Assurance Group. I have enjoyed working together with representatives from both of these organizations and I believe they have put together excellent submissions that offer important information to educate our readers. We are excited about this new venture and hope that other FELA attorneys and vendors will participate in the future.

I feel like a broken record always saying "thank you, thank you," but we have so many to whom we are grateful. Without all of you helping us, and the assistance we get from the BLET National, we would not be where we are at this time. Thank you also to each of the husbands of our national officers, especially those of us on the Executive Council. Your encouragement and support of each of us, and the Auxiliary as a whole, means the world to us.

As 2015 draws to a close and the new year rolls in, I'd like to leave you with a quote that I read somewhere recently. I can't remember where I saw it or who said it, but I jotted it down because I really resonated with it: *"Real women lift each other up rather than tear each other down... then they become our sisters."* As railroad spouses, we need each other's friendship and support, in good times and in challenging times. That is the premise of this organization. We bond together as sisters, with mutual support of our union brothers and sisters, to create a proactive organization to advance our common interests and to help our union accomplish its goals. Looking forward to another great year in 2016!

Sereena Hogan, National President
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Introducing two new local auxiliaries!



Great Lakes Auxiliary Auxiliary No. 327

**Organized October 18, 2015
Richville, Michigan**

Charter members in photo (not necessarily in this order): Audrey Wallis (President), Kari Jordan (Vice President), Tara Morin (Chaplain), Jennifer Swint (LR), Lindsey Morrison (Asst. LR), Brittany Parks (S/T), Dennis Wallis, Tricia Barcia, Randy Jordon, Brenda Lathrop, Desiree Allard. Although too young to qualify for membership, Lilly, Kalea, and Hunter Wallis joined in to take the oath.

The Red Willow Rails Auxiliary No. 623

**Organized November 12, 2015
McCook, Nebraska**

Front Row: BLET Auxiliary National Past President Anita Caruso, Sarah Uerling, Sue Shepherd, Theresa Ostendorf; **Back Row:** Staci Meyers, Tami Potthoff, Crystal Day, Jan Hubert, Bree Jones.

Not pictured: Kari Clausen, Jennifer Decker, Tangie Rogers, Lori Dack-Pearson, Angie Felber.



Regional Conventions Convene for the Last Time

88th Southeastern Meeting Association by Lawana Poss, National Secretary

Members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen and their families were in attendance for opening ceremonies of the 88th Southeastern Meeting Association (SMA) at Lake Lanier Islands, Buford, Georgia.

Coincidentally, the inaugural SMA was held in Atlanta, Georgia, in March 28-29, 1921, and, on June 14-18, 2015, the final SMA was held in the Atlanta area. SMA Arrangements Chair Teresa Bryant, Local Chairman of Division 30, and Co-Chair Scott Frederick, hosted this year's SMA.

Sister Bryant called the meeting to order. She then introduced Lawana Poss, SMA Auxiliary Chairperson, who presided over the annual presentation of state flags by members of the BLET Auxiliary, a tradition that dates back to 1921. States flags presented in the

ceremony included Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Sereena Hogan, National President of the BLET Auxiliary, carried the United States flag and later addressed the members and families in attendance. Also in attendance was Kathleen Bisbikis, BLET Auxiliary National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative. Kathleen spoke to the members about auxiliary fundraising.

Sister Bryant introduced Brother Mike Lambert, Local Chairman of BLET Division 110, who delivered the opening prayer. Brother Mike Poss, Secretary-Treasurer of the Georgia State Legislative Board, led the memorial ceremony honoring BLET members killed in the line of duty. An empty chair was left at the front of the meeting hall in honor of the organization's departed brothers and sisters.

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce introduced members of the BLET Advisory Board and National Division staff who were in

— *continued on Page 12*

Auxiliary Members Volunteer in Community Efforts, continued

Northern California Fires

by Kathleen Bisbikis, National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Rep.

In September, the Butte Fire raged across 70,868 acres of Northern California. The fire claimed a total of 545 homes, 343 barns and outbuildings, and resulted in the loss of many animals and two human fatalities. A large percentage of the Nor-Cal 39 Auxiliary membership lives in the affected area.

On the day the fire began, I was driving to a neighboring town along the road near the canyon where the fire first broke out. Several Cal Fire helicopters, tankers, and firefighters were working the fire and I felt confident that they would have it under control by morning. The next day; however, I awoke to realize that the fire had grown by leaps and bounds and I learned that many people were being evacuated from their homes as the fire spread out of the canyons and into populated rural farm areas. The morning was met with multiple cries for help to evacuate animals and people out of the fire area and into safe areas that had been set up.

My daughter and I headed out to do what we could to help. We purchased several cases of water to take to the Red Cross shelter in a neighboring town. Upon arrival at the shelter, we learned that there was an effort underway with the Firefighters Auxiliary and the VFW to provide 150 lunches to feed hungry firefighters on the front lines of this growing nightmare. I immediately put out a call to my sisters in Nor Cal 39 and, in no time at all, sisters from all over the valley arrived at the local VFW hall to help. We turned a pool table into an assembly line where we made sandwiches and packed brown bags with snacks. Our auxiliary also helped pay for some of the food. It was the very least we could do for these people working so hard to protect us and for a community of people who support us so strongly with our yearly fundraiser at the Blues and Bones festival.

The following days were met with more bad news as the fire continued to grow closer to several larger towns in the county and more people and animals needed to evacuate. My family, along with other Auxiliary 39 families, including the Elle Family, Sereena Kelling, Jennifer Hayden, and Jana Bauerson, loaded up our trucks and horse trailers to help in the evacuation efforts. Others, including Susie and Oscar Burrola, worked to help sort donated goods. We monitored Facebook and other local community sites for people putting out the cry for help and, driving through areas where the fire was too close for comfort, we were able to move livestock of all shapes and sizes to safety.

