



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 4, Number 4

Winter 2013

Anita J. Caruso, President • Sereena Hogan, Vice President/National Legislative Representative • Lawana Poss, Secretary
Helen Brand, Treasurer • Gina Forman, 1st Vice President /National Outreach Coordinator • www.bletauxiliary.net

Enchanted Echoes Auxiliary No. 446 Reorganized in New Mexico

By Sereena Hogan, National Vice President/National Legislative Rep



Pat Lynch, Jodi Cramer, BettySue Ralph, Amy Montoya, Michael Jaramillo, Jill Jaramillo, Gina Sproule, and Mike Sproule

Thanks to the efforts of BLET Division 446 Secretary/Treasurer Mike Sproule, of Belen, New Mexico, the Enchanted Echoes Auxiliary No. 446 has been resurrected. This auxiliary had originally been chartered in 2004, but had been inactive for a number of years. Mike reached out in late 2012 asking for help to get an auxiliary started in the Belen area. Because the charter from 2004 was never officially surrendered, we were able to reorganize an auxiliary there under that same charter. At a luncheon meeting held at Ribs Hickory BBQ Pit in Los Lunas, New Mexico, on September 16, 2013, five new members and three associate members joined Auxiliary 446. Four of these new members took the oath to serve as officers: President Jill Jaramillo, Vice President Amy Montoya, Secretary-Treasurer Gina Sproule, and Legislative Representative Jodi Cramer. The other members are: BettyeSue Ralph; Pat Lynch, New Mexico State Legislative Board Chairman; Mike Sproule, BLET Division 446 S/T; and Michael Jaramillo, BLET Division 446 Guide. Barbie Lynch, who was one of the original charter members in 2004 and the organizing force behind that effort, was unable to attend the meeting. Barbie has remained an auxiliary member-at-large and will transfer her membership back to Auxiliary 446.

Following the organizing meeting, FELA Attorney Lloyd (Chip) Rabb gave a presentation about the Federal Employers Liability Act and sponsored a lunch for everyone in attendance. Many thanks to Chip, as well as to my husband Ken Kroeger who accompanied me to this meeting and recorded the minutes. We welcome these new members and wish them all the best in their efforts to carry forth the mission of the BLET Auxiliary.

Has Your Auxiliary Elected a Convention Delegate?

Although all of our local auxiliary elections are important, 2013 is an especially important year because each auxiliary must elect a delegate and an alternate delegate for the National Convention to be held at the Rio Hotel, Casino, and Convention Center, in Las Vegas, Nevada, September 29 - October 2, 2014. According to our **Local Auxiliary Bylaws, Article VI, Nominations and Elections**, (on page 40 of the Constitution and Bylaws, which can be found on the BLET Auxiliary website at www.bletauxiliary.net), local auxiliary elections must be held every two years at the last meeting of the calendar year. If this is not an election year for your auxiliary and you have not already elected a delegate and alternate delegate for the convention, then you must hold a special election before the end of the year to do so.

For a description of the duties and requirements of the delegate position, please refer to the **Local Auxiliary Bylaws, Article IX**, on page 46. Expenses for the delegates to attend the convention are covered by the BLET National Auxiliary.

At each National Convention (or "General Session" as it is referred to in our bylaws), elections are held for the national officers and changes or amendments are made to the Constitution and Bylaws. If you have an idea about something you would

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Auxiliary President's Message - BY ANITA J. CARUSO

The holidays are fast approaching and this time of the year is very special to me. I am happy that my husband Sam finally has enough seniority to be able to take a week of vacation at both Thanksgiving and Christmas. As many of you

are well aware, when your spouse is an over-the-road locomotive engineer, there are many sacrifices the family makes to accommodate this type of schedule. It took many years to get to this place, but I am grateful that we have withstood the sands of time and can enjoy these holidays with our family and friends.

Since we don't do a lot of traveling for the auxiliary during this time of the year, let's please keep in mind that we need to continue to maintain our focus on recruiting new members. We have organized three new auxiliaries this year and are happy with all the new members-at-large who joined during the four regional conventions this summer. Let's continue to invite any railroad spouses we come into contact with—whether it is at a holiday party, educational seminar, or someone you just happen to run into around town—to consider joining the BLET Auxiliary.

As the year is winding down, it gives me pause to look ahead to 2014. The members of the Executive Council have much to do to prepare for our upcoming Executive Council meeting, which will be held at my home in April 2014. I am beginning to formulate dates and plans with the council members to accommodate everyone's schedules. More about this very important yearly meeting will be forthcoming.

We are gearing up for our Second Quadrennial Convention, which will take place next year at the Rio Hotel and Suites in Las Vegas, Nevada, the week of September 29 – October 2, 2014. Our spring issue will contain much more about this convention, but we wanted to get the ball rolling now in light of the fact that we have many new auxiliaries that will be experiencing a National Convention for the first time.

As per our Constitution & By-Laws, Article IV (Representation). Section 1. Delegates. Page 13.

