FEBRUARY 2008

What has the BLET done for me lately?

Often overlooked, fringe benefits an important part of compensation BLET provides its members

It’s a familiar refrain: “What has the BLET done for me lately?” The answer is quite a lot.

BLET collective bargaining agreements provide our members with some of the highest blue-collar wages in the United States, and also include important work rules that ensure our members’ safety on duty.

Often overlooked — but just as important — are the fringe benefits provided to BLET members as part of the Brotherhood’s collective bargaining agreements.

In 2008, BLET members on average will receive more than $31,000 in fringe benefits, according to the BLET’s 2008 Fringe Benefit Study.

The rail carriers will pay an average of $12,919.32 toward membership health care benefits — that’s $12,919.32 per member working under the National Contract.

This does not include what the carriers’ contributions toward the retirees’ health care plan, which is an additional $1,331.76 per member, per year. It also does not include benefits of $545.64 per member, per year toward the dental plan, and $121.92 per member, per year for the vision plan.

“disable every penny of this fringe benefit.”

These fringe benefits also extend to Railroad Retirement payments. By the first of the year, nearly half of the $2,982.02 that BLET members receive each year in fringe benefits goes toward Railroad Retirement payments.

For each Class 1 railroad worker covered by the National Contract, rail carriers will contribute $6,324 per year in Railroad Retirement Tier 1 taxes and an additional $9,183.90 per year in Railroad Retirement Tier 2 taxes. That’s a total of $15,567.90. (As a side note, the same railroad workers will each pay $6,324 per year in Tier 1 taxes and $2,960.10 in Tier 2 taxes.)

“Our Railroad Retirement system is strong and healthy, and I hope it’ll be that way for generations to come,” President Hahs said. “As economists provide dire forecasts for Social Security, it is good to know that our members can depend on the reliability of Railroad Retirement.”

The next time someone asks, “What has the BLET done for me lately?” the answer is quite a lot.

The money values set forth in this study are computed on costs actually known as of January 2008, and the estimated values of fringe benefits accruing to operating employees is based on annual wages of $75,900 to $102,000, which are the maximum Tier 2 and Tier 1 Railroad Retirement taxes, respectively.

It should also be noted that the study does not take in to consideration vacations, holidays and other time off benefits, which vary by railroad, class of service and seniority.

“I am proud of the contracts negotiated by the BLET,” President Hahs said. “Railroad jobs are good jobs — the kind of jobs you can depend on to raise a family. The wages and work rules are just as important as the fringe benefits. So the next time someone asks, ‘What has the union done for me lately?’ you can point them to this study and show what the BLET is doing every day to provide its hard working members with decent jobs and decent benefits.”

Members may download the 2008 Fringe Benefits report from the BLET website at http://www.blet.org/FringeBenefits2008.pdf •

Members at Huron & Eastern short line ratify first BLET agreement

Members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engin eers and Trainmen have ratified their first-ever collective bargaining agreement with the Huron & Eastern Railroad, a RailAmerica short line headquartered in Vassar, Mich.

The four-year agreement was ratified on Dec. 17, 2007, and went into effect on January 1. The agreement covers approximately 25 members and provides general wage increases of 2% per year (8% over the life of the contract) in addition to bonuses earned through the company’s profit sharing program.

The agreement provided a 3% wage increase from December 17 to December 31, along with the annual 2% wage increase that went into effect on January 1.

Prior to selecting the BLET as their designated collective bargaining repre-sentative on May 11, 2006, workers at the Huron & Eastern were non-union “at will” employees.

Dan Lorenz, Local Chairman of Division 327, said the new contract provides security for members.

“The big reason we organized and wanted to get in a union was to create a policy, structure and guidelines to hold management accountable,” Lorenz said. “The new contract gives us those protections.”

The contract contains a work safe provision that allows members to earn quarterly bonuses for avoiding workplace injuries. Payments under the work safe program are awarded on an individual basis and could be as high as $780 per quarter.

In terms of profit sharing, members have the right to opt out of the program if it does not meet their expectations. In lieu of profit sharing, members would earn a general wage increase of 3% per year instead of 2%.

Members also will receive back pay in the form of profit sharing payments that were withheld during negotiations. Lorenz said the negotiating process lasted between 18 and 24 months, and during that time management withheld profit sharing payments from six previous quarters, which will total several thousand dollars for some members.

Midway through the negotiating process, Rail America was sold. The transaction threw a monkey wrench into the negotiating process and delayed the final outcome.

“This property took the local union and joint council leaders and deliberations by the union’s democratically elected General Executive Board.”

“We have been fortunate to have candidates throughout the Democratic primary who are friends of working families and the Teamsters Union,” Hoffa said. “We are pleased that all of the Democratic candidates have focused on issues of importance to working people, including wages, health care, retirement security, fair trade and outsourcing.”

The union’s endorsement immediately activates the union’s 50-state election program, with special emphasis on swing states.

