



# 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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Kathleen Bisbikis, President • Rachel Pharris, 1st Vice President • Jodi Wallace, Secretary

Chris Carvalho Baldwin, Treasurer • Natalie Miller, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative • [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net)



THE NATIONAL B.L.E.T. AUXILIARY

## RAFFLE SOLO-STOVE-BONFIRE

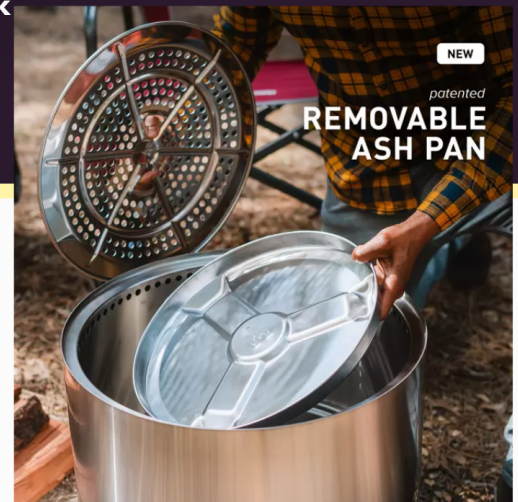
TICKETS ON SALE FEB 1ST 2023

Drawing will be May 27, 2023 @ 5:00pm pst

Live Raffle on Facebook



TICKETS  
\$5



DIAMETER: 19.5 IN | 49.5 CM

HEIGHT: 14 IN | 35.5 CM

WEIGHT: 23.3 LBS | 10.6 KG

MATERIALS: STAINLESS STEEL



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MEMBER

[HTTPS://BLETAUXILIARY.NET/](https://bletauxiliary.net/)



Website



# From the President

BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS

**"In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."**

*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

A new year, a new officer team, and fresh and exciting ideas for the Auxiliary make 2023 a year to look forward to.

The National Auxiliary officers have all found their footing in their new positions and are doing great. Our executive team has begun the practice of bi-monthly Zoom meetings as a way to check in with each other and keep track of our scheduled deadlines and planned events. It also allows us to continue to get to know each other and share a little about our lives.

You may have noticed that we jumped into fundraising this year with the raffle for our Solo Stove. Tickets are available online at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net). The winner will be drawn on Facebook Live on May 27, just in time for summer fun!

Our 1st Vice President/Outreach Coordinator Rachel Pharris and I will travel to Kansas City, Missouri, on March 25 to install our first local auxiliary of the year. We have been fortunate to have the support of the state legislative board chairmen of both Kansas and Missouri supporting Holly Holdcraft and her husband, Local Chairman Daniel Holdcraft, BLET Division 502, on this undertaking.

We have two other auxiliaries in formation, with upcoming installations to follow later in the year. Ogden, Utah, and Little Rock, Arkansas, will join our auxiliary family soon. If you would like more information on any of these, please see pages 10 and 13 for contact information.

Our 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Natalie Miller and I recently joined the New Mexico State Legislative Board members via Zoom during New

Mexico's fight for their two-person crew bill, HB 105. While we were not able to testify during the meeting due to a time limit for testimonies, Natalie provided written testimony for the record, representing the Auxiliary and families of railroaders across the country.

If your state legislative board is fighting for legislation to help railroaders, please call or e-mail your representatives and express your support for these bills. Even if you are only able to speak to the staff at your representative's office, state your name and the reason for your call. Every call counts, and doing so makes a real difference. The legislative teams work nationwide to make things safer for railroad workers and the public.

The Auxiliary has courageously forged ahead in the fight for railroad workers and their families over the last several years. We cannot and will not in any way halt the movement we helped start in solidarity with our union over the previous two years. We are bringing the dirty laundry and unjust treatment of railroad workers to the attention of the public and the media. We will continue to do what we can at every opportunity, and we ask you to join us. Be a part of the solution. They see us and they hear us, and we are confident we make them nervous. If there is a movement in your area, please join it, or contact one of us, and we will bring others together to help. We cannot stop what has started—timing is everything, and the time has never been better!

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Also...

Find us on   
THE NATIONAL B.L.E.T. AUXILIARY



# Holiday Happenings in North Platte, Nebraska

By Katryna Hughes, President – Flatrock No. 8 Auxiliary, North Platte, Nebraska

## Chex Mix for the Crews

We are very passionate about our rail families and felt it significant that our local auxiliary extend our gratitude with a HUGE thank-you to our “Rail Santas” who were marked up and working during the holidays. During the month of December, as a token of our understanding and appreciation of their sacrifice, our local North Platte crews were able to enjoy some homemade treats, courtesy of their local auxiliary members. We came together with the philosophy of the Auxiliary - solidarity, friendship, understanding, support, and resources for all railroad families - no strings attached! We support our Crews!



## Second Annual Christmas Party

On December 2, 2022, BLET Division 388 and Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8 hosted their annual Christmas party. We never fail to come up with some exciting gifts for door prizes, totaling over \$1,000! This year we got creative with our auxiliary's fundraiser event, with the help of our fellow National Auxiliary sisters' ideas, and sold numbers for the chance to win \$100 worth of lottery tickets. What a huge hit!

As always, our local auxiliary had some fun entertainment planned, including “left, right, center” table games, as well as the famous Naughty/Nice Boards. I am excited to share that attendance was up compared to years prior, including many new faces who had not previously attended.

There was a ton of support for, and interest in, the auxiliary amongst those in attendance. It blows my mind that many railroad wives and employees in our area don't even know we have a local auxiliary they can join.

We formed new friendships, enjoyed good company and conversation, and yet another year of memories. We look forward to continued partnership and growing in numbers. Thank you all, and cheers to 2023!





# Celebrating the Giving Season in Springfield, MO

*By Rachel Pharris, President, Springfield Auxiliary 417*



## Cookies for the Crews

Many of the families from Springfield Auxiliary 417 baked and delivered cookies to the depot for two weeks over the Christmas holiday. We also packed individual bags of Chex Mix for those crew members who preferred a not-so-sweet treat!

## Bell Ringer Volunteers

Springfield families volunteered their time to participate in the Salvation Army bell ringing fundraiser on Saturday, December 5, at Battlefield Mall in Springfield.



Becca, Amy & Brian Walters



Heather, Jerod and Brooks Williams



Rachel Pharris and Kelsey Epperson greeted guests as they arrived.



Randy Amberger LC, BLET Div 567; Brad Pharris and Jerod Williams, BLET Div 83

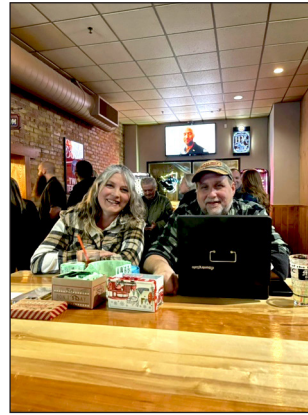
## Holiday Party

With the support of our BLET Divisions 237, 83, and 567, and SMART-TD Local 303, the Springfield Auxiliary celebrated its 4th annual holiday party on Thursday, January 26, at the Barnhouse in Springfield.

