BLET engineers, trainmen approve strong contract with Utah Railway

Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen represented by the BLET ratified a new contract with the Utah Railway on July 29. The five-year deal calls for a 13 percent general wage increase over the life of the contract. Additional fringe benefits could boost overall earnings slightly higher to approximately 18 percent.

The BLET has represented engineers at the short line for several years, but organized the trainmen on February 29, 2003. Many of the trainmen chose BLET over their former union, the UTU, in order to achieve better representation.

President McPherson said, “They did their homework and did an excellent job of representing their members.”

Milano said that Brother Clifton, a trainman and former UTU Local Chairman, was an integral part of the negotiating team. “I’m glad we worked together as a team,” General Chairman Milano said. “Conductors and engineers both were on the bargaining committee.”

Brother Clifton, the Local Chairman for conductors at the Utah Railway, said many trainmen were somewhat skeptical of the BLET going into this round of negotiations. However, they soon realized those concerns were unfounded when the new contract was unveiled.

“Some people were asking, ‘Will the BLET really look out for us or will they just give locomotive engineers everything?’” he said. “I was kind of hesitant myself. But during negotiations, the BLET was looking out for conductors and engineers both. It wasn’t one sided and I think everyone was happy with it. People were happy with the BLET and how the contract turned out.”

Clifton said members were most pleased with the back pay and general wage increases negotiated by BLET.

Among the study’s most significant findings are the following:

- Because remote control locomotives ultimately are controlled by on-board computers, RCOs introduce a level of mechanical hazard into switching operations that does not exist in conventional switching operations.
- Certain design features of the “black box” actually may increase the likelihood that an unintended misoperation will occur.
- Blind shoves — because of the lack of a requirement to provide human protection at the leading point of a movement — undermine, if not defeat, the purpose of designed “remote control zones.”
- Training provided RCOs was routinely criticized as lacking in sufficient time and detail.

The authors recommended that FRA audit accidents and injury reports submitted by the railroads, so that reliable baseline data can be amassed for remote control accident and casualty rates. Further, that FRA refine existing accident investigation procedures to include studying technological or systemic factors that may cause or contribute to accidents. The study also recommended that the industry should no longer be permitted to regulate itself concerning remote control operations.

The BLET has represented conductors at the Utah Railway since 1998. The new contract also preserves a minimum crew size of 18. Several other provisions were included. The contract became effective July 29. The BLET noted that the agreement is the first in the United States to address RCO operations.

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Would anyone be proud of the UTU?

Eugene V. Debs — or anyone, for that matter — would find it hard to back UTU leaders

When sorting through the UTU leaders’ mendacity and mirages attempt to obscure the truth (UTU website post, “How to smoke out a pair of skunks,” August 5), BLET and UTU members need to keep one fact in mind: No amount of spin doctoring will obscure the truth. Here is a link to BLET’s proposed contract agreement with BNSF, in which UTU leaders propose the elimination of yard engineers from Rivergate Yards in Portland. Not only do UTU leaders propose eliminating these locomotive engineer jobs, they further propose using ground crew employees qualified as engineers to operate locomotives in a conventional manner:

http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/utuproposal.pdf

BLET and UTU members can recognize a sell-out when they see one. No amount of UTU spin doctoring can obscure that fact. A sell-out is a sell-out, no matter how UTU tries to spin it.

BLET General Chairman Dennis Pierce (BNSF/MRL), a major target in UTU’s August proposal that totally eliminated railroad public relations officials on their payroll, yet they are critical of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) for merging with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Would Eugene V. Debs be proud of a union like the UTU that appears to be under the control of a rail management spin doctor? Or would Debs be proud of a union like BLET, which is part of the Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition, seeking to unite rail labor under one umbrella at the negotiating table? Only UTU has craft autonomy writen into its constitution? Then why is it trying to use the National Mediation Board to combine operating crafts at the Union Pacific Railroad? It appears the UTU’s craft autonomy clause in its constitution isn’t doing anything good to protect operating crafts. Would Eugene V. Debs be proud of a union that is seeking to eliminate the locomotive engineer and conductor crafts to pave the way for a new “train and engine service employee” craft? Or would Debs be proud of union like BLET, the union fighting to protect the crafts and jobs of locomotive engineers and conductors?