(a) Each existing auxiliary in good standing in the National Auxiliary at the close of the Auxiliary

calendar year ending December 31 preceding the convention will be entitled to a delegate at each session of the National Auxiliary Convention. An existing auxiliary that has not submitted their annual report and dues to the National Auxiliary by March 31 of the National Convention year will not be entitled to seat a delegate nor shall a proxy be assigned to represent the auxiliary. Each auxiliary organized during the year of the National Auxiliary Convention (prior to 90 days in advance of said convention) will be entitled to seat a delegate as long as all organizational paperwork, and any associated fees have been forwarded to the National Secretary and is deemed by her to be in order. If no member from an auxiliary is able to attend, then the National President may assign a proxy to a member or an elected delegate.

We want to be sure every auxiliary has representation at this very important convention and don't want anything to fall through the cracks in getting your Annual Report filled out, turned in, and filed by our National Secretary Lawana Poss. The due date for these report forms is March 1, 2014. Please make every effort to get your report and dues to Sister Lawana by that date. As a courtesy, we allow a 30-day grace period for the filing of these documents; however, if your dues and paperwork are not received in Sister Lawana's office by March 31, 2014, you will forfeit the opportunity to seat a delegate at the Second Quadrennial Convention. Please refer to our Constitution & Bylaws, which is available on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net, for further explanation of this process. As a side note, per our Constitution & By-Laws, we held elections for member-at-large delegates at all four regional conventions this past year.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone for helping to make this one of the best years of my term. I wish everyone a safe, happy, healthy and prosperous New Year as we continue to educate, support, and promote the welfare of BLET members and their families around the country.

Anita J. Caruso
National President - BLET Auxiliary
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Omaha, NE 68136
(402) 330-6348 ~bunziegia@cox.net

Has Your Auxiliary Elected a Convention Delegate?

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like to see changed or amended with regard to how the Auxiliary operates, either on a national level or on the local level, you must submit a resolution to the office of the National Secretary. In order to have that change considered at the convention, it must be submitted at least 60 days prior to the opening of the General Session. For next year's convention that date is July 31, 2014. For more detailed instructions on how to submit a resolution, please refer to the guide below that shows the format for submitting a resolution. We will also have this form available on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net. If you have any questions, please contact National President Anita J. Caruso by e-mail at bunziegia@cox.net or call her at 402-330-6348.

[Constitution/National Bylaws/Local Auxiliary Bylaws]

Proposed Amendment to [Constitution/Bylaws]

[Article #, pg #, Title, Section]

Resolution submitted by

Present Law reads:

[type what the Constitution or Bylaw says now]

Change to read:

[type as to how you think it should be changed]

The purpose of this Amendment is to [insert the reason you feel the change is needed].



Holiday Greetings from National Treasurer Helen Brand

As another year comes to an end, my thoughts are drawn to an extremely old Scottish song from the 1700s and the Robert Burns transcription gets the most attention. Auld Lang Syne actually means "times gone by," and when

we sing this song, we are saying, "We'll drink a cup of kindness yet for times gone by."

Thirty some years ago I joined the Grand Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers as a young wife of a pool freight engineer. I found friendships and a bond with other wives who had to deal with the same lifestyle. My husband's division was always politically active and our auxiliary was no exception. We wrote letters, marched in unity, and represented our husbands at hearings at the state capitol.

My husband Charlie and I have attended regional meetings for twenty years and I have attended four National Conventions. I have served as the National Treasurer of the BLETA for the past eight years. This will be my last year in this position. As I look back through the years, I have made so many friendships and acquaintances in my association with this wonderful organization.

And these wonderful memories and shared moments bring reflection in this age-old song. Should old acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?

*Should old acquaintance be forgot, for times gone by?
For times gone by, my dear, for times gone by,
We'll take a cup of kindness yet, for friends gone by.
And surely you'll buy your pint cup! and surely I'll buy mine!
And we'll take a cup o' kindness yet, for times gone by.
We two have run about the slopes, and picked the daisies fine;
But we've wandered many a weary foot, since times gone by.
We two have paddled in the stream, from morning sun till dine;
But seas between us broad have roared since times gone by.
And there's a hand my trusty friend!
And give us a hand o' thine!
And we'll take a right good-will draught, for times gone by.*

Here's wishing each and every one of you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Love and Light to each of you who have touched my life and made it richer!

Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

LOCAL AUXILIARY NEWS

Auxiliary Secretaries, please be aware that annual report packets will be in the mail soon. Your annual report and the 2013 dues for your auxiliary members are due on or before March 1, 2014. If you have any questions about the forms in the annual report packet, please give me a call or send me an e-mail with your questions. I will be more than happy to assist you in getting these forms properly filled out and processed.

Local Auxiliary election of officers must take place every two years at the last regular meeting of the year. At this year's election, each auxiliary must elect a Delegate and an Alternate to attend the National Convention to be held September 29 - October 2 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Any auxiliary that does not have their members' dues paid in full by the last day of the grace period, March 31, 2014, will not be eligible to seat a delegate at the National Convention.