Following a Mexican buffet, and door prize giveaway, attendees showed off their entertainment skills with karaoke. Many thanks to all who attended and continue to support our efforts.



## Twin Ports Auxiliary Hosted their Annual Christmas Party



*By Rose Surchik, President, Twin Ports Auxiliary No. 6388*

Twin Ports Auxiliary No. 6388, celebrated the holiday season with their annual Clyde Larson Christmas Party. Not Even a storm or 17-below temperatures could stop these railroad families from getting together for some fun and fellowship. Over 340 of us braved the cold winter night to celebrate the holidays. Many thanks to the Joe Dolan and Firm for the fantastic dinner and drinks, to all the local BLET and SMART unions for donating all the door prizes, and to Divisions 163 and 188 for always donating and supporting the Auxiliary. Congrats to all the winners of the raffles! It was such a great time!

Rose Surchik joined BLET and SMART-TD members for a Solidarity Rally sponsored by SMART-TD in Duluth, Minnesota, on December 13, in front of the BNSF Yard. All crafts, trades, unions, and friends were encouraged to attend.

## Cookies for the Crews, Amarillo, TX



*Amarillo auxiliary members: back row, left to right: Michele Robinson, Emily Schnatz, Victoria Delahay, Pam Winbolt, Stephanie Daggett, Katrina Dagget; Kneeling in front: Erin McConnell*

*By Victoria Delahay, Amarillo Auxiliary President*

On Saturday, December 17, 2022, members of the Yellow City Bomb Squad Auxiliary in Amarillo, Texas, traveled to three depots for our annual "Cookies For The Crews" event. We are so incredibly blessed to have a group of women willing to bake, and bake, and bake, to make sure our spouses and families get to enjoy some holiday treats on the road. Hope you had a wonderful holiday season. We can't wait to share all that our auxiliary has in store for 2023! Happy New Year!



**MARCH IS WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH  
CELEBRATING OUR FOUNDING SISTERS**

### 1887: GIA IS FOUNDED

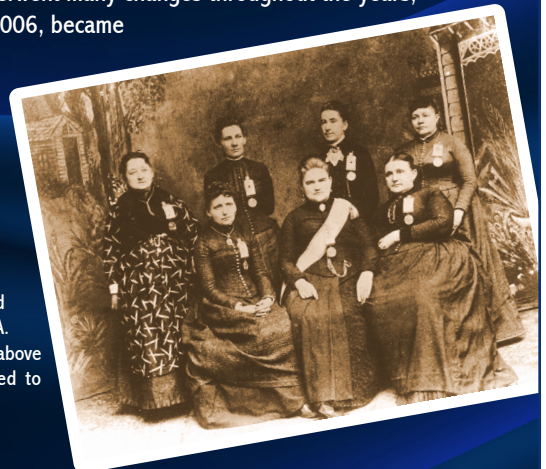
In 1887, there were 25,000 members in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE). On Oct. 16, 1887, Division One of the Grand International Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers was organized. The organization underwent many changes throughout the years, and, in October 2006, became known as the **BLET Auxiliary**.



In 1898, the crescent and star were adopted as the logo for the GIA. In 2006, the logo in above heading was adopted to reflect the new name.

#### Auxiliary Grand Officers

elected at the Auxiliary's first convention in 1888. Sister Letitia Murdock, seated front and center, served as the first Grand President from 1887 until her death in 1919.



*See Page 8 for more information on the history of the Auxiliary.*

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY NATALIE MILLER, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE



"The only effective answer to organized greed is organized labor."

Thomas R. Donahue

As your new National 2nd Vice President and Legislative Rep for the next four years, I am committed to work hard to provide you with up-to-date and accurate information, both through the newsletter and through social media platforms. Please feel free to reach out to me via e-mail to share important information in your state.

## News from the States

**Iowa:** Iowa House lawmakers Rep. Brent Siegrist, R-Council Bluffs; Rep. Tom Determann, R-Clinton; and Rep. Jeff Cooling, D-Cedar Rapids made up the subcommittee that advanced House Study Bill 88 (HSB 88) on January 26, 2023. HSB 88 is a bill for an act relating to railroad train length limits and making penalties applicable.

HSB 88 "limits the length of any freight or work railroad train operated or permitted to be operated by a railway corporation to 8,500 feet." Violation of the bill results in a "Schedule 4" penalty under Iowa State Code Section 327C.5, which is a fine of not less than \$500 nor more than \$5,000 per violation.

The three-member, bipartisan panel voted unanimously to forward House Study Bill 88 to the full House Transportation Committee for passage to the floor. This is the second attempt at passing a law limiting train length in Iowa, with an identical bill clearing the subcommittee but dying in the full committee before it could make it to the floor in 2022.

Source: *The Gazette*, [www.thegazette.com/government-politics/01/26/2023](http://www.thegazette.com/government-politics/01/26/2023); <http://i alegislature.gov/committees>; <http://i alegislature.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=90&ba=HSB88>.

**Kansas:** On Tuesday, February 7, Senator Carolyn McGinn (R) from Sedgwick, Kansas, introduced Senate Bill 215 (SB 215), the Kansas Rail Safety Improvement Act, in the Kansas State Senate Committee on Ways and Means. SB 215 is an act concerning railroads, establishing the Kansas Rail Safety Improvement Act, providing for safety requirements for railroad operations and crossings, and allowing for the transfer of title for abandoned railroad tracks to municipalities.

Specifically, SB 215 (KRSIA) provides for: train length limited to 8500 ft; equipment left no closer than 300 ft from the center of the crossing; 2-person crew requirements; improvements of regulations for vegetation and debris; improved walkways where work is performed; inspections; liabilities; violations and fines; and abandoned track requirements.

SB 215 was referred to the Senate Committee on Transportation and, as of 2/15/2023, has not yet been added to the Senate Committee on Transportation weekly agenda. Source: <http://www.kslegislature.org>, Journal Page Number 75, 02/08/2023 and Journal Page Number 83, 02/09/2023.

**Nebraska:** Senator Mike Jacobson introduced Legislative Bill 31 (LB 31), a bill for an act relating to railroads; to require a train crew of at least two individuals as prescribed; to provide fines; and to provide duties for the Public Service Commission.

After being introduced on January 5, LB 31 was referred to Nebraska House Transportation and Telecommunications Committee on January 9. The bill gained support with four Senators adding their names to LB 31 by the time notice of a hearing was announced on January 30, and three more Senators adding signatures as of February 3. The Hearing on LB 31 is Scheduled for March 6, 2023.

In his Statement of Intent for LB 31, Senator Jacobson wrote: "The following constitutes the reasons for this bill and the purposes which are sought to be accomplished thereby: LB 31 prohibits any train or light engine used in connection with the movement of freight from being operated unless it has a crew consisting of at least two individuals. Two-person crews can play a major role in helping to prevent potential accidents or derailments, as well as allowing potential problems to be addressed while an individual remains in the cab."