As the number of evacuated animals and people grew, so did the need for supplies. BNSF railroad donated several pallets of water that the auxiliary was able to deliver to refugee camps that had been set up for the evacuees in different areas away from the fire. Food for livestock and domestic animals was being donated faster than we could pick it up and deliver it, but again my sisters and I made the rounds to get the supplies to where they were needed most. Strangers who saw what we were doing contacted us via text message and Facebook to ask us how they could help and we put them to work.

Amongst the heartbreak, confusion, and exhaustion that this fire caused in our small community, it also brought us together. To express our gratitude to the firefighters,



Auxiliary members and family members gathered at the VFW Hall in San Andreas to pack sack lunches for hungry firefighters. Left to right: Susie Burrola, Serena Kelling, Lynette Sanchez, Jeanette Elle, Kathleen Bisbikis, Jennifer Hayden, Hillary Sanchez, and Eric Cancilla.



Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary members Lynette Sanchez, Ashley Bisbikis, Kathleen Bisbikis, and Jeanette Elle load up a trailer full of animal feed to deliver to those who were caring for animals that had been evacuated from their homes and ranches.

the community gathered early one morning in the downtown streets of Angels Camp, California, holding up signs and flags to let each of the fire crews that were changing shifts know how much we appreciated them. It meant as much to them to see us out there that morning as it did to us, being there to let them know we were so thankful for their help.

My involvement in the Butte fire made me appreciate this wonderful small town community that I live in, and it made me so grateful to my sisters and brothers of Nor Cal 39. They all truly rose to the occasion and helped out wherever it was needed, without question. I think I can speak for all of us when I say that it was an honor for us to be able to give back and it's what we all feel that our auxiliary is about—coming together, not for ourselves, but for a greater good. I encourage all of our auxiliaries across the nation to get involved in community efforts, not just in times of disaster but in the good times as well. People are learning who we are now, and they know we are more than just a group of railroad spouses; we are an active group of willing and strong families who will go above and beyond whenever we are needed. There is no better feeling in the world!

ANDREW M. HALEY
PRESIDENT



EDWARD P. HALEY
NATIONAL DIRECTOR

CORNERSTONE ASSURANCE GROUP

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The Importance of Understanding Disability Insurance

For over 125 years, the mission of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen Auxiliary has been to support the interests and welfare of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen throughout the United States. The BLET Auxiliary has been a central point of support, education, and guidance, as well being an important resource in times of need and crisis. It is important for the BLET Auxiliary to understand how the railroad worker can best protect their income and improve their own insurance benefits.

Union members' benefits for insurance often fall far short of what they need to support themselves and their families. Railroaders are constantly promoting safety, fighting for better working conditions, and doing all they can to protect both themselves and their income. Accidents, illnesses and sudden misfortunes can occur to anyone, at any time, and at any age. The union does make a great attempt to provide benefits when negotiating with the rail carrier. However, the rail carrier disability policies often do not provide sufficient insurance coverage necessary to maintain a family's current lifestyle. Other rail carriers provide no employer-paid disability insurance policy, leaving a member with even less protection. While Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) sickness benefits are available to members, the benefits pay only \$300 per week for a maximum of 26 weeks. Additionally, any railroader who has worked less than 240 months on the railroad would not qualify for an Occupational Long-Term Disability from RRB. Because it is difficult to get the proper protection from RRB benefits and the rail carrier benefits, the union has developed a relationship with Cornerstone Assurance Group to help provide additional voluntary benefits. These plans provide excellent voluntary coverage and protection to fill the gap for a union member that is out of work due to injury or illness.

Disability insurance can effectively provide a steady benefit income to help members pay their bills and alleviate a severe financial burden in the event of a disability. Railroad workers and their family members must remember that their "most valuable asset" is not their home, car, or other valuables, but rather their ability to earn a working income. On average, there is a 3 in 10 chance of a railroader being out of work for 90 days or more during their career. Disability insurance provides the ability to pay bills without having to tap into savings or make a significant lifestyle change. The pain of dealing with an injury or illness is stressful enough without the worry of not being able to pay bills or maintain a normal life. Members with disability insurance are happy to say they can maintain their current, comfortable lifestyle until they are healthy enough to return to work.

Cornerstone negotiates with some of the very best insurance companies in the industry to offer BLET members premier short term disability, long term disability, accidental death and dismemberment, and life insurance coverage at competitive group rates. Additionally, Cornerstone works with the BLET union officers to ensure proper administration of their group benefits. Lastly, claims advocates from Cornerstone work directly with the union members and their spouses to help provide a smooth claims experience. Disability plans through Cornerstone offer the shortest waiting period and the richest disability benefits available in the marketplace. Railroaders who have coverage on these plans advocate for their brothers and sisters to participate by saying: "It's whether you can afford this type of income protection, but in our line of work, and in fighting the rail carrier, you cannot afford to **NOT** have this this type of protection".

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ON THE JOB INJURIES: *Information every BLET spouse needs to know*

By John P. Kujawski and

Bob Marcus - Kujawski Marcus, LLC

Railroading is a dangerous job. Hazardous working conditions, unsafe track, and defective equipment are all-too-common occurrences on the Railroad. Hopefully, you will never receive the dreaded telephone call telling you that the railroader in your life was injured. If you do receive that call, you need to take certain actions to ensure that you and your family's rights are protected.