Also, please notify me, or any national officer, when there is a death of a member of your auxiliary, or the death of one of their family members. In addition to keeping our records up to date, we want to be able to send our condolences out to the family. We would like to share in your joys also. If any member has news that they would like to share, please send me an e-mail so that I may include it in my newsletter column.

A BIG WELCOME TO OF OUR NEW AUXILIARIES!

Auxiliary 446 - Belen, New Mexico

M.J. Jaramillo, Jill Jaramillo, Amy Montoya, BettySue Ralph, Jodi M. Cramer, Pat Lynch, Barbie Lynch, Michael A. Sproule, and Gina M. Sproule.

Auxiliary 422 – Kansas City, Missouri

Megan Lundy, Cheryl Leach, Ami Tevis, Katy Lautzenhiser, Randall Lundy, Lori George, Jessica Barnard, Jeremy Leach, and Casie Lewis.

Auxiliary 72 - Vancouver, Washington

Karla Black, Suzanna Campbell, Michael B. Campbell, Kramer Ragan, Julie Dunn, Janet Cordes, Tina Clark, Nicole Tiffany, Jesse Edwards, Amanda K. Miller, Lynne H. Barnes, Kayla Marshall, Melissa and Justin Lowery, and Holly Wasnoska.

MAL NEWS

Welcome to all the new Members-at-Large and Associate Members-at-Large: AnnaStacia Penrod, Karen S. Baker,

Norman Baker, Nancy Anderson, Jarrell Alling, Kimberly Bryant, J.E. Flummer, Lisa Martin and Julie Stevens.

To all Members-at-Large:

Notice of Dues will be arriving in your mail soon. Please make sure all of your information is correct and return with your dues payment to me no later than March 1, 2014.

SCHOLARSHIP NEWS

If you have children who are college bound, they may be eligible to apply for a scholarship from the BLET Auxiliary. To qualify, one parent must be a member of the BLET and one parent must be a member of the BLET Auxiliary for a minimum of two years.

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 2014-2015 academic school year are due in my office no later than April 1, 2014. Late applications will not be considered.

CARE AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CAP)

The CAP program was established in 1921 and it is our organization's way of saying thank you to long-time members. These members are widows whose incomes are such that some of life's little pleasures are out of their reach. At the present time, we have two members who are beneficiaries of the CAP. The program provides a \$100 per month stipend to qualifying members to help them maintain a little bit more of the dignity they deserve. If you know someone who would qualify, please have them contact any of the national officers so that we may send them an application for this program.

Please keep in mind our wonderful BLET Cookbooks are available for purchase! They make wonderful hostess gifts and wedding gifts, or for any occasion! Please send me an e-mail or call me for more details!

Thank you to everyone for your patience and support as I take on this new position as National Secretary. I have tried to "hit the floor running," and so far it has been an exciting undertaking. I will continue to learn as I go. Please call or



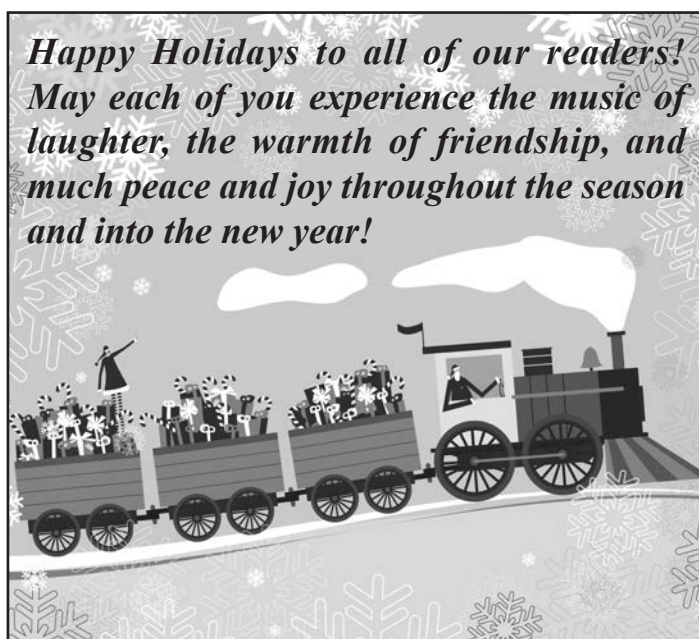
e-mail me with any questions that you may have. I truly look forward to the opportunity to meet many of you at one of the upcoming regional meetings!

Our deepest sympathies go out to Sister Sereena Hogan and her family. Her mother, Mary Margaret DeGagne, passed away Sept. 22, 2013. Our thoughts and prayers are with Sister Sereena.

Congratulations to Sister Anita Caruso and husband Sam as they welcomed grandson number three, Luca Romi Baggiani, born July 5, 2013.

From me and my family to you and yours...wishing you a safe, happy, and healthy 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.