The Nebraska State Legislature provides links to "Submit Comments Online" in the "History" section on the main information page of each legislative bill proposed and being considered during the legislative session. The direct link to submit a comment online in support of LB 31 is: [https://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/bills/view\\_bill.php?DocumentID=50311](https://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/bills/view_bill.php?DocumentID=50311)

Source: <https://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/FloorDocs/108/PDF/SI/LB31.pdf>, Journal pages 72, 126, 196, 235, 398, 427, 442, and 460; BLET Nebraska State Legislative Board 02/01/23.

**New Mexico:** House Bill 105 (HB 105), an act relating to railroad safety, requiring at least two persons for the operation of a railroad train or locomotive that is used in the movement of freight, prescribing penalties, was introduced in the State of New Mexico 56th Legislature First Session 2023 on January 19 by Senator Elisio Lee Alcon and Senator Patricia Roybal Caballero. On January 26, HB 105, Freight Locomotive Personnel Requirements, made it through the New Mexico House Labor, Veteran's & Military Affairs Committee by a vote of 7-2.

From there, HB 105 was sent to the New Mexico House Judiciary Committee, where it was amended

to include a definition of the word "crew" as a locomotive engineer and conductor. It passed in this second committee by a vote of 5-1 and will now be sent to the House Floor for the third reading; discussion; floor amendments, if any; and eventually a final vote of the House.

The New Mexico House of Representatives reconvened for Legislative Day 6 on Monday, February 13, 2023, at 11:00 a.m. with Third Reading of Legislation heading up the calendar starting with House Bills. HB 105 was listed tenth on the Third Reading Calendar posted for February 13; however, no further updates were posted as of 2/14/23, the deadline for this LR Update.

Source: BLET New Mexico State Legislative Board, 01/26/2023 & 02/06/2023; HLVMC Committee Report, 01/27/2023 published 01/30/2023 <https://www.nmlegis.gov/Sessions>; HJC Committee Report, 02/06/2023 published 02/07/2023 <https://www.nmlegis.gov/Agendas/Floor/hFloor021323>.

**Wyoming:** On January 24, House Bill 204 (HB 204) was received for introduction in the State of Wyoming Legislature House of Representatives. HB 204 was co-sponsored by Representatives Chestek, Berger, and Newsome, and Senators Gierau and Rothfuss.

HB 204 is "a bill for an act relating to public utilities, requiring trains to be not more than a specified length; providing operational requirements; providing a civil penalty; providing definitions; and providing for an effective date."

HB 204 requires train length to not exceed 8,500 feet on all freight trains operating in the state, with violations subject to civil penalties no less than \$500 and not to exceed \$1,000 per foot of the amount of train exceeding 8,500 feet.

The bill would also include a one-time fine not to exceed \$250,000



for any railroad company that commits a grossly negligent violation or who has a pattern of repeated violations that caused an imminent threat of death or injury to another person, or that caused death or injury to another person.

A hearing for House Bill 204 was held on February 3, in the Wyoming State Legislature House Corporations Committee, where the bill died in committee.

Source SMART-TD News, [www.wylegis.gov/Legislation/2023/HB0204](http://www.wylegis.gov/Legislation/2023/HB0204).

### **BLET Deadlocked in Negotiations with New Jersey Transit**

The National Mediation Board (NMB), the federal agency that oversees labor relations at the nation's railroads and airlines, has called negotiators for railroad management and for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen to meet in Washington next month in an attempt to avert a labor crisis that would cripple the third largest commuter rail in the country.

Based on a pre-pandemic average weekday ridership of 240,000 passengers, trailing only the other two commuter railroads serving the New York suburbs, it was second in total annual ridership. But wages for engineers at NJ Transit are significantly lower than wages at those other two commuter lines as well as Amtrak and PATH, another railroad also linking New Jersey and New York.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, the union that has been seeking a new contract since the last one's scheduled end in 2019, says if members don't get raises of 18% to 23% to match those competing railroads, its 500 members at NJ Transit could be lost to those other railroads. That could cause a shortage of engineers and a reduced train schedule, according to union leadership.

"We don't want to hurt the riding public. But NJ Transit is adamant they won't negotiate at all," said Jim Brown, president of the New

Jersey Transit portion of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen. "We've become a training facility for other railroads. We do not expect to make more than them. All we're looking for is parity."

Source: *Labor showdown looming at NJ Transit | Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (ble-t.org)*, 02/14/23; *Labor showdown looming at NJ Transit, one of nation's largest commuter railroads | CNN Business*, 02/14/23

### **BLET Members Ratify New Contract With Illinois Railway**

On February 10, members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) unanimously ratified a new collective bargaining agreement with the Illinois Railway. The new five-year agreement governs rates of pay, work rules, and health & welfare for approximately 50 engineers and conductors. The contract provides fully retroactive general wage increases of 22% over the life of the deal.

The BLET secured a major improvement to how overtime pay is handled. Members will now earn overtime pay (at one and one-half times) after 8 hours instead of after 50 hours under the previous contract.

The new contract guarantees all members will be eligible for five weeks of vacation (25 days) after 11 years of service, two paid personal days, an additional holiday, and secured overtime rates of pay for working rest days and holidays. Additionally, the BLET secured the removal of the wage step rate and incorporated training pay and a 30-minute lunch period.

Brother Pete Semenek, the new National Vice President assigned to the Illinois Railway, said the negotiating team consisted of General Chairman Dan Wells, Division 682 Vice Local Chairman Dustin Stadie, and retired Vice President Marcus Ruef.

Source: *BLET members ratify new contract with Illinois Railway | Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (ble-t.org)*.

### **BLET Calls on Congress to Fix Flaw in FMLA**

February marks the 30th anniversary of the enactment of The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1993. BLET has had a long history of fighting to protect members' rights under FMLA.

In a press event marking the anniversary of FMLA held February 1, U.S. Senator Kristen Gillibrand (D-NY) and U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) to announce they are working on legislation that could possibly lower the required hours of eligibility or include alternative means for railroad workers who work on-call to qualify for their FMLA leave rights under the law.

The Teamsters and Teamster Rail Conference members of the BLET were invited to participate in the press event by Rep. DeLauro to explain the need for FMLA reform that ensures all railroad workers have access to FMLA protections.

BLET Director of Political Affairs Brendan Sullivan and BLET Director of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs Sean Simon represented the BLET at the February 1 event. They joined legislators to bring light to the importance of modernizing FMLA for all rail employees.

For many years, BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative Vince Verna has made it very clear to legislators that time waiting for a call, or staying at company lodging waiting for a call, should count towards a railroad worker's FMLA hourly requirement.

Brother Verna, who also attended the event said: "A railroad worker who follows the rules, works safely, and is available for the railroad to call them at any hour should not get their FMLA rights clawed back by a technical glitch in the law. We celebrate the anniversary of the law today, but we also put Congress on notice that FMLA needs reform for railroad workers and railroad workers need paid sick leave now."

BLET National President Eddie Hall agreed and thanked the BLET's National Legislative Office for their efforts to secure FMLA improvements on behalf of BLET members. "I have heard our members' voices and we will use every available tool to secure all FMLA protections for all of our members."