If your Spouse is Injured on the Job:

1. If you are contacted by the Railroad, make them identify themselves and make certain they prove they are a Railroad Official.
2. Make them tell you the location of your spouse and his/her condition.
3. You **do not** have to allow them into your home or into the hospital room.
4. Request pertinent information but do not give the Railroad Official any information with regard to your spouse's condition. **Do not make any verbal or written statements or recordings.**
5. If you are called by the Railroad Official, get whatever information you need to locate your spouse and then do not discuss anything further. You are under no obligation to talk to them about your spouse's condition.
6. Instruct your spouse's doctors and nurses that you do not want them to discuss his/her condition with the Railroad and they are not allowed into the treatment area. **The Railroad does not have the right to discuss your spouse's condition with the medical**

staff. Do not sign any authorizations for the Railroad to obtain your spouse's medical information. You are under no obligation to do so. Make sure your spouse does not sign anything or fill out any reports while he/she is medicated or in pain. If the Railroad requests that your spouse fill out an accident report, ask the doctor or nurse to have the Railroad Official removed from the room. This is covered by a Federal Statute – HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act). The Railroad is not entitled to your spouse's private medical information without his/her consent or yours if they are unable to communicate for themselves.

7. **Do not sign anything or accept anything from the Railroad.**
8. After you have been given the information relative to your spouse's whereabouts, have no further contact with any Railroad Official. There is no charge for a consultation with a member of our law firm. You can also contact your spouse's Local Chairman or other union officer for information.
9. Advise the Railroad Official that you do not want any further contact until you contact them directly or your attorney contacts them. Once you mention there is an attorney involved, they will leave you alone.
10. **Do not let any Railroad Official make any medical decisions for your spouse.** This includes the choice of doctors or hospitals for treatment. You have the right to make that decision yourself.
11. **Your spouse is not covered by State Workers' Compensation laws.** Railroad workers are covered by a

Federal Law known as the "Federal Employers' Liability Act" (FELA). **If the providers ask for insurance information, you should give them the current health insurance carrier information under the union's policy.** Please be sure you advise them that it is not a workers' compensation case since the information will state it is work-related and the provider will assume it falls under Workers' Compensation and contact the Railroad. **It is very important to make sure the provider does not discuss your spouse's case with the Railroad.**

If your spouse is injured on the job, the Railroad will require him/her to fill out a "Personal Injury Report" as soon as possible. Many Railroads require the injured employee to complete this report at the hospital, or even after they have received prescribed narcotic medicine. The purpose of this report is NOT to protect your spouse; it is to protect the Railroad. The Railroad will attempt to use this report against your injured spouse in subsequent negotiations or litigation. Below is a list of information that you and your spouse needs to know before completing an injury report.

If your Spouse needs to fill out a "Personal Injury Report":

1. If your spouse is injured, he/she should report the accident immediately to a supervisor and request immediate medical attention.
2. Your spouse needs to complete a personal injury report as soon as possible in the presence of your local chairman or other union official.
3. Due to the nature of the injury, your spouse may not be able to immediately fill out a report. He/she should complete

the report at the first opportunity that he/she is physically and, more importantly, mentally able to do so. If he/she is on certain types of medication, he/she may not be mentally able to complete the report.

4. In some cases, such as a repetitive trauma (i.e. carpal tunnel, hearing loss, overuse syndrome, degenerative changes), your spouse may not be aware that the injury was caused by his/her employment until he/she is diagnosed by a physician. At that time, your spouse should inform the Railroad of the injury and file a personal injury report. Your spouse should also contact our law firm before filing a report for repetitive trauma to insure that all questions are fully answered.
5. Statements made by your spouse in a personal injury report, if not accurate, can be used against him/her by the Railroad. To ensure the accuracy of his/her report and to avoid making untrue admissions, please contact our law firm for appropriate legal advice.
6. Keep a copy of whatever record or report your spouse signs. This will protect your spouse from any entries being made on the report at a later time.
7. Contact our law firm before giving a statement, which will impact your legal rights and privileges. The claims agent is not your friend.

Kujawski Marcus, LLC was established by John P. Kujawski over thirty years ago. Mr. Kujawski and Bob Marcus are committed to protecting the rights of working people and clients who have been seriously injured. Based in O'Fallon, Illinois, the firm practices in the areas of: Federal Employers' Liability Act (FELA), personal injury, medical malpractice, products liability, motorcycle accidents, auto accidents, workplace/industrial accidents, and general negligence.

Our firm enjoys the highest legal rating attainable, that of an AV rating as determined by Martindale-Hubbell, a national rating agency overseeing attorneys. Mr. Kujawski is an AV Preeminent peer review rated lawyer who has been practicing since 1972. Bob Marcus has been practicing law for more than 13 years and has earned a Martindale-Hubbell client review rating of Preeminent 5 out of 5, and has been named a Super Lawyers "Rising Star" for 2016.

The lawyers at Kujawski Marcus, LLC have recovered millions in verdicts and settlements for injured railroad workers. Recently, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld the FELA and the right of Railroad workers nationwide in affirming a \$275,000.00 verdict Kujawski Marcus, LLC obtained on behalf of locomotive engineer Robert McBride against the CSX Transportation, Inc. In the last two years alone, John Kujawski and Bob Marcus have recovered over \$27 million in confidential settlements for Railroad workers who have suffered traumatically amputated limbs.

Kujawski Marcus, LLC

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

CHARTER MEMBER OF
BLET DESIGNATED LEGAL COUNSEL
Concentrating in FELA Injury Trial Practice

Wishing the BLET Auxiliary and their Families a Safe and Happy Holiday Season!

Visit us on-line to read about our U.S. Supreme Court Victory in
McBride v. CSX and \$10 Million Dollar Verdict in *Burden v. CSX*
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www.kujawskimarcus.com

Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

The cool weather has arrived and 2015 is quickly coming to an end. 2016 promises to be a wonderful year for the Auxiliary. We are so delighted to have many new Auxiliaries and members! Welcome aboard everyone!