Engineer only operations? UTU is the only railroad in North America to negotiate engineer-only operations at a freight railroad. Take a look at the Quebec, North Shore and Labrador Railway (QNS&L) in Canada. Would Eugene V. Debs be proud of a union that sold out its own members to run freight trains with only one engineer on board? Or would Debs be proud of a union like BLET, which is successfully negotiating for and protecting the jobs of engineers and trainmen throughout the United States, as it did recently with its new agreement with the Utah Railways?

Bribes and kickbacks? High-priced management spin doctors on the payrolls? Engineer only operations on every step that they are willing to take to eliminate even more craft and jobs? UTU is the only railroad in North America to negotiate engineer-only operations at a freight railroad. Take a look at the Quebec, North Shore and Labrador Railway (QNS&L) in Canada. Would Eugene V. Debs be proud of a union that sold out its own members to run freight trains with only one engineer on board? Or would Debs be proud of a union like BLET, which is successfully negotiating for and protecting the jobs of engineers and trainmen throughout the United States, as it did recently with its new agreement with the Utah Railways?

BLET and UTU members need to keep one fact in mind: No amount of spin doctoring will obscure the truth. Here is a link to BLET’s proposed contract agreement with BNSF, in which UTU leaders propose the elimination of yard engineers from Rivergate Yards in Portland. Not only do UTU leaders propose eliminating these locomotive engineer jobs, they further propose using ground crew employees qualified as engineers to operate locomotives in a conventional manner:

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BLET General Chairman Dennis Pierce (BNSF/MRL), a major target in UTU’s August 5 announcement, clarified the real story behind the UTU’s sell-out in a letter to his Committee today. Brother Pierce makes it clear that he has not “climbed in bed” with BNSF management, as UTU falsely claims. In fact, the passport from UNCO meetings with the carrier regarding this issue as the only formal meetings that took place were between UTU and BNSF in BLET’s absence. While BLET requested a joint meeting with UTU and BNSF, UTU ignored the request. BLET generated no written contract proposals with the carrier on this issue, however, the UTU did. The UTU has put its spin on the matter to serve its own ends.

What BLET informally suggested was that both BLET and UTU agreed to the jointly negotiated compromise agreement that UTU and BLET agreed to on another portion of the BNSF property in 2004. That agreement left one engineer and one conductor on the job in return for agreement language preventing the sale of the line. Brother Pierce notes that it was UTU that agreed to open up its crew consist agreement and eliminate the brakeman’s position in order to prevent the line sale in Texas, not BLET.

No negotiations occurred concerning the groundmen’s craft without UTU present in the Texas case, nor did BLET suggest any occur in the Portland case.

Pierce further explains: “Without getting into each and every tired old accusation UTU has perpetuated with you, can rest assured that BLET did nothing to negotiate behind closed doors to attack the groundmen’s craft. Once notified of the proposed sale, we asked for a joint meeting with UTU and BNSF to discuss the possible adoption of the attached agreements. Ironically, unlike any agreement that UTU has negotiated on its own, the agreements that BLET proposed considering actually have hard fast language preventing the Carrier from selling the covered portion of the property so long as the agreement is in effect. UTU obtained no such protection in its remote control sell out, in fact, yards where UTU represented employees operate RCO are also up for sale and UTU has no agreement to prevent the sales. “As for our request to meet jointly, UTU did not even respond, instead they met alone with BNSF behind closed doors in our absence, returning to their offices after the meeting to draft an agreement that was clearly intended to eliminate a craft for which UTU holds no jurisdiction on this property.”

A copy of Brother Pierce’s letter, along with all attachments, are available here:

http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/PierceLetterToUTU.pdf
http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/ReducedCrewUTUBLETpdf
http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/BLETUTUintrippdf
http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Figeralderequest082006.pdf

BLET sets the record straight on UTU spin doctoring

BLET seeks sell-out of BNSF yard engineers in Wash., Ore.