John Edgar Thomson Foundation provides financial assistance to daughters of deceased railroaders

The John Edgar Thomson Foundation, a nationally recognized non-profit organization, provides limited financial assistance to daughters of deceased railroad employees.

The Foundation was established in 1882 and endowed by the will of John Edgar Thomson, who was the third president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Although childless, he left a large endowment for orphaned daughters of railroad employees to help maintain their good health and to provide for their higher education. Since its creation, the Thomson Foundation has assisted countless families in their transition back to a normal life.

In order to be considered for a grant, the deceased parent (regardless of gender) must have been actively employed by a railroad in the United States at the time of death, although the cause does not need to be work-related. The parent, while on the active rolls of the railroad, may have been receiving disability or sick leave benefits at the time of death.

Additionally, the daughter must be living with her remaining parent or guardian full time, unless attending college, to qualify for an award. To remain eligible, the Foundation specifically requires that both the daughter

and her parent/guardian must remain unmarried in order to receive aid. The family's financial status is also considered in the selection process.

The grant is available to daughters of the deceased throughout their infancy until the age of 18. It can be continued, however, until the recipient reaches 24 years age provided that she is in pursuit of higher education. Whatever grant is awarded usually serves to benefit all members of the family. The Foundation also offers special health care benefits.

All applications are subjected to the approval of the Thomson Foundation's Board of Trustees. The funding for the work of the Foundation is completely independent of any railroad, and it neither solicits nor receives funds from the public.

For further info, please contact Director Sheila Cohen, at:

The John Edgar Thomson Foundation
201 South 18th Street, Suite 318
Philadelphia, PA 19103
Phone: (215) 545-6083 or (800) 888-1278
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E-mail: sjethomson@aol.com

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE - BY SEREENA HOGAN, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REP

"No man is able to make progress when he is wavering between opposite things."

— Epictetus

With Congress having been consumed with budget battles, the debt ceiling, and the continuing battles over Obamacare, not much business has been conducted in this last quarter of the year. As we enter the new year, I don't think it would be realistic to even hope that our members of Congress will find much that they are willing to agree on in 2014, but we can only hope that perhaps they will at least attempt to act like mature, sensible adults and learn to disagree without being so darn disagreeable!

BLET Lobbies for Two-Person Train Crew Bill

The Legislative Update that appeared in the Autumn issue of this publication contained a section entitled "BLET Denounces One-Person Train Crew Operations," describing the horrific incident that occurred last July when a runaway train plowed through the small town of Lac Megantic in Quebec, Canada, resulting in the destruction of many buildings in the downtown area and the death of approximately 50 people. In the aftermath of that tragic accident, which heightened awareness of the risk of single-person operations, Representatives Michael Michaud (D-ME) and Chellie Pingree (D-ME) introduced H.R. 3040, the Safe Freight Act, on August 2, 2013. The bill requires that *"no freight train or light engine used in connection with the movement of freight may be operated unless it has a crew consisting of at least two individuals, one of whom is certified under regulations promulgated by the Federal Railroad Administration as a locomotive engineer pursuant to section 20135, and the other of whom is certified under regulations promulgated by the Federal Railroad Administration as a conductor pursuant to section 20163."*

Following the introduction of that bill, BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce

and Vice President & National Legislative Representative John Tolman led a team of BLET lobbyists on Capitol Hill in a concerted effort to get the union's message to the members of Congress. To follow up on the lobbying effort, President Pierce is now asking BLET members, retirees, the BLET Auxiliary, and all concerned family members to contact their members of the U.S. House of Representatives to urge them to sign on to this vital piece of legislation.

To find your member of the U.S. House, go to www.house.gov and enter your zip code.

Coal Export Facility to Open in Washington State

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen recently announced its support of the building of a coal export facility in Washington State that is expected to create many well-paying union jobs during its construction and more than 100 permanent jobs after its completion, including a substantial number of new rail jobs.

Eight trains per day will deliver coal to the terminal from the Powder River Basin in Montana and Wyoming. The facility is expected to begin operations in 2015 and will export coal to emerging markets in Asia and beyond. To see the complete BLET Newsflash, with a link to President Pierce's letter of support, go to <http://www.ble-t.org/pr/news/newsflash.asp?id=5503>.

Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway Strike

In the early morning hours of September 20, more than 100 BLET members struck the Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway (WLE) to protest that railroad's repudiation of the Collective Bargaining Agreements that cover the two operating crafts. Picket lines were posted at seven primary WLE terminals in Ohio and Pennsylvania, shutting down the entire railroad's operation, which usually averages 45-50 trains per day. BLET General Chairman Bob Linsey stated that WLE had used management officials to perform the work of bargaining unit employees and had also ignored

longstanding crew consist agreements by operating single-person operations in an effort to eliminate trainmen. BLET National President Dennis Pierce stated that WLE's actions were "in outright defiance of its obligations, a major dispute in and of itself."