“Senarator Obama will stand with the Teamsters when it comes to fighting for working families,” Hoffa said. “This endorse ment begins a partnership to change America. Together we will reinvent the political process and give a voice to those who have been ignored.

Members at Huron & Eastern short line ratify first BLET agreement

Members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen • International Brotherhood of Teamsters
Division 34’s John Claytor championed safety at CSX

Brother John T. Claytor, a member of BLET Division 34 (Columbus, Ohio), ended his long and safety-conscious railroad career when he made his Last Run on December 27, 2007.

Brother Claytor’s Last Run came as a Locomotive Engineer for CSX Transportation on a trip between Willard, Ohio and Marion, Ohio. Operating a MAC 70 engine on mixed manifest train No. Q549. He then worked third trick on his last job Y301 at Parsons Yard in Columbus, Ohio, until his retirement became effective on January 3, 2008.

Claytor hired out in Chillicothe, Ohio, as an operating clerk for the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in 1967. He went firing for the Chessie System on June 6, 1977, and earned promotion to Locomotive Engineer for the Chessie in September of 1977. Throughout his railroad career, he worked out of Newark, Ohio, from 1987 to 1988, and then on the Columbus Sub/Huntington Division from September 1988 until his retirement.

He first joined the Brotherhood on June 5, 1957, and transferred to Division 34 in September of 1988. He served Division 34 as Local Chairman from Jan. 1, 2001 to Jan. 1, 2004, and has served as the District SENSE Coordinator of the Columbus/Marysville District from Feb. 2001 through his retirement on January 3. Structured Employee Network for Safety Empowerment, or SENSE, is the system-wide safety program at CSX.

As District Coordinator for SENSE, Brother Claytor established SENSE teams with team captains. “Team members could then feel freer to contact their team captain with any SENSE issues,” he said.

Brother Claytor has been actively involved in the BLE’s transformation to the BLET through his Local Chairman responsibilities and as District SENSE Coordinator. As Local Chairman, Brother Claytor started a newsletter for his members to keep them informed of important news and changes within the Brotherhood.

Upon his retirement, he was awarded a 30-year honor pin from the BLET. He served four years in the United States Navy. His home port was Jacksonville, Fla., and he served on the air-craft carrier USS Shangri-la. He also received special military citations for his Vietnam service.

Brother Claytor and his wife Linda were married on March 22, 1968. The couple has two sons, Christopher and Scott, and three granddaughters: Cameron, 9, Sheridan, 4, and Lorelei, 8 months.

He has a special interest in his church and do-it-yourself projects. During his retirement, he plans to stay playing golf while catching up on home improvement projects. He is also looking forward to spending more time at home and enjoying time with his family.

**“Being able to make a difference these last eight years by active involvement in the BLET as a Local Chairman and a SENSE District Coordinator helped make the job more rewarding,” he said. “I was able to see the union grow and also see safety become an important part of railroading. I am proud to have been a part of implementing good ideas from fellow railroaders who cared enough to make everyone’s job better and safer. I hope it continues.”**

Brother Claytor lives at: 321 Fairway Rd., Chillicothe, Ohio 45601-2121.

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Former NJ legislative chairman Ken Michel retires

Ken G. Michel, former Chairman of the New Jersey State Legislative Board, retired effective January 1, 2007.

Brother Michel hired out as a fireman on the former Penn Central in Weehawken, N.J., in 1974.

He is constant to hire out sooner as I had watched my father, a former New York Central Engineer and BLE member, work many long hours and be subject to call on the extra list,” Michel said. “Since there were still firemen on several assignments, after being hired, I was able to hold a position as fireman on a regular run between North Bergen, N.J. and Selkirk, N.Y.”

He earned promotion to Locomotive Engineer in 1976 after completing Engineer Training in New Haven, Conn. For a period of about three years he worked as a hostler in Selkirk before being promoted as needed to Engine.

Brother Michel became a member of BLE Division 235 (Union City, N.J.) on December 1, 1975. In 1986, he was elected Secretary-Treasurer and Legislative Representative of Division 235. In a special election in 1988, he was elected Local Chairman and held that position until 1989, when he did not seek re-election.

In 2000, as 1st Vice Chairman for the New Jersey State Legislative Board, Brother Michel was elected Chairman upon the resignation of James Chappell. Only one Local Chairman had previously elected Chairman later in 2000.

“While my commitment was always to my members as Local Chairman, by far, my most satisfying position was that of State Legislative Chairman,” Brother Michel said. “I only served the Brothers and Sisters of New Jersey for six years as Local Chairman, but felt that the Legislative Branch of our Brotherhood would prove to play an important role in the future of our organization.

The position provided the opportunity to address issues legislatively which were meeting opposition at the negotiating table. I credit our National Division leadership and affiliation with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters for expanding the involvement and activities of our State Legislative Boards. We have achieved many small advances, not the least of which is the recently passed Rail Security Act.”