Once again showing its willingness to sell out operating crafts, leaders of the United Transportation Union has proposed eliminating locomotive engineer jobs on BNSF Railway lines in Washington and Oregon. To reduce its operating costs, the BNSF is seeking to eliminate the large portion of its territory. BNSF management recently attended certain portions of the yard operations at Pasco, Wash., and Portland, Ore., were potentially up for sale or lease unless the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen and UTU were able to come up with an agreement to reduce costs.

The BLET proposal was one of compromise. BLET suggested that the carrier operate with two man crews in the yard — one BLET-represented locomotive engineer and one UTU-represented remote control operator.

The UTU proposal, however, was one of self-preservation. UTU provided the carrier with a contract proposal that totally eliminated the yard engineer position and uses foremen to operate locomotives conventionally.

It’s just another case of UTU leaders promising one thing but then doing another. “While the UTU puts its spin on its spin after spin after spin, BLET would do it if it had the representation rights for ground men, they have now put in writing the steps that they are willing to take to eliminate even more yard engineers,” said BLET General Chairman Dennis R. Pierce, who represents engineers in the effected territory. “While these actions no longer come as any surprise to us, we must make every effort to ensure that all operating employees are aware of the steps that UTU is willing to take to bring the carriers to their knees.”

The BLET has advised the carrier that any action toward considering the UTU proposal will lead to swift action to protect BLET’s work rights in conventional operations.
Canadian National Railway

CN reported strong financial and operating results for the second quarter, up 30 percent from $1.13 reported for second-quarter 2004; Second-quarter 2005 net income of $1416 million, an increase of 28 percent from second-quarter 2004 net income of $326 million; and Second-quarter 2005 operating income of $713 million, an increase of 24 percent. CN also boasted a record second-quarter operating ratio of 61.2 percent, a 4.3-percentage point improvement over second-quarter 2004 performance. Second-quarter revenues increased by 10 percent to $1,585 million, largely owing to freight rate increases, which included a higher fuel surcharge as a result of increases in crude oil prices, and the inclusion of revenues from the rail and related businesses of Great Lakes Transportation LLC and BC Rail. Partly offsetting these gains was the unfavorable $80 million translation impact of the stronger Canadian dollar on U.S.-dollar denominated revenues.

CSX Transportation

Rail and transportation conglomerate CSX Corp. said that second-quarter earnings rose more than 38 percent on higher surface shipping revenues, especially of coal. The Jacksonville-based company reported earnings of $165 million, or 73 cents a share, up from $119 million, or 53 cents a share, a year ago. Excluding one-time expenses and benefits, earnings were 96 cents a share. CSX said revenues at its core surface transportation business were $2.17 billion, up about 8 percent from $2.1 billion a year earlier. The strength was led by the coal and merchandise shipping markets. Merchandise revenues were $1.06 billion, up 7 percent from $981 million, and coal, coke and iron ore revenues were $541 million, up 22 percent from $442 million. Intermodal revenues were $330 million, up 2 percent from $325 million. Its operating ratio improved 4.7 percentage points over the same quarter to 80.5 percent.

Also in the quarter, CSX repurchased $1 billion of its debt, which strengthened the company’s balance sheet, reduced its interest expense going forward, and improved its credit profile.

Kansas City Southern

Kansas City Southern reported second quarter 2005 financial results, which included the consolidation of TFM’s results following the acquisition of control on April 1, 2005. For the second quarter 2005, KCS consolidated revenues were $381.1 million versus $153.9 million in 2004. On a same rail system comparative basis, KCS consolidated second quarter revenues grew 12.5% over the 2004 pro forma combined revenues of the Company.

In connection with the April 1, 2005, acquisition of an additional 4.3% interest in TFM from CSX, CP Rail maintained its profit outlook for the year, said it earned CS$123 million ($101 million), or 77 Canadian cents a share, in the second quarter, up from a profit of CS$84 million, or 53 Canadian cents a share, a year earlier.

Excluding foreign exchange losses on long-term debt, earnings would have been 87 Canadian cents a share, the company said.