Source: *BLET calls on Congress to fix FMLA flaw that harms rail workers | Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (ble-t.org)*, 02/03/23; <https://ttd.org/news-and-media/press-releases>, *On 30th Anniversary of FMLA, Rail Unions Adopt Resolution Calling for Universal Paid Sick Leave - TTD*, 02/06/23.

### **Bipartisan Paid Sick Leave to be Introduced in U.S. Senate**

On the National level, we applaud Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Senator Mike Braun (R-IN) for their continued support for railroad workers. Senator Sanders and Senator Braun announced at a press conference on February 9 that they plan to introduce bipartisan legislation mandating rail carriers provide a minimum of seven paid sick leave days per year.

The proposed legislation follows the Tentative Agreement vote, where a paid sick leave amendment failed to reach the required 60-vote threshold in a close 52-43 vote in the U.S. Senate after having passed in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Senator Sanders is no stranger to the working man's fight and has always been a staunch supporter of Union Labor. But to see a co-sponsor from "across the aisle" step forward and put principle over party, that is something worth noting. It is not often that you get two senators with vast ideological differences to agree, so it is encouraging to see both Senator Sanders and Senator Braun champion this commonsense legislation.

Senator Sanders said, "At a time of record-breaking profits, that industry can and must guarantee at least seven paid sick days to every rail worker in America. In

— continued on Page 12



## FROM the GIA, to the B. of L.E., to the BLET AUXILIARY



*By Becky Schneider  
Past National President 2006-2010,  
and Auxiliary Historian*

In recognition of our 135th Anniversary last October, President Bisbikis asked if I would do a series for the newsletter - a project that started as a presentation at our National Convention last October. I regret not doing this sooner, when my term as National President ended back in 2010. I realize reading about the history of the Auxiliary may sound like as much fun as a root canal, but I urge you to keep an open mind; you might be surprised. I thought I knew most of the history, but as I was putting it together, I discovered numerous things that truly surprised me. When you think about the world in 1887 and how it has evolved over the last 135 years - going from horse and buggy to the exploration of Mars; from travel by train to self-driving cars; or from quill pens to electric typewriters, to computers that fit in your hand - much has changed. Our auxiliary predecessors fought for and experienced women finally getting the right to vote 32 years after we organized. There have been so many societal changes, including a game changer, the advent of the internet and social media. Admittedly, the initial offering may start a bit slow, but it does pick up as we move through the years. I hope you find the series interesting, and, if you have questions, please let me know and I'll do my best to answer them.

Ten years prior to our peaceful beginnings in 1887, the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 occurred in cities across the Nation. Please refer to the abbreviated overview of what lead up to this event in the sidebar on Page 9. Bottom line, what happened in 1877 showed that spouses and families were involved even in the infancy of the labor movement. During the time preceding the organization of the Auxiliary, individual groups of wives were already gathering together all over the country, sharing their common bond of being married to a railroader.

In Chicago, Illinois, a group of wives were working with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (B. of L.E.) Arrangements Committee planning the International Convention of 1887. Inspired by one woman, Letitia Murdock, who stood out as a leader, suggestion was made

to formally organize the wives of locomotive engineers. Letitia had been a railroad wife for six years, married to William A. Murdock, a locomotive engineer for the North Western Railroad. On October 16, 1887, Division One of the Auxiliary was organized with 10 charter members. [Maybe that's where the requirement of a minimum of 10 interested persons on a Petition for Charter came from.] The first meeting occurred a week later at Chicago's Palmer House Hotel. There, a temporary constitution and bylaws was adopted, along with the election of the first Grand Officers. Through most of our history, "only wives of B. of L.E. men" (how the union was referred to back then) could join. Much later, a motion to admit the brothers to membership carried with it the provision that they were not to hold office nor be sent as a delegate to Convention.

According to Past Grand President Ella Turner, who penned the History of the Grand International Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers from 1887 to 1947, the objective of this new organization was to "elevate intellectually and socially the families of the members of the B. of L.E. and practice benevolence in the broadest sense." - a noble task they took to heart and made a difference in so many lives. One of the first orders of business for Grand President Murdock was to establish a charity for an Orphan's Home, and a life insurance program for auxiliary members. To that end, at the 1900 convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Mayor of Mattoon, Illinois, accompanied by two brothers from the B. of L.E. requested the GIA use its influence to have a "home" built on the B. of L.E. property of Meadow Lawn Farm. After considerable considerations, Sister Cassell was sent to advise the B. of L.E. Convention that the GIA would gladly accept the farm if they would donate it for the purpose of instituting a home for the orphaned children of the B. of L.E. members. Unfortunately, there was never any further reference to the outcome of this offer that I could find.

At the 1889 convention, the reports of the Bylaws Committee and Ritual Committee were accepted. The Ritual Work that was adopted was more than likely patterned after other organizations of the day: the Auxiliary to

the Shriners, whose symbol we shared (the crescent moon and star); or the Order of the Eastern Star (wives of Free Masons). At that same convention, the members requested a letter be written to the B. of L.E. Grand Chief P. M. Arthur requesting recognition of the Auxiliary and a public announcement regarding same. It was several years before Grand President Murdock could convince Grand Chief Arthur that an Auxiliary would be helpful to the B. of L.E. She did ask him to suggest a name, and he is the one who came up with Grand International Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.

By 1890, the Ladies Benevolent Insurance Association was established with the initial rules governing same. This wildly popular life insurance program had its own governing officers elected by the delegates and, over the years, most members of the Auxiliary availed themselves of the program. The name changed to the Voluntary Relief Association in 1894. Initially, the age cap was 50, but was lowered to 45 and a medical question was included prior to granting a certificate of insurance. The initial cost was a fifty-cent application fee for a \$300 policy, with a minimal monthly fee collected by each Division Insurance Agent and forwarded to the Grand Secretary-Treasurer. After the insurance program was initiated and, as it grew, a great deal of time at the conventions was spent tweaking the rules. The Voluntary Relief Association was in effect well into the mid-1900s, maybe even into the 1960s. My research has yet to reveal when that program sunsetted.

At the time of the convention of 1894, the GIA boasted a treasury of \$12,906 (which equates to approximately \$420,000 in today's dollars). Because our organization was growing and very successful, salaries for the Grand Officers were much better then as well, with the Grand President making around \$1,600/month in today's dollars. The convention of 1894 was the first attempt to limit the term of the Grand President, but did not succeed. Letitia Murdock died in office after serving 32 years as Grand President and it was many years before the Auxiliary was actually able to fill the office of Past Grand President for a full term (3 years). When I served as National President, brothers would ask me why we had term limits, and I



would flippantly reply, “because we got tired of people dying in office because they were so old.” Not entirely accurate, but not totally off-base. In 1906, the delegates voted to elect the grand officers every four years, but without term limits.