Since the NJ Legislative Chairman’s position was a part-time position, this time Brother Michel had to maintain a regular assignment.

“Fortunately, I was able to hold my yard assignment, the YY-120 in North Bergen, where I began my career,” Brother Michel said. “By this time the State Central had become Conrail, which was then purchased by CSX.”

An unexpected illness in September 2006 forced him to stop work to recover. Subsequently, he was advised that he should consider ending his career and did so effective January 1, 2007.

“Have been a proud active member of the BLET for 32 years,” Brother Michel said. “During that time I served as Division Delegate to three Quadrennial Conventions, and as a staff member for a fourth.”

He graduated from William Paterson State College in New Jersey with a Bachelor of Arts degree in secondary education. He and his wife Marguerite (Mile) were married in 1974. They have three daughters: Terri Lynn, Janette and Jacqueline (twins) and one son Ken. The couple has been blessed with five grandchildren ranging in age from four to 16.

Brother Michel’s father hired out on the New York Central in 1944 as a fireman. He was promoted to Engineer in the late 50’s and worked until his retirement in 1980. My son Ken hired out as a trainman with Conrail in 1998 and was promoted to Engineer in 1999. He is currently employed by NJ Transit as an Engineer in training.

“Since retirement has been very good,” Brother Michel said. “We sold our home in Northern New Jersey and moved to a home and a few acres in Cooperstown, N.Y. This is close to Lake Otsego where I spend a lot of time fishing. I have also taken up golf and spend as much non-fishing time as possible on the golf course. We also enjoy traveling to visit our kids and grandchildren on both coasts.

“Membership in the BLET has provided me many friends over the years. Active participation in our Organization provided me with immense knowledge of our industry and the difficult task of achieving hard fought benefits. I only hope that new Brothers and Sisters will not sit on the sidelines allowing others to do all the work. Participation as an officer in your Division is a very rewarding job. I also urge all members to participate in the BLET PAC program. Help your Union level the playing field with the carriers by contributing and supporting our battles in Washington D.C. and State Legislatures.

“Wish all as rewarding a career as I have enjoyed,” he concluded.

*Old friends may write to Brother Michel at 1903 Margarum Ave., Lake Como, NJ 07749.*
Fourth quarter 2007

Business volumes in fourth quarter 2007, as measured by total revenue carloads, were flat at 2.4 million. UP’s 2007 average quarterly fuel price, including transportation and taxes, was up 34 percent to $2.58 per gallon compared with $1.94 in 2006.

UP’s fuel consumption rate, as measured by gallons per thousand ton-miles, was a fourth-quarter-best rate of 1.25 versus 1.27 in the fourth quarter 2006. UP repurchased nearly 2.4 million common shares at an average share price of $127.35 in the fourth quarter of 2007.

Fourth quarter 2007 commodity revenue summary versus 2006: Chemicals up 12 percent; Energy up 8 percent; Agricultural up 7 percent; Automotive and Parts up 4 percent; Intermodal up 3 percent; and Distribution up 0 percent. For the full year of 2007, the railroad transported 119.7 billion ton-miles, an all-time annual record.

The railroad continues to improve reliability. In the fourth quarter 2007, average train speed was 41.6 miles per hour. On Conrail property and the resolution of certain tax matters. On a reported basis, earnings per share increased 15 percent on a year-over-year basis.

Canadian National Railway

CN posted a 67% jump in fourth-quarter net income, aided by gains from a tax adjustment and the sales of its Montreal station complex and stake in the English Welsh & Scottish Railway. Net income for the fourth quarter of 2007 was C$833 million, including a deferred income tax recovery of C$284 million resulting from the enactment of corporate income tax rate changes in Canada, and the after-tax gains on the sale of the CSC of C$46 million and the Canadian investment in IWSI of C$41 million. Excluding the three items, CN reported adjusted diluted EPS of C$0.90.

The operating ratio, defined as operating expenses as a percentage of revenue, was 62.2 percent compared with 62.2 percent for the fourth quarter of 2006, a 0.1-point decrease. In 2008, CN also plans to invest approximately C$1.5 billion in capital programs, of which more than C$1 billion will be targeted on track infrastructure to improve a safe railway and improve the productivity and fluidity of the network.

Canadian Pacific Railway

Fourth quarter net income at Canadian Pacific Railway increased to C$342 million in 2007 compared with C$148 million in 2006 primarily due to lower future Canadian income tax rates. For the full year 2007, net income improved 19 percent to C$946 million compared with C$796 million in 2006. This improvement was driven by an increase in operating income and a foreign exchange gain on long-term debt. In 2007, CP recorded a full year future tax benefit of C$163 million compared with a tax benefit in 2006 of C$170 million, both due to lower future Canadian income tax rates. Diluted earnings per share was C$2.21 in fourth-quarter 2007 compared with C$0.92 in fourth-quarter 2006 and C$0.10 for the full year 2007 and C$0.02 in 2006.