WELCOME TO OUR NEW AUXILIARIES!

Great Lakes Auxiliary 327 - Richville, Michigan
Red Willow Rails 623 - McCook, Nebraska

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS AT LARGE!

Robert Marcus, O'Fallon, IL; John Kujawski, O'Fallon, IL; Shainita D. Carter, Conyers, GA.

T-SHIRTS

We have small sizes only left in the black v-neck "BLET Chick" t-shirts. The shirts are \$30. Please contact National 2nd Vice President Kathleen Bisbikis at 209-786-7367 or biz4413@gmail.com if you would like to purchase one or more shirts.

CARE AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CAP)

Please check to see if someone in your Auxiliary may be eligible for the Care and Assistance Program and encourage them to apply. Members-at-large are eligible also!! Our CAP recipients are grateful for what we do. Please contact me for applications!

MEMBERS AT LARGE

Dues notices will be mailed in December. If your address or any other information has changed, please let me know so I can mail your dues notice to the correct address. I should receive all dues payments by March 1, 2016.

AUXILIARY SECRETARIES

You will receive your Auxiliary Packets in December. Please have these back to me **BEFORE** March 1, 2016. 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.

SCHOLARSHIP NEWS

If you have children who are college bound, they may be eligible to apply for the BLET Auxiliary Scholarship. BLET Auxiliary Scholarship information and applications can be obtained on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net. You can also find a link

from the BLET website at www.ble-t.org under "Departments," then "BLET Auxiliary." Scholarship applications for the 2016-2017 academic school year are due in my office on or before April 1, 2016. Late applications will not be considered.

Please read **ALL** instructions!! Changes have been made to the application and eligibility. Also, please note that we will not be accepting applications for IWC-only scholarships as this scholarship program has been discontinued.

OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES TO:

Debbie Keele, Alternate National Secretary — Debbie's father, Kenneth Biesemeyer, passed away in September. Debbie is a member of Helen Gould Auxiliary, Osawatomie, Kansas.

Jim Keele, Associate Member of Helen Gould Auxiliary, Osawatomie, Kansas — Jim's mother, Mildred Keele, passed away in October.

Mike Sproule, Associate Member of Enchanted Echos Auxiliary 446, Belen, New Mexico — Mike's father, Frank Sproule, passed away in October.

We send our thoughts and prayers to Mike Sproule, James and Debbie Keele, and their families.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!!!!

Jenni and Dave Gossett renewed their wedding vows aboard a cruise ship in October! Jenni is the Secretary for Mile High Auxiliary 5280, Denver, Colorado, and Dave is an Associate Member.

I would like to wish my husband a Happy Anniversary!! Mike and I are celebrating year 39 and I am not sure where the time went. Time flies when you are having fun!!

Please call or e-mail me or any National Officer when there is a death of a member or the death of one of their family members. We want to be able to send our condolences to the family. We would like to also share in the joy!! Please let me know of any exciting happenings!

I send warm wishes to you and your families for a beautiful Christmas and a safe, Happy New Year!!



Lawana Poss can be reached at 770-497-8898, by e-mail at Lewp2007@bellsouth.net, or by mail at 1394 Bywood Court, Suwanee, Georgia 30024.

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

— Lawana



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE



The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing

— Albert Einstein

Positive Train Control

On October 29, 2015, President Obama signed into law HR 3819. This legislation extends the deadline for railroads to implement the positive train control system (PTC). The new deadline is December 31, 2018. Railroads will also be given the opportunity to apply for a waiver of an additional two years beyond the December 31, 2018 deadline if it is needed. This new deadline should abolish any threats made by the carriers to shut down operations due to their inability to get PTC in place by the original December 2015 deadline and should keep the country's rail traffic moving as usual.

Wisconsin Takes Rail Safety into Their Own Hands

This month, Wisconsin saw the derailment of two trains, both carrying potentially dangerous freight. In Alma, Wisconsin, 17,000 gallons of ethanol was spilled into the Mississippi River and, just a few days later, in Watertown, Wisconsin, approximately 500 gallons of crude oil was spilled, causing an

evacuation of nearby homes. Thankfully, in both cases there were no explosions or injuries. In both accidents, the tank cars were the older DOT-111 models, but in the Watertown derailment they were DOT-111s with the retrograde.

These back-to-back accidents caused the legislators in the state to demand that their voices be heard both on the state and federal levels. On the state level, Representative Jill Billings (D-LaCrosse) looked to her neighboring state of Minnesota and modeled a safety bill similar to theirs that would include the following: "The bill would provide for additional state rail track inspectors; require railroad companies to submit prevention and response plans to the state; provide training for local emergency first responders along railroad routes; provide guidelines for coordination and response timelines in the event of a derailment; and require the Office of the Commissioner of Railroads to submit a report to the legislature on emergency preparedness, assessment of training needs for first responders statewide, inventory of both public and private resources available in the event of a derailment, and recommendations to the legislature to improve preparedness and safety."

In Milwaukee, Mayor Tom Barrett is concerned about the integrity of the bridges and infrastructure that is used in the transportation of the oil trains. Mayor Barrett said, "There has to be a stronger emphasis on safety — not just in urban areas but smaller

communities as well. Watertown is not a large community. And the fact that you had to have evacuations, that is very problematic."

On the federal level, Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisconsin) has been pushing for the last several years to strengthen rail safety reform for areas hauling crude oil in her state. "I have been sounding the alarm for two years on the need to put in place strong rail safety reforms," the Wisconsin Democrat said in a written statement. "These two train derailments are more evidence why Congress needs to take action on the reforms I have proposed."