The company, which operates in Canada and the United States, said revenue rose 10 percent to CS$1.1 billion in the quarter, driven by higher revenues for coal, grain, and intermodal shipping. Shipments fell by 2.9 percent, with the biggest drop in carloadings coming in coal, down 10.5 percent, sulfur and fertilizers, off 10.1 percent, and automotive, which fell 5.1 percent.

Operating expenses rose 6.5 percent, mostly because of soaring fuel prices. CP Rail’s operating ratio, a measure of efficiency used by the railroad industry, improved to 75.5 percent from 76 percent in the second quarter 2004.

Norfolk Southern

For the second quarter of 2005, Norfolk Southern Corporation reported record net income of $424 million, or $1.04 per diluted share, compared with $213 million, or $0.54 per diluted share, for the same period of 2004. Second-quarter net income included two previously announced items (the effects of Ohio tax legislation and settlements of two coal rate cases) totaling $120 million, or $0.29 per diluted share. Excluding these items, net income would have been $304 million, or $0.75 per diluted share. For the first six months, the operating ratio was 75.8 percent, which was 2.2 percentage points better than the same period a year earlier.

- Second quarter 2005 operating income of $468 million was the highest reported since the fourth quarter of 2003.
- The second quarter 2005 operating margin increased to 14 percent compared to 11.9 percent in 2004.
- Average terminal dwell time improved 11 percent from 30.9 hours to 27.4 hours and rail car inventory improved 2 percent to 318,434 cars. Average quarterly train speed fell slightly, from 21.3 mph to 21.2 mph comparing the second quarter of 2004 to 2003.
- The Railroad’s average quarterly fuel price increased 44 percent versus the year ago quarter, from $1.16 per gallon in 2004 to $1.67 per gallon in the second quarter of 2005.
- Second Quarter Railroad Commodity Revenue Summary versus 2004:
  - Industrial Products up 19 percent
  - Agricultural up 16 percent
  - Intermediate up 10 percent
  - Chemicals up 7 percent
  - Energy up 5 percent
  - Automotive up 1 percent
- The railroad’s operating ratio was 88.1 percent for the quarter, an improvement of 8.61 percent in the same quarter of 2004.
Dottie and Ben Blissett. Brother Blissett is a Primary Investigator of the BLET Safety Task Force and belongs to BLET Division 301 in Roanoke, Va.

Carl and Cheryl Fields. Brother Fields is a Primary Investigator of the BLET Safety Task Force and is Legislative Representative of BLET Division 682 in Hammond, Ind.

Dan Cook III and his wife, Adrienne. Brother Cook is Local Chairman of BLET Division 1 in Detroit, Mich.

From left: EUMA Secretary-Treasurer Gary Brink and EUMA Golf Tournament Chairman Sonny Kertesz. Brother Brink is retiring from his EUMA duties after many years of dedicated service.

From left: GIA Treasurer Bettye Dollar; GIA Vice-President Mabel Grotzinger; BLET Vice-President Stephen Speagle; BLET Vice-President Paul Sorrow; BLET National Secretary-Treasurer Bill Welpert; and BLET National President Don Hahs.

From left: Gregory Durocher, Local Chairman of BLET Division 867 in Waterbury, Conn., General Chairman Tom Roberts (Conrail SAA/CSX-Northern District), and Jim Louis, Local Chairman and Legislative Representative of BLET Division 421 in Buffalo, N.Y. Brother Louis is also Secretary-Treasurer of the Conrail SAA General Committee of Adjustment.
SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y.

Don Zatteau, Local Chairman of BLET Division 286 in Grand Rapids, Mich., purchases raffle tickets from Pat Murphy, GIA Second Vice-President & Assistant U.S. Legislative Representative. The number of raffle tickets sold was based on each person’s arm span, so Brother Zatteau made sure he got as many tickets as possible.

Clockwise, from far right: Sam Caruso, a member of BLET Division 183 in Omaha, Neb.; Anita Caruso, GIA International Secretary; Roxie Twombly; and Mike Twombly, Delaware & Hudson/Springfield Terminal General Chairman.