The GIA was originally set up under the lodge system, but at the convention in 1896, the designations were changed to grand division and subdivisions. Grand division conventions were held at the same time as the B. of L.E. conventions. They started out as biennial (every two years), then in 1915, changed to triennial (every three years), and began meeting in Cleveland for every convention. For decades they remained every three years.

The 1924 convention did not occur concurrently with the B. of L.E. as our “laws” stated it must, but notice from the B. of L.E. of a change in date occurred too late. In a letter from Grand Chief Stone, he advised that the date of their convention had changed because the National Republican Convention was being held in Cleveland at that time, “and it would not be a suitable time for us to be there.” Admittedly, this action took me by surprise considering the year it occurred.

The conventions almost always lasted close to two weeks, probably because the body was invited to so many varied events, including those sponsored by the B. of L.E. Most of the invitations were from other organizations that were also formed around the same time as the Auxiliary, like the Sisters of Pythias, the Order of the Eastern Star, Daughters of the American Revolution, Ladies Auxiliary to the Order of Railway Conductors, Ladies of the Maccabees, etc. One invitation was from a local Presbyterian church whose members would make “home-cooked” dinners for the delegates for a quarter. They also included excursions courtesy of the area’s railroads who proclaimed the good works of the GIA. Host communities, local businesses, theater groups, and so many others clamored to have the Auxiliary attend one of their functions, with one glaring exception. During an organizing trip, First Assistant Grand Vice President Cook attended a meeting with BLE Division 224 in Worcester, Massachusetts, where President Howard Taft was a guest. He addressed the men, but positively declined an audience with the women.

— *continued on back cover*

## ***The More You Know — Great Labor Uprising of 1877***

The Great Labor Uprising of 1877 occurred in cities across our nation, but mostly the East and Central United States. Prompted by a 10 percent pay cut, after a 50 percent pay cut only 8 months prior, and following the announcement of a stockholders dividend that morning, the railroaders at the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (B&O) had enough. On the job, they already endured many dangers, few safety measures, and long hours. Railroads also did not provide employees with away-from-home expenses, yet they were required to stay in opulent, railroad-owned hotels at their own expense, purchase return tickets to their home terminals, and cover meals and other expenses while away.

A series of economic events served as a precursor to the uprising. As railroads became the second-largest employer, they continued their expansion on speculation. When Congress passed the Coinage Act in 1873, removing silver as backing for America’s currency, the house of cards began to collapse. It began with Northern Pacific’s trouble selling bonds to continue expanding their railroad, bonds sold by Jay Cooke & Company’s banking firm. When the bank failed, both the bank and the railroad entered bankruptcy in September 1873, sparking one of America’s worst depressions, lasting six years. During those years, the number of organized unions dropped from 30 to 9 by 1877, with four railroad unions remaining: Machinists and Blacksmiths International Union; Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen; Brotherhood of Railway Conductors; and Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. Even with 10,000 members, the BLE did not have the federal and state support it needed to have any real power. Also interestingly, the BLE’s Grand Chief Engineer at the time, Charles Wilson, balked at striking and refused to stand with workers outside the union in a unified effort.

Several minor walkouts occurred prior to Martinsburg but were quickly quelled. Even though strikers were labeled “rioters,” they never stopped a passenger or mail train, only freight, so the federal government wouldn’t have a reason to become involved. When workers walked off the job in Martinsburg, West Virginia, B&O’s operations were paralyzed. As trains were left stranded, employees from other railroads and even workers outside the industry realizing the strike’s effectiveness, walked off the job. They declared freight wouldn’t move until their pay cut had been restored. One spouse standing alongside her railroad husband said, “I would rather die fighting the railroad than continue to try to live on starvation wages.” The strikers were painted as rioters, vagrants, and disrupters of peace, and even labeled shadow communists.

The B&O convinced Governor Matthews to call up the local militia. When an attempt was made to move a train, one of the strikers tried to stop it, later dying of gunshot wounds. After garnering national attention, President Hayes called up Army regulars to quell the uprising. However, when the troops arrived, they found no signs of property destruction or other disturbance. The day after the troops arrived, many strikers were arrested and the uprising in Martinsburg was essentially over. Even though strikes elsewhere were relatively uneventful, militia in Baltimore ran up against strong local support and were pelted with “stones and jeers.” They opened fire and the final tally was 11 dead and 40 injured. Fueled by the brutality, the crowd of supporters swelled to 15,000, forcing the militiamen to take cover in Camden Station’s train sheds, which the crowd attempted to burn down. It took an additional 1,500 federal troops to restore peace. What started in West Virginia on the B&O spread all the way to Chicago and St. Louis and included the Pittsburgh & Pennsylvania Railroad.

A National Guard member from Pittsburgh noted that workers were driven by “one spirit and one purpose among them – that they were justified in resorting to any means to break down the power of the corporations.” By the time the strikes were over, toward the end of July, about 1,000 people had gone to jail, and around 100 had been killed.

This uprising not only gave momentum to the labor movement, it was also the catalyst that would transform the National Guard in their roles of quelling civil disorder and brought about bipartisan support for the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act, limiting the power of the president to use federal troops for domestic law enforcement.

It’s ironic that while improvements have been made, some of our fights remain the same principal as they existed 150 years ago. Never forget those who came before us who literally gave their blood, sweat, and tears for what we have today, and honor them by never giving up the fight!

Source: Wikipedia; Encyclopedia Britannica; American-Rails.Com, Great Railroad Strike of 1877

## FRA Hearing on Two-Person Crew Brings Support from Across the Country on Zoom



*By Natalie Miller, National Legislative Representative, BLET Auxiliary*

On December 14, 2022, the Federal Railroad Administration held a public hearing regarding its proposed two-person crew rule, in light of the more than 12,000 comments in support of the rule that had been posted on the public comment section of the FRA website. The hearing was open to the public and allowed for live viewing and testimony via Zoom.

The hearing opened with in-person testimony from only two Class 1 Railroads - Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern - followed by representatives from the Association of American Railroads (AAR) and the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRRA) opposing the rule.

However, most of the afternoon session was reserved for testimony from supporters of the 2-Person Crew Rule, both in person and virtually via Zoom. Speaking in support of the 2-Person Crew Rule at the hearing in Washington DC were BLET Vice President & National Legislative Representative Vincent Verna, AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department President Greg Regan, and SMART-TD President Jeremy Ferguson.

Following testimony from our union representatives in person, the hearing was open to testimony from the public via Zoom. Those who spoke via Zoom registered the day of the hearing, and each was given up to ten minutes to speak.

Along with my testimony from the "spouse's point of view," several SMART-TD Brothers and Sisters testified with personal on-the-job stories as evidence supporting the need for two-person crews. The committee heard testimony via Zoom from Johnny Walker (SMART-TD Local 610, Baltimore, Md.), Nick Jochim (SMART-TD Local 904, Evansville, Ind.), Jessica Martin (SMART-TD Local 594, Mineola, Texas), and SMART-TD Utah State Legislative Director Dan Brewer (Local 1554, Ogden, Utah).