OSHA Publishes Final Rules for Transportation Employee's Whistleblower Protection

On November 9, 2015, OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) published its final rule that will provide procedures and guidelines as well as timeframes for employees who have engaged in a whistleblower complaint.

"Railroad workers have the right to report injuries and to follow their doctor's treatment plans for injuries sustained in the course of their employment without fearing that they will be retaliated against," said Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health Dr. David Michaels. "Railroad and public transit agency workers must never be silenced by the threat of losing their job when their safety or the safety of the public is at stake."

Employers are required to provide their employees with a safe work environment under the Occupational Safety and Health act of 1970. Through the use of this Final Rule that went into effect immediately on November 9, 2015, OSHA will be better able to enforce and ensure that employees are working in a safe environment without the threat of retaliation.

1. Prompt medical treatment violations or interference with medical treatment cases will be handled procedurally the same way as all other whistleblower cases.
2. A refusal to allow an employee to return to work, which is not based on standards recorded in the railroad's official policies, not uniformly applied, or not medically reasonable, can be offered to demonstrate that the refusal is not a legitimate safety concern, but rather motivated by retaliatory intent.
3. The time limit to file a whistleblower complaint is 180 days after the railroad's decision has been made and communicated to the employee. To clarify, this is when the employee is aware or should be aware of the decision, not when the employee learns of the retaliatory nature of the action.
4. A contributing factor for a retaliatory action is that the adverse action must take place within a temporal time of the protected activity, or at the first opportunity

available to the retaliating manager. That can be a number of years between the protected activity and the retaliatory actions in situations where the manager did not have the opportunity to retaliate until a later time.

5. Interest on awarded back pay will be computed by compounding daily IRS interest rates for the underpayment of taxes, which is currently the Federal short-term rate plus three percent.
6. Front pay is a potential remedy where reinstatement is not possible because of the unacceptable working relationship, the position has been abolished, or the employee is medically unable to work because of severe depression caused by the retaliation.
7. OSHA has the authority to grant injunctive relief such as expunging certain personnel files, not applying a policy to an employee, posting a notice regarding a whistleblower result, training for managers, etc.
8. Hearsay evidence is admissible.
9. An employee filing a complaint in district court must give notice to OSHA within seven days after filing the complaint.
10. An employee may file both a whistleblower and a FELA complaint at the same time. If violations of other laws are involved, employees may also file those complaints at the same time.

Ohio Replaces Signs at Railroad Crossings

Railroad crossings across the State of Ohio are getting a facelift. More than 1000 yield

signs are being replaced with stop signs. Ohio Department of Transportation is hopeful that the stop signs will cause people to pay closer attention at crossings. By stopping and looking both ways before proceeding over the tracks, it is Ohio's intention to increase safety for drivers as well as train crews and decrease the number of crossing accidents. Way to go Ohio!

FSA to Continue in 2016

Thanks to all the BLET members who enrolled in the Flexible Spending program. Because of all of you, we will once again have this program available to us in 2016. The 2012 National Agreement states that a minimum of 7.5% of eligible engineers must enroll in the program or the carrier would have the option to terminate it. This year, for 2016 enrollment, 8.65% of eligible employees signed up for this great benefit. This year's enrollment number beats that of last year's 8.57%. "The Health FSA program has proven to be a money saver for BLET families over the past few years," President Pierce said. "I am optimistic that participation levels will continue to increase as the word spreads about the plan's benefits and more members become familiar with the positive aspects of the plan."

The FSA is a great tool that can be used to cover out-of-pocket medical expenses such as deductibles, co-pays, and prescription costs that are not covered, as well as dental and optometric out-of-pocket expense.

Feinberg Confirmed as FRA Administrator

The Senate has confirmed President Obama's nomination of Sarah Feinberg as the new ad-

ministrator of the Federal Railway Administration. Feinberg has been the acting administrator since January 2015 when former administrator Joseph Szabo resigned. Ms. Feinberg's previous positions include Chief of Staff of the DOT, Director of Policy and Crisis Communication at Facebook, as well as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Advisor at the White House. Feinberg is the second woman to be named as the FRA administrator since its beginnings in 1966.

Support for S-2148 Protecting Medicare Beneficiaries Act of 2015

On October 7, 2015, Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) and 20 supporting colleagues introduced S.2148, the "Protecting Medicare Beneficiaries Act of 2015." The purpose of the bill is to prevent large increases in Medicare Part B premiums and deductible in 2016.

It has been announced that there will be no cost of living increase for 2016 for Social Security and Railroad Retirement beneficiaries, and the potential increase of up to 52% in Medicare premiums would raise the amount from its current \$104.90 per month to \$159.30 for Part B premiums. Medicare beneficiaries would also see their deductible potentially climb from \$147.00 a year to \$223.00. S.2148 would freeze the current rate at the 2015 level and provide more stability for those who would be affected. Sen. Wyden said, "It is urgent that Congress take decisive action to ensure vulnerable Americans aren't harmed by this archaic policy."

Your support for S-2148 is needed to protect those who would be affected. You are encouraged to

contact your congressman to ask for their support of S.2148.

Railroad Unemployment and Sickness Benefits will Decrease

The information below was taken directly from RRB.gov:

"Beginning October 1, 2015, the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) will reduce railroad unemployment and sickness insurance benefits by 6.8 percent, down from the current 7.3 percent reduction, due to federal budget cuts required by law.

The adjusted reduction amount is based on revised projections of benefit claims and payments under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act. It will remain in effect through September 30, 2016, the end of the fiscal year. Reductions in future fiscal years, should they occur, will be calculated based on applicable law.