From left: EUMA Chairman and Amtrak General Chairman Mark B. Kenny and 2005 EUMA Arrangements Chairman Bill Kearsing, a member of BLET Division 46 in Albany, N.Y.

From left: Mike Gannon, Legislative Representative of BLET Division 11 in New York, N.Y.; and George Newman, Massachusetts State Legislative Board Chairman.

2006 Eastern Union Meeting Association

Hosted by Arrangements Chairman R.J. Chapter, Co-Chairman T.J. Moraghan and the members of BLET Division 157 at the

Atlantic City Tropicana

in Atlantic City, N.J., from June 12-16, 2006
Explaining Railroad Retirement age reductions

Railroad retirement benefits are subject to reduction if an employee with less than 30 years of service retires before attaining full retirement age. Employees with less than 30 years of service may still retire at age 62. However, the age at which full retirement benefits are payable was increased by 1963 social security legislation first effective in the year 2000. This legislation affected railroad retirement benefits through provisions of the Railroad Retirement Act, and the age requirements for some unreduced railroad retirement benefits changed just like the social security requirements.

The following questions and answers explain how these early retirement age reductions are applied to railroad retirement annuities.

1. What is the full retirement age for employees with less than 30 years of service and is it the same for all employees?
The full retirement age, the earliest age at which a person can begin receiving railroad retirement or social security benefits without any reduction for early retirement, ranges from age 65 for those born before 1938 to age 67 for those born in 1960 or later, the same as for social security.

2. How are the changes in the maximum age reduction being phased in?
Since 2000, the age requirements for some unreduced railroad retirement benefits have been rising just like the social security requirements. For employees with less than 30 years of service and their spouses, full retirement age increases from 65 to 66, and from 66 to 67, at the rate of two months per year over two separate six-year periods. This also affects how reduced benefits are computed for early retirement.

The gradual increase in full retirement age from age 65 to age 66 affects those people who were born in the years 1938 through 1942. The full retirement age will remain age 66 for people born in the years 1943 through 1954. The gradual increase in full retirement age from age 66 to age 67 affects those who were born in the years 1955 through 1959. For people who were born in 1960 or later the full retirement age will be age 67.

3. How does this affect the early retirement age reductions applied to the annuities of those who retire before the full retirement age?
The early retirement annuity reductions applied to annuities awarded before full retirement age are increasing. For employees retiring between age 62 and full retirement age with less than 30 years of service, the maximum reduction will be 30 percent by the year 2022. Under prior law, the maximum reduction was 20 percent.

Age reductions are applied separately to the tier I and tier II components of an annuity. The tier I reduction is 1/180 for each of the first 36 months the employee is under full retirement age when his or her annuity begins and 1/240 for each additional month. This will result in a gradual increase in the reduction at age 62 to 30 percent for an employee once the age 67 retirement age is in effect.

These same reductions apply to the tier II component of the annuity. However, if an employee had any creditable railroad service before August 12, 1983, the retirement age for tier II purposes will remain 65, and the tier II benefit reduction will not be reduced beyond 20 percent.

Chart 1 below shows how the gradual increase in full retirement age will affect employees.

4. What are some examples of how this will affect the amounts payable to employees retiring before full retirement age with less than 30 years of service?
Take the example of an employee born on June 2, 1960, who retires in 2012 at the age of 62. In terms of today’s dollars and current benefit levels, not counting future increases in creditable earnings, assume this employee is eligible for monthly tier I and tier II benefits, before age reductions, of $1,200 and $800, respectively, for a total monthly benefit of $2,000.

Upon retirement at age 62, the employee’s tier I benefit would be reduced by 25 percent, the maximum age reduction applicable in 2012. This would yield a tier I monthly benefit of $900; the employee’s tier II benefit would also be reduced by 25 percent, providing a tier II monthly benefit of $600 and a total monthly rate of $1,500. However, if the employee had any railroad service before August 12, 1983, the tier II benefit would be subject to a maximum reduction of only 20 percent, providing a tier II amount of $640, and a total monthly rate of $1,540.