After all who had registered had the chance to testify, the FRA adjourned the meeting thanking all who attended and testified, especially thanking those who took the time to join via Zoom. Although the committee did not ask many questions from those giving testimony on either side of the rule, I am optimistic that the final words supporting the rule will resonate the most with the committee members.

And, given the fact that following the hearing, the FRA extended the comment period on the website an extra week, to December 21, I would like to believe that optimism is warranted. But, until we get the official decision from the FRA, we need to continue fighting to get two-person crew legislation passed in as many states as possible. They haven't ruled yet, and we need to keep fighting while the spotlight is on us. The safety of our railroaders depends on it.

A breakdown of testimony from the December 14 hearing can be found on the SMART-TD website at "Union states 2PC case before FRA - SMART Union" ([smart-union.org](https://smart-union.org)).

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# Tidbits from National Secretary Jodi Wallace

## Greetings Auxiliary Members!

I am excited to serve as your new National BLET Auxiliary Secretary. Many of you may remember me from my past service as National Vice President/ National Outreach Coordinator. I am excited to serve the Auxiliary again as a national officer and to work closely with the other members of the BLET Auxiliary Executive Council. For more info, please see my full bio on the Auxiliary website at [www.bletauxiliary.org](http://www.bletauxiliary.org).

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

- MAL Members: Mindy Stocks, Melinda Byerly, Stacey Finnerty, Preston Robinson, Kristen Kelly James Blum, and Margaret Elley.
- Pacific Northwest Auxiliary 503: Ryan Johnson, McKaylah Kuhns, Matthew Kuhns, Michael Hernderson, Chris Hulden, Christopher Fandrei, and Timothy Haug.
- Eastern Oregon Auxiliary 362: Harley Ahner.

## MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Dues payments for members-at-large were due by March 1. If you have not already done so, please make sure to send your dues to me and ensure that all of your information is correct so you will continue to receive your newsletter. If you have not received your dues invoice, please reach out to me asap at [jwallace.bletaux@yahoo.com](mailto:jwallace.bletaux@yahoo.com) **All checks should be made payable to BLET Auxiliary, or you may use PayPal. The PayPal link is located on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net)**

## SCHOLARSHIP NEWS

If you have children who are college-bound, they may be eligible to apply for a BLET Auxiliary scholarship. Scholarship information and applications can be obtained on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net). **Applications for the 2023-2024 academic school year are due in my office on or before April 1, 2023.** Incomplete or late applications will

not be considered. Please make sure you read all the eligibility requirements and instructions.

## AUXILIARY SECRETARIES

Annual reports and 2022 dues for local auxiliaries were due on March 1, 2023. If you have not already done so, please submit the annual report for your local auxiliary to me ASAP. 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 the forms properly filled out and processed. **All checks should be made payable to BLET auxiliary, or you may use PayPal. The PayPal link is located on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net).**

## CARE AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Care and Assistance Program (CAP) is our organization's way of saying thank-you to long-time members who 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. Please contact us for applications! Please check to see if someone in your local auxiliary may be eligible and encourage them to apply. Members-at-large are eligible also!

## OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES

- Gary Raiburn, father of Shonda Holder, passed away on December 9, 2022. Shonda is a member of Yellow City Bomb Squad Auxiliary No. 99 in Amarillo, Texas.
- Dorothy McLean, grandmother of Rachel Melone, passed away on December 31, 2022. Rachel Melone is a member-at-large.
- Katherine Jeanetta Remington Stocks, mother-in-law of Mindy Stocks, passed away on January 3, 2023. Mindy is a member-at-large.
- Donna Moore, aunt of Melinda Byerly, passed away on January 28, 2023. Melinda is a member-at-large.
- Dominick Petronella, stepdad to Jenny Ferguson, passed away on February 2, 2023. Jenny is a member of Yellow City Bomb Squad No. 99 in Amarillo, Texas.

Sending our thoughts and prayers to all.

## CONGRATULATIONS

To Frankie and Donna Milford on the arrival of their Great Granddaughter Natalee Claire.

*"When you're curious you find lots of interesting things to do."*

— Walt Disney



*Jodi Wallace lives at 1804 Washington Ave., LaGrande, Oregon, 97850. She can be reached at [jwallace.bletaux@yahoo.com](mailto:jwallace.bletaux@yahoo.com), or 541-663-6966.*

## GOING GREEN!

Have you made the move to GO GREEN? You can choose to GO GREEN and receive your full-color digital newsletter by e-mail! It is so easy to do. Send a note requesting your newsletter by e-mail instead of regular mail. When the quarterly newsletter is published, you will receive an e-mail to let you know that the newsletter is published and ready to read.

Past newsletters are also available to read on the website at: [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net).

## SAVE THESE DATES!

**June 26-30, 2023**  
**Milwaukee Regional Meeting**

**August 14-20, 2023**  
**Myrtle Beach Regional Meeting**

**Additional info coming soon!**

## Legislative Update

Continued from Page 7

the year 2023, that's not a whole lot to ask."

Vice President & National Legislative Representative Vince Verna, who represented BLET at the press conference, said, "Railroad workers deserve better treatment than they are getting from the railroads right now when they get sick, and they need time off when they're sick. Right now, employees know they better not get sick. If you do, you'll be subject to harsh attendance policies that do not allow you to take off sick without fear of reprisal."

"The railroad CEOs would never work under the conditions they require of their employees when making them choose between their jobs and their health," Verna added. "Let's make sure America's freight gets moved by workers who are not sick on the job. Let's get this fixed."

Brother Verna was joined by several Rail Labor representatives who spoke at the press conference. SMART-TD President Jeremy Ferguson; BMWED President Tony Cardwell; BRS Vice President Doug Vanderlag; and President of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO Greg Regan all spoke in support of this important legislation.

Senator Sanders penned a letter to the CEOs of six Class I Railroads (CP, CN, KCS, BNSF, UP, and NS) prior to the February 9 press conference stating, "Frankly, it is hard for the American people to understand how, in the year 2023, rail workers in America who put their lives on the line to keep the economy going during the pandemic and who continue to work very dangerous jobs have no guaranteed paid sick days."

Sanders continued, writing, "Guaranteeing seven paid sick days to rail workers would cost your industry just \$321 million dollars—less than 1.2 percent of industry-wide profits in a single year. If your companies can afford to spend

over \$20 billion on stock buybacks and hand out huge dividends to your wealthy shareholders, I am having a very difficult time understanding how you cannot afford to provide rail workers with these essential benefits."

Senator Braun went on to say, "When I heard you didn't have a guaranteed sick day, I wondered how could you get by with that in this day and age? You don't know when you're going to get sick. It's going to be an issue on keeping employees long-term."

Over the last six years, Class I freight railroads, which include BNSF Railway, CSX Transportation, Kansas City Southern Railway, Norfolk Southern, and Union Pacific, have hemorrhaged a combined 45,000 workers, according to the Surface Transportation Board. That is nearly 29 percent of their workforce. Quality of life issue, like not having guaranteed paid sick days, have played a big role in a large portion of those jobs being lost to employee resignations.

"Most of this stuff should be natural," Braun said, "and if you do it, it's in the best interest of your company, long term."