For the fourth quarter 2007, the railroad’s operating ratio was 74.3 percent compared to the same quarter of 2006, a 3.1 percent improvement. Operating expenses of C$351.6, a decrease of 0.7 percent. For the quarter, new business was a significant contributor to a 12.0 percent revenue increase in chemical & petroleum. Led by increased volumes in Mexico, fourth-quarter revenues reached a record C$1.9 billion, or 9 percent compared with the same quarter of 2006.

For the full year 2007, earnings per share increased 3 percent, or 11 cents, to $3.68. Operations income was $950 million, compared to $943 million in the fourth quarter of 2006. Diluted earnings per share were $1.02 compared with the $0.95 per diluted share earned in the fourth quarter of 2006. Net income for 2007 was $1.5 billion, down 1 percent, compared with net income for 2006. Diluted earnings per share increased 3 percent, or 11 cents, to $3.68.

Norfolk Southern

Norfolk Southern reported record fourth-quarter 2007 net income of $390 million, an increase of 4 percent, compared with $385 million for fourth-quarter 2006. Diluted earnings per share were $1.02 compared with the $0.95 per diluted share earned in the fourth quarter of 2006. Net income for 2007 was $1.5 billion, down 1 percent, compared with net income for 2006. Diluted earnings per share increased 3 percent, or 11 cents, to $3.68.

For the fourth quarter, new business was a significant contributor to a 12.0 percent revenue increase in chemical & petroleum. Led by increased volumes in Mexico, intermodal revenues grew by 11.8 percent.

Kansas City Southern

Kansas City Southern reported record fourth quarter 2007 revenues of $460.3 million, a 4.0% increase over the corresponding 2006 period. Revenue growth was primarily the result of a continued strong pricing environment as well as volume growth in some key commodity segments. Fourth quarter 2007 highlights:

- Record revenues of $490.3 million, a 4.0% increase;
- Operating expenses of $393.4, a decrease of 0.7%;
- Record operating income of $105.9 million, a 23.2% increase; and
- Operating ratio of 70.4%, a 3.7 point improvement; and
- Diluted EPS of $0.56, a 36.0% increase.

The company’s performance, compared with the same quarter of 2006, was 62.1 percent during the quarter, compared with 62.2 percent for the year.

For the fourth quarter, new business was a significant contributor to a 12.0 percent revenue increase in chemical & petroleum. Led by increased volumes in Mexico, intermodal revenues grew by 11.8%.

Union Pacific Corp.

Union Pacific Corporation reported 2007 fourth quarter net income of $401 million, or $1.86 per diluted share, compared to $485 million, or $1.78 per diluted share in the fourth quarter of 2006. In the fourth quarter of 2007, Union Pacific reported operating income of $864 million compared to $810 million in fourth quarter 2006, a 7 percent improvement.

UP’s operating ratio improved to 78.4 percent versus 79.6 percent in 2006. UP’s commodity revenue grew 6 percent in 2007 to a fourth quarter best of $4.0 billion. All six business groups posted record fourth quarter revenue, and Agricultural revenue set an all-time mark. The main component of the growth was a 6 percent increase in average revenue per car (ARC), which reached an all-time quarterly record of $1.636 per car in the fourth quarter 2007, driven primarily by yield gains.
Division 404’s Paul Fessenbecker retires

Brother Paul G. Fessenbecker, former Local Chairman of Division 404 in Chicago, retired on February 1, 2007. He completed his last run as a Union Pacific Locomotive Engineer on job PRCBA on January 30, 2007, a through freight assignment between Proviso and Clinton, Iowa. He headed home the next day.

“As UP bought the Chicago & NorthWestern, it was nice to make the trip on two repainted C&NW SD40s,” he said. Brother Fessenbecker hired out on the C&NW in Milwaukee, Wis., as a brakeman on August 6, 1966, and was promoted to conductor in June of 1970. He worked local way freight, through passenger, commuter passenger and through freight.

He transferred to Chicago on the Galena Division and had a fireman’s date of May 6, 1971. Brother Fessenbecker earned promotion to Locomotive Engineer on May 30, 1972. He worked local and way freight, switch runs, through freight, switch engine, through passeng er and commuter passenger.

He joined BLET Division 404 on December 13, 1980, and was elected local chairman in December of 1981. He held that position until December 31, 2006. “I loved railroading, but even more, I loved being a local chairman,” Brother Fessenbecker said. “Serving as local chairman was the most personally fulfilling and exhilarating experience of my life.”

He and his wife, Margie, were married on August 27, 1966. The couple has two children, Kim and Steve, and two grandchildren Stacie and Emily.

Brother Fessenbecker reports that his only hobby at the present time is hot rodding. “I am currently hot rodding a 1954 Oldsmobile that has a Corvette engine and suspension and I plan to tour it when completed,” he said. “Plans are also in the works for a V8 powered Miata.”