As a second example, take an employee born on June 2, 1960, and also eligible for monthly tier I and tier II benefits, before age reductions, of $1,200 and $800, respectively, for a total monthly benefit of $2,000. This employee retires in 2022 at age 62 with no service before August 12, 1983. Consequently, a 30 percent reduction is applied to both the tier I and tier II benefits and the net total annuity would be $1,400.

5. How are railroad retirement spouse benefits affected by this change?
An employee retiring with less than 30 years of service is age 62, the employee’s spouse is also eligible for an annuity the first full month the spouse is age 62. Early retirement reductions are applied to the spouse annuity if the spouse retires prior to full retirement age. Beginning in the year 2000, full retirement age for a spouse gradually began to rise to age 67, just as for an employee, depending on the year of birth. While reduced spouse benefits are still payable at age 62, the maximum reduction will be 35 percent by the year 2022. However, if the employee had any creditable railroad service prior to August 12, 1983, the increased age reduction is applied only to the spouse’s tier I benefit.

6. What age reductions are applied to employees who retired with 30 years of service prior to 2002?
Under the Railroad Retirement and Survivors’ Improvement Act of 2001, employees with 30 or more years of creditable service are eligible for full monthly railroad retirement benefits if the first full month they are age 60, if their annuities begin January 1, 2002, or later. The spouses of such employees are likewise eligible for full annuities, which can also begin with the first full month the spouse is age 60. Also, if a disability annuitant is age 60 and has 30 years of service, his or her spouse can receive an annuity at age 60 without any age reduction if the spouse’s annuity begins date is January 1, 2002, or later. The early retirement reductions are applied to the tier I portion of an employee’s annuity if the employee first became eligible for a 60/30 annuity July 1, 1984, or later and retired at ages 60 or 61 before 2002. The tier I benefit awarded such an employee’s spouse will also be reduced for early retirement age reductions of whether the spouse retires at age 60 or 62, and regardless of the date the spouse’s annuity begins.

7. Are age reductions applied to employee disability annuities?
Employee annuities based on disability are not subject to age reductions.
Advice from a seasoned GIA spouse: ‘Get involved’

By Sereena Hogan
3rd International Vice President
Grand International Auxiliary

In the June issue, Mabel Grotzinger did a fine job of outlining the challenges and frustrations of being a railroad spouse. I would like to add a little of my own, with my promise to present some coping mechanisms for this lifestyle, I will share a few personal stories.

When I met Ken and I met, I’d been a single mom for eight years and was fairly independent and capable of handling many situations on my own, which of course is a good fit for a railroad wife. During the two years Ken and I dated before we married, I realized that putting up with the uncertainty of his non-existent schedule was a real headache. He invariably ended up being gone when we had planned dates, and one day when I asked him, he said that he was “dead on his feet” and would be going to call me out, many of them were starting to think that this railroad guy was some figment of my imagination.

What I did find, though, was that when Ken was in town and we socialized with other railroaders, I met some pretty nice people, even if they were somewhat of a different breed, with their own special language. I will never forget the first time one of Ken’s railroader buddies told me that “Ken died last night on the train” while somewhere close in the desert on his way from Tucson to Yuma. “I was relieved to find out what really meant was that he had “died” on the hours,” I thought, and I’m not the only one!

By the time Ken and I were married in the spring of 1989, I had met some very nice people who were also railroaders. Some of them asked me to help organize a spouses’ support group so we could get together and talk as much about ways to cope with the lifestyle. At that time, we were unaware of the GLA. Our support group organized picnics and worked on projects to create more familiarity among the membership, something that seemed to be slipping away in these busy times.

In 1990, Ken was involved in a major derailment just outside of Yuma, Ariz. Although he was unaware of it at the time, this was a turning point in his career. That day, he traveled the plank on the crew for the loss of approximately $1 million worth of brand new General Motors automobiles, not to mention the track damage and railroad car and equipment damage.