He further condemned WLE for its actions, saying the railroad had loaned 25 million dollars to the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railroad (MM&A), for its failed one-person operations. As you may remember from the September update, a MM&A train that had been operated by a single crew member, rolled driverless down a hill before derailling in the middle of the town of Lac-Megantic, Quebec, causing an explosion that killed 47 people. Following that tragic accident, a bipartisan bill, H.R. 3040, the Safe Freight Act, was introduced in Congress. This bill would require at least two crew members on all freight trains in the nation. President Pierce called on the House leadership to move forward with that legislation.

By late afternoon on September 20, a U.S. District Court Judge issued a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) in Akron, Ohio, ending the WLE strike. He ordered the strikers to return to work and to refrain from any form of economic self-help or job action against the railroad, including delaying anyone from performing his or her work for the railroad. The judge conditioned the TRO on WLE's agreement to cease the use of supervisors or other management employees in place of engineers or conductors. The TRO will remain in effect until a hearing is held on the WLE's request for a longer-term injunction.

Teamsters Rail Conference Fighting to Restore Full Railroad Unemployment & Sickness Benefits

The following is excerpted from a post dated October 4, 2013, on the BLET Legislative Department website, www.bletdc.org:

Beginning October 1, the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) will reduce railroad unemployment and sickness insurance benefits by 7.2 percent — instead of 9.2

percent — due to federal budget cuts first implemented in March 2013. Since that time, these benefits had been reduced by 9.2 percent.

However, Rail Labor and the industry say that's not good enough. Both sides are actively petitioning members of Congress to eliminate the unfair benefit reduction entirely. Rail Labor unions have contacted all members of the House and Senate, while the Association of American Railroads has reached out to the Ranking Members of both the House and Senate Budget Committees.

Dennis R. Pierce is leading the charge on behalf of the Teamsters Rail Conference and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET). As President of both Organizations, Pierce mailed a letter to all members of Congress highlighting the unfair treatment that railroad workers receive under the Budget Control Act of 2011, more commonly known now as sequestration.

"Workers who are not employed in the railroad industry do not have their basic unemployment and sickness benefits reduced, only railroad workers," he wrote. "It is difficult to understand why this unfair and onerous reduction is being applied to only one type of worker in this country."

The sequestration cut impacts more than 70,000 Rail Conference members belonging to the BLET and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED).

"We believe that railroad workers should not be singled out and penalized by having their unemployment and sickness benefits arbitrarily reduced," President Pierce wrote. "This is not only unfair but it is harmful to the economy as a whole since almost 100 percent of these benefits is immediately put back into the economy as these individuals struggle to buy food and medicine, pay mortgages, etc. Recipients of these temporary benefits do not save or invest these benefits. Rather, they use them to pay for everyday living expenses."

According to the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board, 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, 2014, the end of the fiscal year. Reductions in future fiscal years, should they occur, will be calculated based on applicable law. The 7.2 percent reduction in railroad unemployment and sickness benefits will reduce the maximum daily benefit rate from \$68.00 to \$63.10. As a result, the total maximum amount payable in a 2-week period with 10 days of unemployment will drop from \$680.00 to \$631.04.

"We... request that you rescind this unfair benefit reduction on our most vulnerable workers, and restore their full unemployment and sickness benefits," President Pierce concluded.

A copy of President Pierce's letter can be found at http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Rail_Conf_Letter_2013.pdf.

Understanding Chained CPI and its Potential Impact on Members

The U.S. Chained Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a twist to the current Consumer Price Index (the formula that looks at how the cost of goods changes over time). Each month, the Bureau of Labor Statistics determines the CPI based on the average prices of 211 different categories of goods and services in 38 different urban geographical areas. Various public and private organizations use the CPI to determine cost of living adjustments.

The Chained CPI measures living costs differently because it is based on the assumption that when prices for one item go up, consumers sometimes settle for a cheaper substitute, for instance when the price of beef goes up, people buy more chicken and less beef. With Chained CPI, cost of living adjustments would be lower than with the CPI that is currently being used. Chained CPI would cause cost of living adjustments for Social Security to be lowered by .3 percent, which initially doesn't sound like all that much, but it compounds over time.

Proponents of this new twist on the Consumer Price Index, like The Heritage Foundation and the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, want to enact

Chained CPI as a means to cut the federal deficit at the expense of those who depend on programs like Social Security and Supplemental Security Income. Groups like AARP claim that the current CPI already understates the inflation seniors experience, primarily because the elderly purchase more medical care than younger people, and medical care inflation has far exceeded inflation in the rest of the economy. Because changes in Railroad Retirement Tier I benefits usually follow Social Security benefit changes, if Chained CPI goes into effect, thereby slowing future Social Security cost of living adjustments, it will more likely than not affect Railroad Retirement benefits as well.

The Obama Administration has proposed adopting the chained CPI in its fiscal 2014 budget request. We need to tell the White House and our representatives, "Don't bargain with our railroad retirement and social security benefits!"