He plans to continue building cars and traveling during his retirement.

“I have met some outstanding union people over the last 15 years that have helped me accomplish many fine things,” Fessenbecker said. During his long and distinguished railroad career, Brother Fessenbecker helped with the development of a safety program for the UP’s Chicago Service Unit; joined in the BLET’s mobilization fight with the UP’s Union; over the single craft issue; developed student engineer and engineer training programs; and trained local chairmen.

“I am proud of my representation of engineers on certification issues,” he said. “With the help of my union brothers we accomplished a lot. It is disheartening that the BLET has not reaped the full benefits and leverage of our Locomotive Engineer Certificates.

“Some meaningful words of wisdom passed on to me that I will pass on are: the job of the union is to lead in the struggle for control of the work place; an injury to one is an injury to all; all union officers work for the membership; and we, the BLET, are governed and organized from the bottom up and not from the top down. It’s all about the membership. Too many union officers forget who they work for.

“When I decided to run for local chairman all I wanted was to make the railroad a better place to work. Unfortu nately, change is slow, but with the help of many fine union people we may have made a start. The work is never done and the struggle will never end.”

Friends may write to Brother Fessenbecker at: 393 Grandview, Glen Ellyn, IL, 60137.

Retirees honored at annual LIRR Dinner-Dance

Members of BLET Division 269/Long Island Rail Road honored 13 retirees at their annual Dinner-Dance in late 2007. With more than 430 members, Division 269 is the largest single division in the BLET.

The 13 retirees (and the date of their retirement) are as follows:

• Ray Spagnuolo, 2-1-07;
• Joseph Erdland, 6-1-07;
• Robert Wargas, 6-1-07;
• Brian Eletti, 7-1-07;
• Jack Marsala, 7-1-07;
• Stephen Hurst, 7-1-07;
• Christopher Merkle, 7-1-07;
• William Knote, 9-1-07;
• Vicki Allen-Hughes, 12-1-07;
• Bill Knote, 9-1-07;
• Christopher Merkle, 7-1-07;
• Stephen Hurst, 7-1-07;
• Jack Marsala, 7-1-07;
• Brian Eletti, 7-1-07;
• Joseph Erdland, 6-1-07;
• Robert Wargas, 6-1-07;
• Ray Spagnuolo, 2-1-07.

Mickey Quinn, LIRR General Chairman, said the BLET is proud of its membership pension plan at LIRR. When BLET members retire, they receive pension benefits from the LIRR in addition to their Railroad Retirement benefits.

Front row, from left: John Bove, Division 269 Secretary-Treasurer; and Scott Decker, Division 269 President.

Second row: James Brown, LIRR GCA S-T; BLET National President Don Hahs; Bob Olson, Division 269; Mickey Quinn, LIRR General Chairman; Ed Rodzwitz, BLET First Vice President; and John Tolman, BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative.

Div. 375’s Rowell enjoys retirement

Brother Frank E. Rowell of BLET Division 375 (Spencer, N.C.) made his last run on March 28, 2004 as a locomotive engineer for Norfolk Southern.

Brother Rowell began his railroad career in 1968 as a trainman on the eastern division of the Southern Railway. He earned promotion to locomotive engineer on July 5, 1973, and joined the Brotherhood on June 1, 1973. From 1978-1981, Brother Rowell served as the Local Chairman of BLE Division 375 (Davieville District). Brother Rowell and his wife Elma have one son, Danny and a granddaughter. He enjoys fishing. Rowell lives at: 414 South Fulton Street, Salisbury, N.C. 28444.

Brother Frank E. Rowell has enjoyed fishing and spending time with his family during retirement.
Archival BLET photos used in art exhibit

Four photographs from the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) archives are currently on display in an art and photography exhibit at the Carnegie Arts Center in Alliance, Neb. The exhibition, sponsored by the Center for Railroad Photography & Art, is titled “It’s Work. 150 Years of Railroad Workers at Work.” The show runs from January 8-March 2.

The BLET photographs are by the late Richard J. Cook, former Director of Public Relations for the union, and were taken on September 26, 1983. They were originally published in the October 21, 1983, issue of “The Locomotive Engineer,” at the time the Brotherhood’s official monthly newspaper. The photos feature members of BLET Division 622 in Alliance, Neb.

One of the photos used in the exhibition, a 1983 photograph of Joel and Barbara Schafer, is on the Center’s Internet archive, railroadheritage.org. Joel is a member of Division 622 and retired on July 1, 2006; she is working as a BNSF locomotive engineer. The images were made available courtesy of Barbara and Joel Schafer.

 Appropriately, the photographs are on display in a busy railroad community that serves the Powder River Basin coal mines. Alliance is the county seat for Box Butte County, which had 1,209 railroad employees in 2005, according to the Railroad Retirement Board.