The daily benefit rate is \$72, so the 6.8 percent reduction in railroad unemployment and sickness benefits will reduce the maximum amount payable in a 2-week period with 10 days of unemployment from \$720.00 to \$671.04.

Certain railroad sickness benefits are also subject to regular tier I railroad retirement taxes, resulting in a further reduction of 7.65 percent. Applying the 6.8 percent reduction to these sickness benefits will result in a maximum 2-week total of \$619.71.

These reductions are required under the Budget Control Act of 2011 and a subsequent sequestration order to implement the mandated cuts. The law exempts social security benefits, as well as railroad retirement, survivor,

— continued on back cover

Regional Conventions

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Lawana Poss, Chair, and Wanda Hawkins, Secretary-Treasurer, of the Southwestern Meeting Association Auxiliary.

attendance, and also acknowledged the presence of former BLET National President Paul Sorrow. President Pierce spoke about the upcoming presidential elections.

On Monday afternoon, the BLET conducted their closed meeting for BLET members only, and the BLET Auxiliary had its open meeting for all guests in attendance. Educational workshops throughout the week featured specialized training for BLET Legislative Representatives, Secretary-Treasurers, and Local Chairmen.

Tuesday, the golf tournament was held at Lanier Island Emerald Point Golf Course, and non-golfers enjoyed a family day to explore North Georgia, followed by an outdoor cookout.

The dinner banquet was held on Thursday. The Southeastern Auxiliary flags were auctioned to the highest bidders. I know that these flags will be enjoyed in their new homes. Congratulations to the winners! What a wonderful souvenir from the final SMA. The Auxiliary raffle tickets were drawn and winners announced. Many of the items were donated back to the Auxiliary and the auction continued. Thank you to everyone who participated. We were able to raise more money for the BLET Auxiliary because of your generosity. Thank you, again!

Teresa Bryant and Scott Frederick, along with Division 30, thank you so very much for everything—Southern hospitality at its finest!

77th Eastern Union Meeting Association

By Susie Burrola, National 1st Vice President

A fond Farewell was the theme of the 77th Eastern Union Meeting Association Convention and a fond farewell indeed it was! Kevin

Moore and his wife Beth, and the EUMA Arrangements Committee, did a spectacular job hosting this convention at Boston Park Plaza Hotel in downtown Boston, July 26-29.

It was an honor and pleasure for me to attend this last EUMA convention. The convention kicked off with early registration on Sunday, July 26, followed by a welcome reception that evening. On Monday morning, opening ceremonies began with a presentation of the flags and the Boston Gaelic Column of Pipes and Drums playing the bagpipes—what a beautiful contribution to start off the event. BLET National President Dennis Pierce spoke on the importance of being vigilant on current political issues, as well as the war on workers. The guest speakers—International Brotherhood of Teamsters Vice President John Murphy, Congressman Mike Capuano, IBT International Vice President & President of Teamster Local 25 Sean O'Brien, and Steve Tolman, Massachusetts AFL-CIO President and brother of our very own BLET Vice President & National Legislative Representative John Tolman—had a wealth of information and great stories to share.

After lunch, the BLET reconvened for their closed meeting and the BLET Auxiliary held an open business meeting, welcoming new and returning members. The Auxiliary officers, along with our guest speakers, provided education and information about the Auxiliary and the issues that affect our railroaders and their families today. Attending Auxiliary meetings is a great way to learn and share information and meet spouses who share the same lifestyle.

That evening, we were off to Fenway Park to watch the Boston Red Sox vs. Chicago White Sox game. Fenway Park is a beautiful stadium, with much about the history of the Red Sox displayed throughout the park. Tuesday was a fun-filled day for all. Golfers met up at the Ponkapoag Golf Course while other members and their families got to take in the city. The central location of the hotel allowed guests to walk to many downtown attractions in this city filled with so much history.

On Wednesday, training and education workshops were offered for BLET officers. During this time, the spouses got to take advantage



Aux. 422 member Heidi Wright participates in the icebreaker at the EUMA Auxiliary Meeting.

of meeting with health care providers, Railroad Retirement, and insurance vendors, as well as representatives from the Railroaders Guide to Healthy Sleep. That evening, the membership gathered to hear the scholarship winners and attend the last EUMA Banquet. It was a wonderful evening, starting with a slideshow of photos from past EUMA conventions, fundraiser auctions and raffles, and much laughter as well as sadness that this would be the last EUMA convention. Special thanks to Matt Kronymak for auctioning off a limited edition framed railroad print donated by Mark Robb, President of BRCF. The funds generated helped tremendously with our scholarship fund. Matt also auctioned off a baseball jersey donated by Kevin Moore to help with ALS.

Once again, I would like to thank Kevin and Beth Moore, the EUMA Arrangements Committee, the vendors, the FELA Attorneys, and all the other donors for a wonderful farewell convention. I hope to see many of those I met at this convention next year at the Eastern Regional Meeting in Chicago, Illinois.

International Western Convention

By Kathleen Bisbikis, National 2nd Vice President

The 75th and final IWC was held at the Downtown Embassy Suites in Denver, Colorado, August 16-20, 2015. The convention was hosted by co-chairmen James Wilmesher, Chairman of the Colorado State Legislative Board; and Cory Runion, Chairman of the Wyoming State Legislative Board.

This year's kickoff day events included the annual golf tournament held at the Fox Hollow Golf Course, as well as the opportunity for families to tour the Colorado Railroad Museum with a catered barbecue lunch.