Once legislation is introduced, look for a call to action to have your senators support and co-sponsor this important legislation. *Source: Rail Labor joins Senators Sanders and Braun to demand paid sick leave | Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (ble-t.org), 02/09/23.*

### FRA News

- In the wake of a fatal accident on Norfolk Southern last month, the Federal Railroad Administration has issued a safety bulletin urging railroaders to conduct pre-departure inspections to ensure that no objects are protruding from freight cars. *Source: Trains Magazine, January 6, 2023.*
- The head of the Federal Railroad Administration has warned Class I railroads that it will take enforcement action if they do not make recommended improvements to their engineer and conductor

training and certification programs. *Source: Trains Magazine, January 17, 2022.*

- The fiery derailment of a Norfolk Southern train in Ohio on Feb. 3 has prompted some rail unions to press the Federal Railroad Administration to increase its oversight of the freight railroads' safety operations. Since rank-and-file employees are the ones close to actual operations, one way to enable federal oversight is through requiring the seven Class I railroads to adopt the confidential close call reporting system, which would provide workers with a venue to anonymously report potential safety concerns, according to Greg Regan, president of the Transportation Trades Department (TDD) of the AFL-CIO.

TTD of the AFL-CIO, a coalition of 37 transportation-related unions including several related to railroading, is calling on the Federal Railroad Administration to require Class I railroads to participate in the Confidential Close Call Reporting System, a currently voluntary method of tracking and addressing near-accident situations.

In a letter to the Federal Railroad Administrator dated February 9, TTD President Greg Regan writes that freight rail operations require greater federal oversight and that "dangerous cost-cutting practices ... pose real threats to workers and public safety."

Regan's letter says, "derailments per train-mile and incidents at rail yards have significantly increased on several major freight railroads since they adopted the Precision Scheduled Railroading operating model in 2015," and worker perspectives on safety issues "are not fully leveraged," since none of the seven Class I railroads participate in the Confidential Close Call system, which allows employees to report incidents without fear of repercussion.

"We firmly believe that mandatory participation in this program will create a safer freight rail system and identify potential safety issues before they lead to dangerous ca-

tastrophes," Regan writes. *Source: https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews, Union group calls for FRA to require Class I participation in close-call reporting system, 02/10/23; TTD calls for FRA to require Class I participation in close-call reporting system | Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (ble-t.org); Freight Waves, February 10, 2023.*

### Railroad Retirement News: RRB announces Spring 2023 Pre-Retirement Seminars

INDEPENDENCE, Ohio, February 13 — The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has announced its schedule of Pre-Retirement Seminars for Spring 2023.

Designed for union officers and railroad employees and spouses planning to retire within five years, Pre-Retirement Seminars will familiarize attendees with the retirement benefits available to them, and also guide them through the application process. While most of the program focuses on various aspects of Railroad Retirement benefits, each seminar closes with a brief presentation on railroad unemployment and sickness benefits to help prepare union officers for sharing reliable information with their members. Advance on-line registration is required for those wishing to attend a Pre-Retirement Seminar.

Please note that event details and registration will be available approximately 70 days in advance of each seminar, and registration will be closed for any seminar that reaches capacity. The April-June 2023 schedule is as follows:

- April 28, 2023: Courtyard by Marriott, 14635 Baldwin Park Towne Center, Baldwin Park, California.
- May 5, 2023: AIC Federal Building, 1240 E 9th Street, 31st Floor Auditorium, Cleveland, Ohio.
- May 12, 2023: Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, 28500 West Park Hwy., Ashland, Nebraska.

— continued on page 15



## New Local Auxiliary Forming in Ogden, Utah Area



Member-at-Large Mindy Stocks, who is spearheading the effort to get the Ogden local auxiliary started, baked dozens of cookies for the Ogden crews for Valentine's Day.

For more information about the Ogden auxiliary-in-formation, please contact Brickell Robinson at [BrickellRobinson@gmail.com](mailto:BrickellRobinson@gmail.com).

## Hearing on New Mexico HB 105 - Freight Locomotive Personnel Requirements

*By Dallas Valentine, Member-at-Large, New Mexico*

In early February, my husband Jimmy Valentine, President of BLET Division 592, and I traveled to Santa Fe to attend the meeting of the New Mexico State Legislature House Judiciary Committee regarding an amendment to New Mexico House Bill 105 (HB 105), first introduced in the State of New Mexico 56th Legislature First Session 2023, on January 19, 2023, that would require two qualified crew members on all freight locomotives. Union Pacific (UP), and Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) sent lobbyists out in force. Two lobbyists from UP and one from BNSF, as well as vice presidents from each railroad, spoke against the proposed bill.

The Company's stance regarding HB 105 was that it is a collective bargaining issue and has been for 40 years, and of course, "it is perfectly safe to have only one person on a train." The Company also said it would be better because they would have a conductor in a truck following the trains to respond quickly to any train issues, and these rail employees would have set shifts, resulting in more "regular lives." The Company also claimed that Positive Train Control (PTC) is ensuring train safety. They stated that if New Mexico were to enact a law requiring two crew members, train movement would back up because trains traveling through New Mexico from bordering states would have to stop at the New Mexico state line and add a conductor to the train.

Brothers from BNSF, Amtrak, as well as my husband and I (on behalf of UP engineers and trainmen, spoke in support of the bill, arguing that it is not a collective bargaining issue but is a major safety issue.

The bill passed in the New Mexico State House of Representatives on March 3 and will now go to the Senate. According to Brother Clem Harris, Chairman of the BLET's New Mexico State Legislative Board, House Bill 105 has gained bipartisan support in every committee where it has been presented.



**Front row (left to right):** Jared Hininger, Alt. LR, Div. 592; Gilbert Montiel, 1st Vice Chairman, New Mexico State Legislative Board and LR, Division 446; Kevin Seale, Alt. LR, Div. 192; Steve Seale, LR, Div. 192; **Back row (left to right):** Dustin Underwood, Alt. LR, Div. 446; Jimmy Valentine, President, Div. 592; Gilbert Tafoya, LR, Div. 791; Clem Harris, New Mexico State Legislative Board Chairman; and Danny Sera, LR, Div. 264.

## In Memoriam

Brother Louis P. Shuster, a Norfolk Southern conductor, lost his life in the line of duty on March 7, 2023, when a dump truck collided with a train car in Cleveland.

Brother Shuster, 46, of Broadview Heights, Ohio, served the union as the president of BLET Division 607 in Cleveland. He began working as a conductor in 2005 and earned promotion to locomotive engineer in 2014.

He was a father of a 16-year-old son and a caregiver for his elderly parents. Brother Shuster was an Army veteran. Our hearts go out to the family of Brother Shuster.

Rest in peace, Brother

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PRESIDENT  
**EDWARD P. HALEY**  
NATIONAL DIRECTOR



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Many thanks to the North American Railway Foundation (NARF) for sponsoring our newsletter and making it possible to share educational articles and information with our members across the nation, to keep railroad spouses and their families up-to-date on changes affecting benefits, and to educate our members about important legislation that helps promote safety on the nation's railroads.