The Center exhibit is a part of “Railroad Art,” which includes paintings by Greg Garnett of Alliance, Mike and Medeline Wirtz of Norman, Colorado, and Joel and Barbara Schafer, and photography “Railroad Art” with the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Foundation at the Carnegie Center located at 204 West 4th Street, Alliance.

Appropriately, the photographs are on display in a busy railroad community that serves the Powder River Basin coal mines. Alliance is the county seat for Box Butte County, which had 1,209 railroad employees in 2005, according to the Railroad Retirement Board.

For this exhibit, the center presents 35 photographs from across North America, beginning with a copy of a dyecurated type of the crew and locomotive Tioga, built for the Philadelphia & Columbia Railroad in 1848. The images trace some of the changes in the railroad work environment, from the age of steam to the age of microchips. This exhibit highlights the human face of an industry that is dominated by machines and hardware. Technology has made the machines more powerful and the equipment more sophisticated, but behind technology are people who toil in an environment that is a world apart from most other industries.

The exhibit had its origins in a three-year program, “Representations of Railroad Work,” funded by the North American Railway Foundation (NARF).

From its beginnings in 1997, the Center for Railroad Photography & Art, a nonprofit arts organization based in Madison, Wis., has grown into a nationally recognized organization, the foremost group in America for promoting an understanding of the place of railroading in America’s visual culture. It is committed to preserving Railroad Heritage in all its facets, and works with photographers, writers, and historians across the country to interpret the intersection of railroads, art, and culture. While maintaining its focus on exhibitions, publications, conferences, and a web site (www.railphoto-art.org), the Center has expanded to include an ambitious Internet archive, railroadheritage.org, an initiative funded by the North American Railway Foundation and private gifts. Some of the Alliance photos may be seen at railroadheritage.org.

The Center is located at 1914 Monroe St., P.O. Box 256330, Madison, WI 53725-9330, phone 608-513-5291. •

This photo of Jack L. Scott, a retired member of BLET Division 622 in Alliance, Neb., was also used in the Center For Railroad Photograph & Art’s exhibit. Brother Scott retired on January 22, 1998.
Pennsylvania BLET launches ‘get out the vote’ drive

The BLET’s Pennsylvania Legislative Board has launched “VOTE Change ’08,” a program that encourages its members to register and vote in the upcoming presidential primary and general elections.

In the first stage of the program, which is already in progress, the Pa. Legislative Board will encourage its members to register to vote in the Pennsylvania, their families, friends and co-workers.

“We expect to have a more organized impact on the 2008 elections,” said Ken Kertesz, Chairman of the BLET’s Pennsylvania Legislative Board.

Labor unions nationwide have already started demonstrating their potential influence on this year’s presidential race. In the states that have already conducted their primaries, labor unions deployed paid staffers and volunteers to knock on doors and get out the vote for their chosen candidates.

The BLET Pennsylvania Legislative Board plans to organize a similar movement in the weeks leading up to the April 22 Pennsylvania primary and the November 4 general election. The goal for “VOTE Change ’08” is to register transportation workers living in Pennsylvania, their families and co-workers.

The BLET Pennsylvania Legislative Board is organized into 21 Divisions across the Commonwealth. Kertesz said the Pa. Board plans to train division representatives on how to make sure all labor union members are registered to vote. Their webpage, www.psbh-blet.org, has a link to the official state voting website so that members can easily register others.

“We plan to work with other Pennsylvania labor unions to make this effort a success,” he said. “By deploying new strategies to use their money, unions have regained their position as the single-strongest force in elections.”

During the previous two elections, the amount of money that unions spent to increase voter turnout rose by 50 percent, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. A recent story in the Wall Street Journal reported that union officials’ efforts may be paying off by the recent successful endeavors conducted in the primary states.

A get out the vote program is one of the fastest-growing elements of the labor spending. Unions spent 670 million getting members to vote in 2004 and 2008. That’s up 145 percent from 462 million getting members to vote in 2004.

The BLET’s Pennsylvania Legislative Board of the BLET represents approximately 1,300 professional locomotive engineers and trainmen who operate trains for Class I freight railroads (including Norfolk Southern, Canadian Pacific, Canadian National and CSXT), and for commuter railroads (Amtrak and SEPTA).

“I applaud Brother Ken’s initiative and encourage all other BLET State Legislative Board Chairmen to do the same,” said John Tolman, BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative. “The November elections are extremely important and the House of Labor must make its voice heard.”

General Chairman, Legislative Chairmen to hold joint meeting

All BLET General Chairmen and State Legislative Board Chairmen are invited to a joint meeting at the Grand Sierra Resort in Reno, Nevada, on May 1.

The meeting comes on the heels of meetings of the National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen (NASLBC) and the Western General Chairmen’s Association (WGCA).

All meetings will be held in Reno at the Grand Sierra Resort & Casino. The goal of the joint meeting is to facilitate a closer working relationship between the BLET’s legislative and protective bodies and to focus on an agenda that provides maximum benefits to all BLET members.