Opening ceremonies took place the morning of August 18 with the presentation of the flags by BLET members Daniel Tolaman from Div. 174 and Kristopher Miller of Div. 940. The National Anthem was beautifully sung by Alison Anderson, daughter of BLET member Mark Anderson. Ryan Snow, First Vice Chairman of the California State Legislative Board, offered the opening prayer, and the traditional empty chair ceremony was presided over by Cory Runion. BLET National President Dennis Pierce gave a great speech about the political challenges that we will all be facing as we head into the upcoming presidential election year. National BLET Auxiliary President Sereena Hogan spoke about the growth of the Auxiliary in the last year, as well as the auxiliary's plans for continued membership growth and fundraising. Guest speakers included Auxiliary Member-at-Large Naomi Muscha, who currently serves as a North Dakota State Representative. Naomi spoke about the importance of getting involved in your state government and your ability to make a difference in your own communities.

Following the opening ceremonies, an open Auxiliary meeting was held for all those in attendance and we had a great turnout. Guest speakers include FELA Attorney Chip Rabb; Ed Haley, Cornerstone As-

surance Group; Juna Snow, Railroaders' Guide to Healthy Sleep, and Alicia Harbin, Financial Planning for Railroad Employees. Attendees had the opportunity for Q&A with all the speakers and lots of great stories were shared back and forth between those in attendance.



Members-at-large Jodi and Will Wallace stylin' it up in the photo booth at the IWC banquet.

President Sereena Hogan handed out door prize tickets and each person in attendance was able to pick one wrapped gift from the gift table. The gifts were amazing and several very happy people left with their gifts tucked safely away. Thank you Sister Sereena; your shopping sense is dead-on based upon all the smiling faces.

That evening, buses transported attendees to a Colorado Rockies vs. Nationals baseball game. Although the weather unexpectedly turned very chilly that evening, a good time was had by all!

The day of the 19th was filled with educational workshops. The National Auxiliary held an informal brainstorming and Q&A session that afternoon, hoping to get ideas as well as share ideas with those auxiliary members in attendance. That evening, at the closing banquet, we drew tickets for our fundraising raffle and auctioned off some of the larger items that had been donated. Many thanks to all who donated the wonderful prizes to us, especially the IWC for providing us with a budget each year to purchase raffle gifts! The National Auxiliary also, for the first time ever, created a photo booth with fun props for everyone to enjoy and it was the hit of the party! The 75th and final IWC ended with lots of laughs and wonderful memories. Thank you Jim and Corey for all your hard work to create a great farewell convention. We will never forget the generosity extended to us by the International Western Convention over the many years!

80th Southwest Convention Meeting

By Terri Fleming, National Treasurer

The 80th and final Southwestern Convention Meeting was held at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Tulsa, Oklahoma, September 13 – 17, 2015. The Hotel is located on the Cherokee Nation Reservation and run by the tribe. It was a bittersweet convention knowing it would be the last SWCM. Perhaps for that reason, we had a large turnout of new members and old friends.

The festivities kicked off on Sunday night with the annual Poker Tournament, with proceeds benefitting the SWCM Scholarship Program. In addition to providing a good time for the participants, this year's tournament also had a professional dealer at each table. Monday, the annual SWCM Golf Tournament, hosted by the BLET Auxiliary, was played on site at the Cherokee Hills Golf Club. Thanks to Alternate National Treasurer Helen Brand and her husband Charlie for doing a terrific job on the tournament, along with Brother Jeff Myers, Golf Chairman. Non-golfers were given the opportunity to take part in the Will Rogers History Tour. The SWCM Golf Tournament has been one of the Auxiliary's biggest Scholarship Program fundraisers since 2004, when the Convention Committee began turning over the proceeds to the Auxiliary in exchange for our help on tournament day. In the last few years, the Auxiliary has taken care of most of the arrangements with the exception of choosing the course. In honor of her dedicated service to the Auxiliary and the excellent job she does running the golf tournament, Helen was honored at the banquet with a unique mantle clock bearing the Auxiliary's logo. Thanks again Helen for all you have done and still continue to do.

The convention officially began with a reception and ARLA presentation in the beautiful and scenic Sky Room, providing important information and updates pertaining to the Federal Employers Liability Act (FELA). Opening ceremonies were uplifting, due in part to special guest speaker Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Bill John Baker. He spoke about his personal life struggles and about his people on the reservation. It was inspirational to hear how he and his people care for each other and especially for the children of the tribe, with home, health, and education being of utmost importance to them. As I listened to him, I thought how the BLET and their families feel the same way, helping each other towards a better future. In addition to National President Dennis Pierce, National President Sereena Hogan delivered an excellent address to attendees. She also bore the solemn duty of conducting the Memorial Service in honor of our fallen brothers and sisters killed in the line of duty.

During the closed BLET business meeting, the Auxiliary held our open meeting, which turned out to be standing room only. A Cherokee Tribe Storyteller provided a colorful and amusing story with a moral. President Hogan reported that seven new local Auxiliaries have been recently organized and there was interest expressed at the meeting to form two more. First Vice President Susie Burrola reported on her efforts in reaching out to not only existing auxiliaries, but also local divisions and spouses who could potentially be interested in joining our organization. Other speakers provided information to attendees, including Andy Haley, from Cornerstone Assurance Group, and Tom Gaither, investigator for the Kujawski Marcus law firm, who spoke about his ordeal when he sustained an on-the-job injury, important tips about what to do and not do in such a situation, and how the FELA attorneys can be helpful when an injury or incident occurs. Monday night we boarded buses for the historic Cain's Ballroom in the heart of downtown Tulsa. The ballroom was built in 1924 and has seen



Photo courtesy of John Bentley, Director of Publications, BLET National

Attendees Tammy and Steven Poole, and Tracy and Bradley Meers, listen intently to the guest speakers at the SWCM Auxiliary Meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

its share of famous musicians perform within its walls. A barbecue fountain provided the appetizers and Oklahoma Joe's Barbeque, which adjoined the ballroom, provided dinner. Easy Street's classic rock and roll musings rounded out the evening's entertainment.