In the next few weeks, Ken worked closely with his local chairman to de-velop a strategy and a plan to investigate the accident. The day of the investigation, I called together a group of his railroad buddies for a surprise pizza party the night. It was fun and lighthearted, and Ken felt supported by these guys. One of them presented him with a plaque that read “General Motors Salesman of the Year.”

Ken and the conductor were both dismissed following the investigation, but he filed an appeal, and we went back to running trains. That experience hit him hardest in becoming a union officer. In 1995, he became the local chairman for Division 28.

By now you might be asking yourself what this has to do with coping and surviving as a railroad spouse? My point is that the way I have learned to cope is by becoming involved. In the beginning of our relationship, I resented the railroad because it kept Ken away from me and the kids. Ken now serves as a Special Rep and Coordinating Editor and with Education & Training with the National BLET. That position requires that he attend all four region conventions. I usually accompany him to assist him and to represent the Interna- tional GLA. Over the years, we have attended a large number of GIA meetings, and we look forward to connecting with each summer. At each convention, we make new friends and this family continues to grow.

This summer, I got a true taste of the support of my extended family: when I suffered a broken ankle the morning of the celebration day at the Eastern Union Meeting Association in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. I had been “glowed over” by a couple of large, rowdy dogs as Ken and I took our morning walk. I spent most of that day in the emergency room, but was able to attend the welcoming reception that evening. My BLET and GIA brothers and sisters all wished me well on the surgery I was to undergo the next day, and after spending a few days in the hospital, I was released in time to attend the banquet and the closing day of the convention. I was very moved by the cards and gifts I received that evening, and especially by the prayers and messages through the week. I was a little sad I hadn’t stayed for the band, when I learned that the disc jockey had been instructed to play “Who Let the Dogs Out?” in my honor. Sorry I missed that one! If you are feeling a little “beaten up” by your role as a railroad spouse, my advice to you is this: You can’t beat so much as you might well join in. Get involved. If you don’t have a GLA in your area, take the initiative and start one. No one will understand your plight bet- ter than a group of other railroad spouses. Even if you can’t change the situations that frustrate you, at least you will find people who can learn more about railroad life. It’s a great way to take a trip with the family, and could be tax deductible if it’s job-related. It’s all in the sense of “family” as you connect and interact with your BLET and GLA brothers and sisters, and you might be surprised at what you can learn.

Utah Railway

Continued from Page 1

remote control assignments to locomotive engineers. “It was a hard issue and I thought it would be a deal-breaker,” Milano said. “But we got a deal that protects both sides and everyone’s satisfied. It’s a good agreement for both crafts.” Engineers and trainmen will receive one hour of pay in addition to all other earnings when working remote controlled assignments. In addition, the BLET secured seven years of protection at a defined rate of pay for anyone who may be adversely impacted by implementation of remote control.

In terms of health care, BLET members will be switched to Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and all members will receive a $500 lump sum payment in the first quarter of 2006 and an additional $500 lump sum payment in the first quarter of 2007 to offset any out of pocket expenses that may occur because of this change. The employee’s salary.

A $70,000 per year employee who puts 4 percent of his salary into a railroad 401k contributions, up to 4 percent of an employee’s salary.

“The eligibility age for a full retirement and social security-covered annuity is 62. The maximum reduction is 28.5 percent. For a disabled widower, the maximum age reduction would be applied to the tier I retirement. However, if the deceased widow(er), the maximum reduction is also 28.5 percent, even if the annuity begins at age 50.

9. How can individuals get more information on railroad retirement and their eligibility requirements?

Employees should contact their RHB field office for information or refer to the RHB’s website, wwwcrr.gov. Persons can find the address and phone number of the Board office serving their area by calling the automated toll-free RHB Help Line at (800) 809- 0772, or from the Board’s Web site. Most Board offices are open to the public from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Strengthening labor unions

For the past nine months the Teamsters Union has been proposing changes to the AFL-CIO structure so that the Federation would concentrate more on organizing, the life-blood of unions, and less on politics. Unfortunately, the IFT and the AFL-CIO were not able to agree on these key issues and we disaffiliated on July 25, 2005.