Tim Smith, Chairman of the NASLBC, said the group will conduct three days of business meetings, which includes training for officers in the legislative arena. Also, the NASLBC will discuss strategies regarding the upcoming elections in November, the BLET-Fund, as well as a host of other legislative, political and regulatory issues that impact the lives and working conditions of BLET members.

The WGCA meeting is designed for the collective sharing of information and planning for the future of the BLET. Its members are the General Chairmen who represent railroads in the western U.S. As of year past, the WGCA members will participate in roundtable discussions on the many serious issues facing the BLET, according to WGCA Chairman Mike Priester, General Chairman CP Rail-US/Metra North.

Did you know that UnitedHealthcare® administers benefits that provide coverage in addition to Medicare for Railroad Employees, their Dependents, Parents & Parents-In-Laws?

WELCOME TO GA-2311 PLAN F

If your or your dependents are covered by Medicare and become enrolled in a hospital, Medicare Part A and Part B pay a large portion of your hospital and physician charges. However, you will still owe the hospital for Part B Medicare deductibles and penalty 20% of the amount Medicare approves as reasonable for physician charges. Depending on the nature of the medical treatment you receive, your or your dependents could be responsible for hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Through UnitedHealthcare, you can secure coverage for a substantial portion of those expenses by enrolling in Group Policy GA-2311 PLAN F of your current health plan.

Take A Look At The Potential Savings!

Did you know that UnitedHealthcare® administers benefits that provide coverage in addition to Medicare for Railroad Employees, their Dependents, Parents & Parents-In-Laws?

Who May Enroll?

Railroad Employees & Dependents

GA-2311 Plan F is available to railroad employees and their dependents (spouse and/or students and non-employing children eligible for Medicare) formerly covered under one of the following Railroad health plans:

• Health and Welfare Plan
• NCBTU Plan
• GA-10756
• NSW-4000
• Any other health and welfare plan equal in benefits and coverage to Medicare

Parents and Parents-In-Law of Railroad Employees

In addition, when a Railroad employee first becomes covered under GA-2311 Plan F, they can also offer coverage under Plan F to their parents and/or their parent-in-law if they enroll during the thirty month period when they become covered under GA-2311 Plan F. Parents and/or their parent-in-law become eligible for Medicare.

When Should You Enroll?

There are several opportunities to enroll once you become eligible for Medicare:

• Within three months from the date the year active employee coverage ends, or
• Within three months of the month you first become eligible for Medicare, or
• If you do not enroll during either of these two opportunities, you may enroll during an Open Enrollment Period. Open Enrollment Periods are currently held for May of each even calendar year (2006, 2010, etc.). Enrollment in May provides coverage effective for the following month, June 1st.

Want To Enroll?

Simply pick up the phone and call us! We would love to hear from you!

• Call UnitedHealthcare at our toll-free number, 1-800-368-6473, and request an enrollment form and a plan brochure for GA-2311 Plan F.

The information provided will include the monthly premium amounts as well as detailed information on the benefits provided under Plan F.

Once you have answered any additional questions you may have:

• How Much Does It Cost?

The current price is $179.00 per individual per month. Prices are subject to change annually on January 1st of any year.

These benefits under Plan F do not cover prescription drugs. To obtain prescription drug coverage, you can purchase a Medicare Part D plan separately. Plan F does not replace Medicare. All individuals enrolling in Plan F must also be enrolled in Original Medicare Coverage (Part A and B).

Ken Kertesz, Chairman of the Pennsylvania State Legislative Board.

Health care advisory regarding GA-2311

UnitedHealthcare® Health care costs. Together,™
Members at Huron & Eastern, a RailAmerica shortline ratify first contract

Continued from Page 1

get the first contract due to RailAmerica being bought by Fortress Inc.,” said John Mullen, the BLET’s Director of Shortlines. “We actually went several months not knowing who we were going to be dealing with.”

The new contract also maintains a 401k program and includes a company match.

On January 1, BLET members were switched from an hourly rate of pay to a basic day. The daily rate of pay is for 10 hours of work, and overtime is paid at a rate of time and a half for work over and above 10 hours per day.

In terms of health and welfare, the new contract maintains medical benefits, but they are now under Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Members will also receive dental benefits and vision coverage and more choices for eligible persons who are of Medicare age and have spouses that are not yet covered under Medicare. As a result, three new benefit plans were recently approved, with availability set for the upcoming open enrollment in 2008.

These new benefit plans, called Plans A, B and C, will provide three new options with different costs and plan designs, allowing members to select the plan best suited for their needs. The current Plans B and C will be replaced by these three new options.

Individuals who are not yet eligible for Medicare and need coverage will find these plans helpful. Because of these changes, the open enrollment period, which is the time to sign up for these new options, will start the very first of January this year. In 2008, open enrollment will begin in April and continue through May. Anyone selecting a new plan will be covered effective June 1, 2008.