Medicare Part B Premiums Remain the Same in 2014

The Railroad Retirement Board has reported that the standard Medicare Part B monthly premium will be \$104.90 in 2014, the same amount as in 2013. Some beneficiaries will continue to pay higher premiums based on their modified adjusted gross income, but these amounts are also remaining the same as in 2013.

Beneficiaries in Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage plans pay premiums that vary from plan to plan. Beginning in 2011, the Affordable Care Act required Part D beneficiaries whose modified adjusted gross income exceeds the same income thresholds that apply to Part B premiums to also pay a monthly adjustment amount. In 2014, the adjustment amount ranges from \$12.10 to \$69.30. The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) withholds Part B premiums from benefit payments it processes. The agency can also withhold Part C and D premiums from benefit payments if an individual submits a request to his or her Part C or D insurance plan. The RRB collects Part D income-related adjustment amounts, but must bill the enrollee, as the agency is currently unable to withhold these amounts from benefit payments.

Those railroad retirement and social security Medicare beneficiaries affected by the 2014 Part B and D income-related premiums will receive a notice from the Social Security Administration (SSA) by December 2013. The notice will include an explanation of the circumstances where a beneficiary may request a new determination. Persons who have questions or would like to request a new determination should contact SSA after receiving their notice.

Additional information about Medicare coverage, including specific benefits and deductibles, can be found at www.medicare.gov.

Railroad Retirement Benefits to Increase in 2014

The following is from Railroad Retirement Board Press Release 13-11, <http://www.rrb.gov/opa/pr/pr1311.asp>:

Most railroad retirement annuities, like social security benefits, are scheduled to increase in January 2014 on the basis of the rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the third quarter of 2012 to the corresponding period of the current year.

Cost-of-living increases are calculated in both the tier I and tier II benefits included in a railroad retirement annuity. Tier I benefits, like social security benefits, will increase by 1.5 percent, which is the percentage of the CPI rise. Tier II benefits will increase by 0.5 percent, which is 32.5 percent of the CPI rise. The vested dual benefit payments and supplemental annuities also paid by the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) are not adjusted for the CPI rise.

In January 2014, the average regular railroad retirement employee annuity will increase \$29 a month to \$2,459 and the average of combined benefits for an employee and spouse will increase \$41 a month to \$3,540. For those aged widow(er)s eligible for an increase, the average annuity will increase \$17 a month to \$1,279. However, widow(er)s whose annuities are being paid under the Railroad Retirement and Survivors' Improvement Act of 2001 will not receive annual cost-of-living adjustments until their annuity amount is exceeded by the amount that would have been paid under prior law, counting all interim cost-of-living increases otherwise payable. Almost 37 percent of the widow(er)s on the RRB's rolls are being paid under the 2001 law.

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

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

In late December the RRB will mail notices to all annuitants providing a breakdown of the annuity rates payable to them in January 2014.

Sereena Hogan can be reached by phone at (520) 297-0944; by mail at 8720 N. Myrtle Dr., Tucson, Arizona 85704, or by e-mail at vp3sereena@aol.com.

From 1st VP/National Outreach Coordinator Gina Forman



It is hard to believe this year is almost over already and the holiday season is already upon us. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to you all! With all the chaos in the world right now, I sincerely hope you can all take time to slow down and focus on what is important this season. Whether you take time to enjoy a movie with your family and friends or take delight in baking holiday treats, make sure you enjoy the season to its fullest.

Many times we forget those less fortunate until the holiday season is upon us. I challenge each of you to commit to helping those who need it all the time. While those charities certainly appreciate the help that is received, the need never ends. Let us remember the many paths we cross during our busy year, and hope to brighten each and every one of them in some way. When you do get to spend time with your family, I hope many happy memories are made. I certainly hope your loved one who works for the railroad has a safe winter season as well. Injuries are more likely to occur during inclement weather, so remind them to take extra care when the weather presents extra challenges.

Lastly, I know many of you have Christmas parties for your local auxiliary at which you conduct various fundraisers. I hope you all have great success in your efforts. This is a great time to bring people together and celebrate. Your membership in the Auxiliary is vital to our future and our success. Please feel free to contact any national officer if you know someone who would like to know more about the BLET Auxiliary!

Gina Forman can be reached at 765-432-1050, by e-mail at tweety95@yahoo.com, or by mail at 63 S. Hood Street, Peru, Indiana 46970.

Retirement Rocks!

By Debbie Keele, Vice President
Helen Gould Auxiliary No. 235
Osawatomie, Kansas

After 42 years of railroading, my husband Jim was able to retire from the Union Pacific Railroad on July 1, 2012. Jim hired out on the Missouri-Kansas-Texas (also known by its stock exchange symbol, "K-T," which evolved into "the Katy") Railroad in 1970 as an operator in Franklin, Missouri, where we met. He left the Katy in 1971 and went to work on the Missouri Pacific Railroad as a brakeman out of Osawatomie, Kansas. We dated long-distance for a several years and married in 1973. Jim became a fireman in 1973 and was promoted to engineer in 1975. In 1982, the Missouri Pacific was merged into the Union Pacific, and in 1985 the terminal was moved from Osawatomie, Kansas, to Kansas City, Missouri.