The Teamsters plan for reforming the AFL-CIO structure were widely known, and lauded as a fresh approach for the union movement. The plans were, and still are, available on our website. In addition, the Teamsters enthusiastically supported the formation of the Change to Win Coalition, a group of seven unions (IFT, LIUNA, SEIU, UFCW, UNITE HERE, Carpenters and United Farm Workers). We believe that labor can grow if we leverage our existing resources and focus clearly on empowering workers.

The Coalition sponsored a package of amendments and resolutions to be presented at the AFL-CIO Convention that would have revitalized the Federation (1) by setting organizing as its first priority, (2) by insuring that organizing is aimed not simply at increasing membership but at bargaining strong contracts that improve the lives of working people, (3) by maintaining high standards both at the Federation and within its affiliates, and (4) by requiring the Federation to act firmly to prevent one affiliate from undermining the standards set by another.

The Teamsters are charting a new course for action, and we will work with like-minded unions that are part of the Change to Win Coalition, pursue programs that will accelerate organizing, increase union density in our core industries, rebuild the labor movement and insure a better future for workers and their families.

The Teamsters Union is committed to cooperating with the AFL-CIO and its affiliates on actions and issues that vitally affect workers and families. We plan to support and cooperate in political and other actions that matter to working people. We will not allow our differences with the AFL-CIO to affect our fundamental commitment to trade unionism and to working people. We will not allow our differences with the AFL-CIO to affect our fundamental commitment to trade unionism and to working people. We hope that the AFL-CIO will join with us in this pledge that our differences will not affect the interests of workers and their families.

James P. Hoffa
General President

A message from Teamsters General President Jim Hoffa

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LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS AND TRAINMEN NEWS
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen
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AUGUST 2005

CALENDAR & EVENTS

OCTOBER 3-6, 2005... 70th Annual Southwestern Convention Meeting, Oklahoma City
Hosted by John Salisbury and the members of BLET Division 141, the 70th annual SWCM will be held at the Renaissance Oklahoma City Convention Center Hotel, (405) 228-8000 or (800) 468-3571. More details to come when available.

NOVEMBER 4, 2006... 79th Annual BLET-GIA Southeastern Meeting Association (SMA)
Hosted by SMA Chairman R.L. Reed and the members of BLET Division 205, the 79th annual SMA will be held at the Newnan Marriott at the Convention Center in Newnan, GA. More details to come when available.

JUNE 4-9, 2006... 79th Annual BLET-GIA Eastern Union Meeting Association (EUMA)
Hosted by EUMA Arrangements Chairman R.J. Chapter and the members of BLET Division 157, the 68th annual EUMA will be held at the Tropicana Casino & Resort on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, N.J. More details to come.

JUNE 12-16, 2006... 68th Annual BLET-GIA Eastern Union Meeting Association (EUMA)
Hosted by EUMA Arrangements Chairman R.J. Chapter and the members of BLET Division 157, the 68th annual EUMA will be held at the Tropicana Casino & Resort on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, N.J. More details to come when available.

JUNE 19-22, 2006... BLET National Division Convention, Las Vegas, Nevada
The First Quadrennial Convention of the BLET National Division will be held at Bally’s in Las Vegas. More details to come when available.

JULY 18-23, 2006... 66th Annual BLET-GIA International Western Convention (IWC)
Hosted by S.V. Halbrook and the members of BLET Division 94, the 66th annual IWC will be held at the Holiday Inn Rapid City–Rushmore Plaza in Rapid City, S.D. More details to come when available.

AUGUST 20-24, 2006... 71st Annual BLET-GIA Southeastern Convention Meeting (SMA)
Hosted by A.L. Williams and the members of BLET Division 182, the 71st annual SMA will be held at TheProbably Little Rock in Little Rock, Ark. More details to come when available.

Advisory Board June Activity

In accordance with the BLET Bylaws, summaries of BLET Advisory Board members’ activities are published monthly.


Vice-President Stephen D. Speagle: Board of Representation assignments. General representation assignments. Organization assignment. Special assignment.

Vice-President & U.S. National Legislative Representative Raymond A. Holmes: General representation assignments. Organization assignment. Special assignment.