More information about these new plans will be available on the BLET website, in March, and will subsequently be published in the March 2008 issue of the Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen News.

Important income tax update from BLET Tax Compliance Department

Internal Revenue Service regulations require that the BLET National Division inform its members that a certain portion of your National Division dues are not tax deductible as a miscellaneous itemized deduction on your personal tax returns.

Specifically, 5 percent of your $34 monthly dues to the National Division are not tax deductible.

That 5 percent reflects expenses associated with political lobbying efforts by the union, which are not tax deductible.

Huron & Eastern

Continued from Page 1

Lorenz said the creation of a guaranteed extra board was a huge benefit for members and a main reason the contract was ratified.

“How we have an assigned day off per year,” he said. “That is huge.”

The agreement also establishes work rules, a scope rule and a seniority system.

Joining Brother Lorenz on the BLET negotiating team were: Justin Brandt, Alternate Local Chairman; and John Mullen, BLET Director of Shortlines. When health reasons prevented Mullen from attending a negotiating session, BLET National Vice President Merle Geiger stepped up to the plate.

“I want to give a big thanks to John Mullen and Merle Geiger,” Lorenz said. “We were at a stalemate, but Merle and John came in with a lot of optimism and enthusiasm. Before it was all said and done, we made a lot of progress and got a contract in principle.”

“I want to thank Justin Brandt, who assisted Dan and I during the contract process, and the membership for having the patience and sticking together through this lengthy process,” Mullen said. “I also thank Vice President Geiger who helped us close the deal.”

In terms of BLET organizational structure, the Huron & Eastern membership now belong to Division 327 and they are a part of the new Regional and Shoreline General Committee of Adjustment, which was formed in early 2007.

RailAmerica is one of the largest short line owners in the United States and Canada. It operates 41 railroads that service approximately 7,500 miles of track.

In 1990, RailAmerica purchased the Huron & Eastern, which represented its first rail acquisition. The short line, headquartered in Vassar, Mich., operates 174 miles of rail line. In January 2004, RailAmerica purchased the Central Michigan Railroad and combined it with the Huron & Eastern, creating a combined railroad with approximately 250 miles of track.

It exchanges with Saginaw Bay Southern (formerly CSX lines) in Saginaw, Mich., the Lake State Railroad in Bay City, Mich., the Canadian National Railway in Durand, Mich., and the Great Lakes Central Railroad in Durand, Mich. Its lines serve massive grain elevators about every 20 miles and its major customers include Consumer Energy in Essexville and four Pioneer Sugar plants.

BLLET members operate locomotives hauling goods such as grain, coal, lumber, sugar beets, molasses, and various other agricultural items.

The railroad also serves Dow Chemical in Midland, Mich., which boasts one of the largest chemical complexes in the United States outside of Texas.

General Chairman Rightnowar re-elected

Charlie Rightnowar was re-elected to the office of General Chairman of the UP-Central Region General Committee’s quadrennial meetings in St. Louis on January 8.

Brother Rightnowar is a member of BLET Division 724 (Stalem, Ill.), and joined the Brotherhood of July 1, 1974. This is his third term as General Chairman of the UP-Central Region General Committee.

Also elected were: 1st Vice Chairman Ronnie Rhodes, Division 915 (Alexandria, La.); 2nd Vice Chairman Bob Law, Division 491 (Kansas City, Mo.); 3rd Vice Chairman Chuck Jones, Division 724 (Salen, Ill.); and 4th Vice Chairman Dave Grimes, Division 42 (St. Louis).

Kevin Leafy, of Division 815 (Kansas City, Kan.) was elected to the office of Secretary-Treasurer of the GCOTA, while Norman Baker of Division 565 (North Little Rock, Ark.) was elected as Alternate Secretary-Treasurer.

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Stimulus package must help unemployed, add jobs

It looks like hard times are ahead of us. If or when the economy bottoms out, many Americans will have lost their jobs, their homes and their savings. Recently, our political leaders made a small start to solve our economic problems.

Congress and the Bush administration cut a deal that would give at least $300 to just about everyone who takes a paycheck. Most wage earners would get $600.

For those who don’t have a paycheck because they don’t have a job, there’s no more help. The right thing to do is to extend unemployment insurance and add to it. People who don’t have jobs will spend money immediately. Any plan to stimulate the economy should aim to create more good-paying jobs. It must be targeted to give stimulus to those who need it the most.

Predatory lenders have forced some people to lose their homes. It’s a good thing that the negotiators agreed to allow more borrowers facing default to refinance their sub prime loans. But we should look for more ways to keep people in their homes if they’ve been victims of unscrupulous lenders.

All these are short-term solutions. What Americans really need are longer-term solutions. What Americans need are good jobs with good wages.

In the long run, what Americans need is for us to fix these so-called free-trade policies that send good American jobs to China and Mexico.

A message from Teamsters General President Jim Hoffa