During his career, Jim was very active with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and served as a Legislative Representative for his Division. He held the office of Kansas State Legislative Board Chairman from 1991 until his retirement from the Union Pacific Railroad. Jim was instrumental in leading Kansas to become the first state affiliated with the Teamsters and served on the Advisory Board of the Missouri-Kansas-Nebraska Conference. He also served as the Treasurer and Chairman for the Southwestern Convention Meeting (SWCM) Committee. It has been a lot of fun attending conventions and meetings over the years and making friends all over the country.

Several of Jim's fellow engineers and close friends also retired in 2012, so they planned a party and celebrated together. We had a wonderful time dancing to the tunes of the Route 66 Band, which is comprised of a group of very talented railroaders, and spending the evening with about 300 friends and family members.

Now that he is retired, I don't miss waking up in the middle of the night when Jim would get called, and it is so nice to be able to make plans with friends. No more wondering if Jim will be home for Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas Eve, and family gatherings. Retirement is a wonderful thing! I still work part time at a bridal shop, but am usually able to get away when I need to.

This has been such a fun year planning trips and seeing old friends. Some of you may remember Tim and Barbara

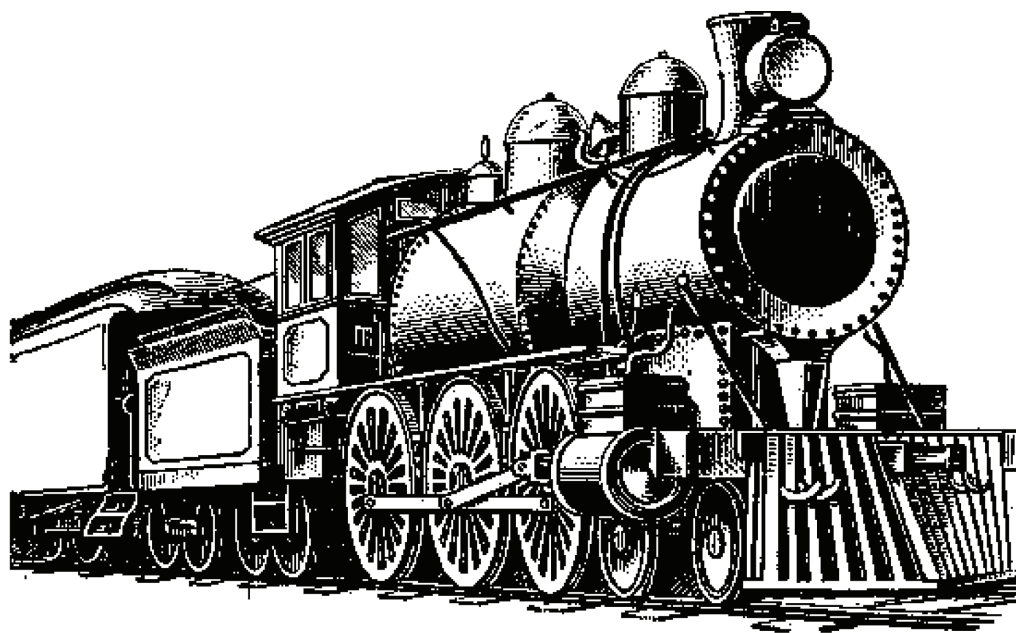


Debbie and Jim Keele, surrounded by friends and fellow fans, enjoy one of their favorite pastimes - baseball!

Young from Arkansas, and Perry and Carolyn Renfro from Oklahoma. In February, we all met in Arkansas at Hot Springs where the Youngs currently reside and enjoyed horse racing and reminiscing at the Oaklawn Race Track. The horse racing was a lot of fun, so we planned another trip in May with four other retired railroad couples from our area. We traveled to Des Moines, Iowa, for an Iowa Cubs baseball game and then on to Altoona to Prairie Meadows for two days of horse racing. We all had so much fun together that we planned a canoe trip on the Niangua River in Missouri in July and again in August. One of the couples has a beautiful cabin in Oklahoma on Grand Lake so we all spent a few days with them in September. We haven't figured out what to do next, but I'm sure we'll think of something! It's just so nice to be able to make plans and go and do things with friends.

Baseball is high on our agenda of things to do so we took in several Cardinals games, including a play-off game with the Dodgers, a few Royals games, and took our children and grandchildren to see a T-Bones game. It's always sad when the last baseball game of the season is played and we look forward to April when it starts all over again. We have high hopes for our Royals team next year and plan to watch the Cardinals in the World Series again, too!

For those of you whose spouses are still working, hang in there! Retirement is well worth the wait!