The North American Railway Foundation, founded by the Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund (BR&CF), was formed on October 22, 1996, as a nonprofit organization (a private operating foundation). Its purpose is to explore, nurture and support railway safety, efficiency, and technology, and to educate about and preserve the history of railroads in the United States and Canada. The goals of the Foundation are achieved by providing direct and active financial support to deserving non-profit institutions and projects, which exemplify the Foundation's purpose.

The Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund, a non-profit corporation established in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was founded on June 12, 1912, by Luther G. Smith, a locomotive engineer for the Pennsylvania Railroad, to provide job income protection to railroaders throughout the United States and Canada who were "held out of service" due to suspension or dismissal. Brother Smith did not object to the railroads using a method to discipline employees when such discipline was necessary, but he did not see the logic in innocent family members having to suffer when the head of the home made an error in the performance of his duties that resulted in a suspension or dismissal.

**North American Railway Foundation**  
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**Brotherhood's Relief & Compensation Fund**  
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Mechanicsburg, PA 17050  
(717) 657-1890





## Greetings from Your Editor, Rachel Pharris

"We are not a team because we work together,  
we are a team because we respect, trust, and  
care for each other."

— Vala Afshar

Sisters and Brothers,

It warms my heart to see all the many ways our local auxiliaries "gave back" this holiday season. Thank you to all who gave so generously to make the holidays brighter for our railroaders, their families, and their communities.

The Auxiliary was created for women to lean on each other. We are a team of sisters (and brothers) who work together to support each other and to support railroaders and their families. I have witnessed railroad spouses reach out for help; I have seen our auxiliary members rally around those amongst us who need support. This sisterhood is strong, and it warms my heart to see the direction in which the Auxiliary is moving.

There is often a stigma attached to asking for help, yet I see strength in the women who have reached out for help - whether they are on our monthly Care and Assistance Program (CAP), have received care and assistance as a one-time donation for an emergency, or have simply reached out to another sister for support during a time of need. The sisterhood is stronger when we pull together, not only in times of need, but also to celebrate our victories. The Auxiliary is about building each other up, being there as a sisterhood, and giving back to rail families during times of need.

I encourage anyone who has been on the fence about joining the Auxiliary to take the leap and do it now, or even better, help to get a new local auxiliary established in your area. Local auxiliaries are being formed all over the country and we also have many members-at-large. Let's get connected!

If you live in the Kansas City area, we would love to have you join us on March 25 at the organizing meeting and dinner for a new auxiliary forming there. See Page 10 for more details.

"A 'team' is not just people who work at the same time in the same place. A real team is a group of very different

individuals who enjoy working together and who share a commitment to working cohesively to help the organization achieve its common goals and fulfill its purpose," ([leadershipfirst.net](http://leadershipfirst.net)).

**Rachel Pharris**  
**BLET Auxiliary National 1st Vice President/  
National Outreach Coordinator**  
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## Legislative Update — Continued from Page 12

- May 19, 2023: U.S. Customs House, 721 19th Street, First Floor Room 181, Denver, Colorado.
- June 9, 2023: Richard Boling Federal Building, 601 E. 12th Street, Room G-64 (Cafe Conference Room), Kansas City, Missouri.
- June 23, 2023: Tinley Park Convention Center, 18451 Convention Center Drive, Tinley Park, Illinois.

For those planning to attend a Pre-Retirement Seminar, please note: Security screening is required for seminars hosted inside any Federal buildings. Bring a current, valid photo ID (issued by State/Federal Government); no weapons permitted.

Attendees are encouraged to bring original records (or certified copies) of documents required to file a railroad retirement application (such as proof of age, marriage, or military service), along with an additional copy of each item to leave with field service staff.

Please let RRB know if you sign up for a seminar and become unable to attend. For more information or to register, please visit: [RRB.gov/PRS](http://RRB.gov/PRS).

*Natalie Miller lives in Alliance, Nebraska. She can be reached at [nmiller.blet.auxiliary@gmail.com](mailto:nmiller.blet.auxiliary@gmail.com), or 308-769-02437.*

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

**Rachel Pharris, Editor**  
**BLET Auxiliary News**  
[rachel-rae@live.com](mailto:rachel-rae@live.com)  
417-872-9641

**The next issue will be published in June 2023. Please  
have your submissions to Rachel on or before May  
15, 2023.**



## **BLET Auxiliary**

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## **From the GIA to the B. of L.E., to the BLET AUXILIARY, continued from Page 9 . . .**

While my research did not leave me rapt with intrigue, I found there to be many interesting, and often amusing, things that occurred. Every convention seemed to open with an admonishment to members against the “evils of thoughtless words and gossip,” and that “there were laws in place to handle transgressors.” I also noticed that most of their excursions, travel to and from the conventions, and visits to subdivisions around the country, was by train. Most of the time they were able to obtain passes from the general managers at the railroads, who were impressed by the work of the GIA. Another recurring theme was that, not only would organizations send greetings and invitations, they would also send flowers. The Ladies’ Auxiliary to the Order of Railway Conductors and the Ladies’ Society of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen would both send a basket of flowers to every convention.

These ladies were very talented as well. Beginning in 1912, the chairs who introduced the grand officers all found clever ways to do it, playing off either their offices and/or origins. There were many talented

songwriters, lyricists, and poets, and every convention was filled with their work. In the next newsletter installment, I will provide some pretty amusing examples of their talent.

Although the Auxiliary’s primary focus for decades was charity, even I was a little surprised to learn that their civic activism went all the way back to 1892, when a petition was circulated asking that the Chicago World’s Fair be closed on Sundays. In 1900, following a presentation from the Shoemaker’s Union, a resolution was adopted endorsing the cause of all trades and labor unions wherever possible. In 1902, Grand Vice President Cassell chastised anyone who said they didn’t have time to read. She advised that sisters needed to at least read the B. of L.E. Journal and daily newspaper so they could converse on topics of the day, enabling them to rear their sons talking about more than the new maid or latest fashion. I found this admonishment both disturbing in that there was no mention of daughters, but also uplifting in that it encouraged our members to educate themselves in order to “form correct, rational opinions . . . and to know rightly how to use her opinions and influence, which businessmen

and politicians acknowledge are not to be controverted.” The suffragette movement was gaining strength, and, at the 1918 convention, correspondence was ordered to be sent to the U.S. Senate requesting passage of the 19th Amendment, otherwise known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, giving women the right to vote. At the 1924 convention, they hosted a guest speaker from England who gave a talk on the “Ideals of Womanhood in the British Labor Party.”

There were significant American and world events during this period in our history, including the San Francisco earthquake in 1906, the U.S. entering World War I in 1917, the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918, the Stock Market Crash of 1929, and the beginning of the Great Depression. Through every domestic and world event or natural disaster, the Auxiliary helped our sisters and brothers in need - be they widows, orphans or aged members - in every way they could, including monetarily.

Stay tuned for our next riveting installment of “As the GIA Turns” in the Summer edition of BLET Auxiliary News.