One of the most important facets of the SWCM has always been the offering of educational opportunities for members and their spouses. Workshops included Operating Practices by an FRA Representative, training sessions for Local Chairmen, Secretary-Treasurers, and Legislative Representative, as well as United Health Care and Railroad Retirement Board updates.

The last night of the last-ever SWCM was celebrated at the hotel with a wonderful banquet and music. The winners of the raffle benefitting the SWCM Scholarship fund were announced as well as those who won the beautiful artwork donated by Brother Chris Showalter, Division 523. As a side note, over the years and because of the dedication and hard work of the SWCM Standing Committee, the Southwest has awarded a total of 660 scholarships over the last 20 years – something the SWCM can be very proud of.

Thanks to all who worked so hard to make our last hurrah one to remember, especially Division 179 Local Chairman Dana Harlow and his wife Janet, along with the members of Division 179. See you next year in Long Beach, California!

Going Green . . .

You can help reduce our footprint on the environment by going green. We now offer readers the option to receive the newsletter in digital format. If you would like to receive your newsletter as an e-mail attachment sent to you each quarter, please e-mail publisher Sereena Hogan at vp3sereena@aol.com to let us know. As always, our newsletter is available on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net even before the copies are mailed out.



Greetings from your Editor, Susie Burrola

Autumn is a time for harvest and reflection. As we slow down from the intensity of summer and contemplate the past year, reflecting on our own personal “harvest,” we can appreciate where we have grown as well as examine our challenges. The last year has certainly been one of growth for the Auxiliary, as evidenced by the

nine new local auxiliaries and the many new members-at-large we have “harvested.” We are working hard to bring the presence of our 128-year-old organization to the attention of local BLET officers, members, and their families, and those efforts are paying off. Our officers’ attendance and presentations at BLET local division meetings, general committee meetings, legislative board meetings, and the regional meetings is essential, as these opportunities allow us to familiarize those in attendance with who we are and what we do.

We have made many changes within our organization in order to keep up with the times. We must embrace change as it is inevitable, whether we want it or not. We are continually adapting to the changes that occur in the railroad industry, the BLET, and in cultural norms, and we strive to implement changes that are in the best interest of our organization and its members. Even with the numerous changes we have made over the years, we continue to have obstacles to overcome; however, I am confident that we can do it.

While the auxiliary offers a variety of programs, the one that we feel offers the most tangible results is our Legislative Program. Our membership can work together as a group to create a strong voice in the halls of Congress and in the state houses to help promote legislation that impacts our railroaders and their families as well as the union movement in general and the middle class working people of our country.

Over the decades, auxiliaries have proven that their members can make a difference. Josephine Hoffa, wife of the infamous James R. “Jimmy” Hoffa (General President of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, 1958 - 1971), was asked to create a women’s auxiliary political action group. When Teamster Counsel Sidney Zagri was named as Director of the newly formed IBT Department of Legislation and Political Education in 1959, he quickly realized that one of the best resources the union had was wives and women members, as women had been proven to be outstanding political organizers. Mrs. Hoffa became an essential part of the Teamsters’ D.R.I.V.E. (Democrat, Republican, Independent, Voter, Education) political action committee. Her ultimate goal was to have a major auxiliary in every Joint Council and make each D.R.I.V.E. unit a political force at the precinct and block level. Sound familiar?

Mrs. Hoffa was one of the first union spouses to see that political action was the best defense against the erosion of workers’ rights in the 1950s. She was quoted as saying: “Labor’s enemies don’t stop for lunch, so neither can we.” She knew taking on a task like D.R.I.V.E. was not for the faint hearted. Many women seemed to not care at all about political issues. Many did not even vote. Mrs. Hoffa created a strong coalition of women working on legislative issues related to their families and communities and, with their knowledge of the issues, these women gained the respect of leaders on Capitol Hill. They were well informed and not shy about holding Senators and Congressmen accountable for their campaign promises. Senator Hubert Humphrey said he had never seen a more effective political action program than the Teamster women’s motorcades. (Source: Teamster History, <https://teamster.org/about/teamster-history/drive>.)

With the election year just around the corner, now is the time that we must educate ourselves, encourage every citizen to vote, and support those legislators who will stand behind unions. We must all stand together in solidarity to protect that for which our union officers and members have worked so hard.

*“Our lives begin to
end the day we
become silent
about things
that matter”*

— Martin Luther King Jr.

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

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Legislative Update, continued from Page 11

and disability benefits paid by the RRB, from sequestration.”

When sequestration first took effect in March 2013, railroad unemployment and sickness benefits were subject to a 9.2 percent reduction. Under the law’s requirements, this amount was then adjusted to 7.2 percent in October 2013, and 7.3 percent in October 2014.

In fiscal year 2014, the RRB paid \$11.9 billion in retirement and survivor benefits to about 562,000 beneficiaries, and net unemployment-sickness benefits of \$84.4 million to nearly 25,000 claimants.

Kathleen Bisbikis can be reached by phone at; 209-786-7367, by mail at 7367 Stabulis Rd., Valley Springs, California, 95252, or by e-mail at biz4413@gmail.com.

2016 Regional Meetings

**Eastern Regional Meeting
July 11 - 14, 2016 — Chicago, Ill.**

**Western Regional Meeting
August 22 - 25, 2016 — Long Beach, Calif.**

The national officers of the BLET Auxiliary extend our best wishes to each and every one of our readers for a happy holiday season and a very Happy New Year!