TRAIN OF LIFE

By Marv Hardin

**Some folks ride the train of life
Looking out the rear,
Watching miles of life roll by,
And marking every year.**

**They sit in sad remembrance,
Of wasted days gone by,
And curse their life for what it was,
And hang their head and cry.**

**But I don't concern myself with that,
I took a different vent,
I look forward to what life holds,
And not what has been spent.**

**So strap me to the engine,
As securely as I can be,
I want to be out on the front,
To see what I can see.**

**I want to feel the winds of change,
Blowing in my face,
I want to see what life unfolds,
As I move from place to place.**

**I want to see what's coming up,
Not looking at the past,
Life's too short for yesterdays,
It moves along too fast.**

**So if the ride gets bumpy,
While you are looking back,
Go up front, and you may find,
Your life has jumped the track.**

**It's all right to remember,
That's part of history,
But up front's where it's happening,
There's so much mystery.**

**The enjoyment of living,
Is not where we have been,
It's looking ever forward,
To another year and ten.**

**It's searching all the byways,
Never should you refrain,
For if you want to live your life,
You gotta drive the train!**

Cookbook Closeout Sale!



The first and second editions of *Mainline Cooking* are both on sale:
1 Book for \$10, 2 for \$15
Shipping included!

Both cookbooks feature a variety of recipes submitted by BLET Auxiliary and BLET members across the country, as well as some amusing railroad trivia. Order forms are available on our website, www.bletauxiliary.net, or you may fill out the order blank here and mail with your check, payable to BLET Auxiliary, to:

Anita J. Caruso
7660 S. 162nd Street
Omaha, NE 68136

Name _____

Address _____

No. of books: _____

First Edition: _____

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Total Enclosed: \$ _____



FanCouture Fundraiser

FanCouture is a line of jewelry made from genuine faceted crystals that sparkle and shine in 21 colors. All of the genuine faceted crystals measure 12mm. The necklaces are approximately 20.5 inches long and bracelets are approximately 7.5 inches long. Each is hand knotted and finished with a Rhodium clasp. The earrings all come on .925 sterling silver hooks and feature a 1/2-inch long drop off the ear.

Orders can be placed on the FanCouture website (www.fancouture.com). Just remember, you must add the BLET Auxiliary code "1003" at checkout.

Here's how you can help: Send an email to your friends and family with the FanCouture website and the BLET Auxiliary code 1003. Share the website information on Facebook. Print off a paper fundraiser form and share the SPARKLE with your friends and family. Have a few friends over for a girls night and share with them how you are raising money for the BLET Auxiliary. They will love the FanCouture SPARKLE!

Sharing the BLET Auxiliary fundraiser at church, sporting events, beauty salon, work, and with everyone you know will help raise \$100,000 or more before October 2014. The funds we raise through this fundraiser will be used to offset the expenses of our National Convention next year in Las Vegas.

Greetings from the Editor, Sereena Hogan

Holiday greetings to all of our readers! This last year has been a good one for the BLET Auxiliary. We celebrated our 125-year Anniversary in Detroit alongside the BLET as they celebrated their 150th! It was quite an event and we were grateful to be included. We were able to organize three new auxiliaries this year and added numerous new members-at-large and associate members to our ranks. Welcome to all!

On a personal note, my husband Ken retired at the end of July and I was very grateful to be able to be in Cleveland for the celebration. It's been quite an adjustment for both of us having him home all the time and I was especially thankful to have his support during the time that my mother passed away in late September.

Wishing each and every one of you a holiday season filled with all that brings joy to you and your families!

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

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The next issue will be published in March 2014. Please have your submissions to Sereena by February 20, 2014.



BLET Auxiliary

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Mark Your Calendar Now!

June 15-19, 2014

87th Annual Southeastern Meeting Association (SMA) - Savannah, Georgia

Arrangements Chairman D.C. Dickey, Local Chairman of Division 646, will host the 2014 SMA at the Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa in Savannah.

June 29-July 3, 2014

74th Annual International Western Convention (IWC) - Minneapolis, Minneapolis

Arrangements Chairman David K. Brown, Chairman of the Minnesota State Legislative Board and Legislative Representative of BLET Division 517, will host the 2014 IWC at the Hilton Minneapolis.

August 4-8, 2014

76th Annual Eastern Union Meeting Association (EUMA) - Cleveland, Ohio

Arrangements Chairman Patrick Redmond, Local Chairman of Division 607, and Co-Chair James R.

Blum, Legislative Representative of Division 526, will host the 2014 EUMA at the newly-renovated Westin Downtown Cleveland, which is within walking distance of BLET National Division headquarters.

September 7-11, 2014

79th Annual Southwestern Convention Meeting (SWCM) - St. Louis, Missouri

Arrangements Chairman Dave W. Grimes, Local Chairman of Division 42, will host the 2014 SWCM at the Hilton St. Louis at the Ballpark Hotel. For more information, visit the SWCM website: bletswcm.org.

BLET Auxiliary Second Quadrennial National Convention

September 29 - October 2, 2014, at the Rio Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada.