Graniteville report highlights safety and security weaknesses; Rail Conference’s ‘High Alert’ report warns of other potential hazards

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) on November 29 recommended that rail companies make important operational changes, including reducing speeds in populated areas, to avoid another catastrophic accident like the crash in Graniteville, S.C., in January that killed nine people.

FRA affirms that the engineer’s responsibility is to acknowledge the information provided by the conductor or brakeman, not to act as a guarantor with respect to the actual position in which the switch was left.”

Generally, the revisions incorporate the information provided in Questions and Answers published by FRA on November 4th. However, FRA also added the three specific items contained in the Petition for Amendment that the BLET filed on November 7th, and tightened the original requirement with respect to switch point indicators.

A copy of the revised emergency order is available on the BLET website at the link provided at the end of this article. As for BLET’s request for clarification concerning the significance of a locomotive engineer’s initials appearing on the Switch Point Awareness Form (SPAF), FRA stated:

“BLET asked that language in item (2) of the order be amended to delete ‘except when the switch is left in the charge of a crewmember of another train or the train dispatcher directs otherwise,’ following the requirement that switches be left in normal position when not in use. BLET suggested that this would heighten the sense of individual responsibility that the order seeks to promote. FRA appreciates the suggestion and recognizes that it is therapeutically consistent with the general thrust of the order. However, FRA is unable to act upon it for three reasons. First, this change does not appear to be necessary to abate the emergency. Recent accidents caused by misaligned switches have generally involved error on the part of the crew initially reversing the switch, rather than miscommunication or lapses associated with handing off responsibility for the switch. Second, such a change could expose employees to hazards unnecessarily, as when it might be necessary to cross live tracks, walk on uneven ballast, or traverse areas covered with snow or ice. Third, imposing this requirement would cause significant delay and inefficiency in railroad operations.”

The BLET’s Petition for Amendment also objected to FRA’s retreat in Q&A #22 — from the original requirement that all intra-crew communications be made via radio, by accepting alternative means of communication. While FRA has decided to allow alternative means of communication, it limited circumstances in which such alternatives were appropriate as a result of the BLET’s petition:

“A concern shared by many commenters was that the EO was written in such a way as to indicate that unless radio communication was inopera- 

This article was published in the December 2005 issue of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen: A Division of the Railway Conference, International Brotherhood of Teamsters.
Part III: The ‘pretzel logic’ of remote control

Carriers, AAR, UTU employ twisted logic to justify implementation, continued use of RCL

By Dave Kugler

“Seat of the pants feeling”) a conventional engineer receives from his/her locomotive and crew...

You echo FRA’s findings...
CSX Corporation reported third quarter net earnings of $164 million, a 31 percent increase in earnings of $123 million from the same quarter in 2004. In the quarter, the company’s core surface transportation business, which includes rail and intermodal, achieved:

• Record third-quarter operating income of $381 million, up 46 percent from the same period last year and representing the seventh quarter of year-over-year improvement; and
• Revenue of $2.1 billion, an increase of 9 percent over the third quarter of 2004 with strength in all major markets.

Hurricane Katrina, which made landfall near Buras, La., on Aug. 29, damaged a CSX line running 85 miles east of New Orleans and five major bridges. Repairs will continue through early next year. CSX says the total cost of the storm will total $250 million, but it has insurance that will cover the vast majority of the expenses. CSX’s coal revenue increased 16 percent to $491 million, while merchandise shipment revenue rose 8 percent to $1.06 billion.

CSX’s operating ratio was 81.0 percent, an improvement of 4.3 points from the same quarter last year.

Kansas City Southern

For the third quarter of 2005, Kansas City Southern set an all-time quarterly record with consolidated revenues of $384.6 million, which were a result of the 2005 acquisitions. KCS also boasted a consolidated net income of $110.5 million.

KCS now includes U.S. rail operations (Kansas City Southern Railway Company and Texas Mexican Railway Company) and Mexican rail operations (TFM, S.A. de C.V.) in its consolidated revenues.

Consolidated operating expenses for the third quarter of 2005 were $386.5 million versus $444.0 million in the third quarter of 2004, primarily due to the previously referenced acquisitions, and increased claims reserves. In July, hurricane Emily reduced operating income from Mexican operations by $1.8 million. In September, hurricanes Katrina and Rita negatively impacted U.S. operations by approximately $7.8 million and Mexican operations by $2.4 million.

BURLINGTON NORTHERN SANTA FE

BNSF reported third quarter revenues of $3.22 billion, which is an all-time record high for the railroad. Revenue rose to record levels in spite of fuel surcharges of $286 million, nearly triple the $85 million paid in the third quarter of 2004.

BNSF experienced revenue increases in all four of the Company’s business groups during the third quarter. Consumer Products revenues increased $234 million to $1.31 billion, largely from strong volume increases across most of the business sectors. Industrial Products revenues increased $161 million to $743 million. Agricultural Products revenues were up $104 million to $522 million, due largely to strong exports through the Gulf and Pacific Northwest ports. Coal revenues rose by $33 million to $722 million.

Operating expenses for the third-quarter of 2005 were $2.54 billion. This compares with third-quarter 2004 operating expenses of $2.69 billion.

The railroad’s quarterly operating ratio was 75.8 percent, which was an improvement over the 2005 second quarter.
Remote control locomotive collides with UP freight train

Quick-thinking locomotive engineer on conventional freight helped make accident less severe

A remotely controlled locomotive (RCL) pulling dozens of freight cars collided with a Union Pacific freight train at UP’s Fife Yard near Tacoma, Wash., on November 13 at approximately 9:45 a.m. Pacific time.

The remote control train side-swiped an inbound container train heading for the Port of Tacoma after having arrived from Chicago. The collision knocked two articulated cars loaded with shipping containers from the rail, and punctured the fuel tanks on each of the remote control locomotives. The accident prompted an emergency response by the Tacoma Fire Department, hazardous material experts from Union Pacific, and from outside contractors.

A preliminary investigation conducted by officials with Division 892 (Seattle) of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) revealed that the container train crew had received authorization to shove their train towards the interchange yard owned by Tacoma Rail, near the Port of Tacoma.

“The train was in the process of crossing over to the Tacoma Rail interchange track when the RCL job collided with it,” said Thomas Frederick, Local Chairman of Division 892.

“They had shoved approximately 6,000 feet through the crossover already, so there can be no doubt that they had the right-of-way and prior authorization to make their movement.”

Frederick noted that the collision occurred on non-signaled yard trackage, with movements authorized by a local supervisor.

“This could have been much worse,” Frederick continued. “As it is, preliminary estimates have 300 gallons of diesel fuel in the ground. We are less than one-fourth of a mile from the Puyallup River and about one mile from Puget Sound. If the RCL had collided with a tank car of chlorine or propane, this would have been a disaster of epic proportions.”

Frederick credits the alertness of Engineer John Hesse, a member of BLET Division 892, for preventing a much bigger derailment.

“John saw the RCL coming at him on the adjacent track and stopped his train prior to the collision,” Frederick said. “He also contacted the manager at Fife Yard and told them to contact the RCL crew to immediately stop their movement.”

The accident could have been much worse, but it also could have been avoided.

“It is probable this incident would have been avoided with either an engineer in the cab, or one of the RCL operators riding the locomotive to protect the direction of the movement,” said Dr. Mark Ricci, Chairman of the BLET Washington State Legislative Board. “We went before the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission seeking rules that would have required the railroads in Washington State to provide point protection. Our efforts have gone for naught, so far. I hope it doesn’t take a major disaster to finally get the attention of the regulatory authorities. We got lucky this time, but our luck will soon run out.”

Frederick indicated that the BLET investigation would also focus on whether a fail-safe system designed to stop an RCL before it encroached upon an improperly aligned switch was installed at the derailment site, and if so, whether it was functioning as intended.

Frederick also indicated that investigators from the Federal Railroad Administration had been notified of the incident and asked to respond.

Important information about a Medco prescription benefit option

(Medco issued the following press release on November 15.)

After months of working together, Medco and the railroad unions that sponsor the coverage available to you under Group Policy GA-25111 are pleased to announce a new Medicare Part D prescription drug plan that has been created specifically for GA-25111 participants. YOURx PLAN™ is the culmination of a process that began after Congress passed legislation establishing the new Medicare Part D drug benefit, and is a Medco-approved, customized prescription drug plan (PDP) specifically designed for GA-25111 participants.

Medco is an industry leader in reducing prescription costs for millions of Americans and has been serving the prescription drug coverage needs of railroad retirees since June 1993. If you decide to join the Medco offering, the transition will be an easy one. And your enrollment process into the plan will not involve a lot of paperwork.

You will receive more details on Medco’s YOURx PLAN™ specifically designed for railroad retirees in early November. Once you receive the materials, carefully review them and complete and return the enrollment form to Medco as soon as possible to ensure there is no gap in coverage.

Medco looks forward to continuing to serve the prescription drug benefit needs of railroad retirees. If you have any questions about your customized plan, please call us toll-free at 1-800-590-6802 (TTY/TDD users should call 1-800-716-3251), or visit us at www.medco.com/medrrailroad on the Web.

United Healthcare update: Early retirement plan increases lifetime maximum

The actions of a BLET member made this remote control accident much less severe, BLET investigators say.

The lifetime maximum benefit for each individual covered under The Railroad Employees National Early Retirement Major Medical Benefit Plan (UnitedHealthcare’s Policy GA-40000) is adjusted each year based on the medical cost component of the Consumer Price Index. As of January 1, 2006, this maximum will increase from $82,400 to $86,400. The $4000 in additional benefits payable applies to expenses incurred on or after January 1, 2006.

New Eligibility Dates

For Age Annuities: You apply for a 60/30 annuity for which you are eligible:

• on or after the date you reach age 60, or
• anytime during the three months before your 60th birthday, provided you continue working into the month before the month in which you turn age 60.

For Disability Annuities: You have a current connection with the railroad industry:

• You have a history of disability
• You have a current connection with the railroad industry, and
• You meet the requirements of the railroad employee retirement plan.

For Disability Annuities:

• You are covered under The Railroad Employees National Health and Welfare Plan (other than under COBRA) on the day before the last day of the following dates:

See United Healthcare, Page 5

Medco’s YOURx PLAN™ specifically designed for railroad retirees in early November. Once you receive the materials, carefully review them and complete and return the enrollment form to Medco as soon as possible to ensure there is no gap in coverage.
Amtrak Board of Directors criticized by Congress for firing David Gunn

In mid-November, commuters traveling through Penn Station in Newark were greeted by rail workers warning of a possible Amtrak shutdown in their future. Locomotive engineers and maintenance of way workers who are represented by the Teamsters Rail Conference passed out leaflets to thousands of commuters using Amtrak.

It was one of a string of informational pickets conducted by the Rail Conference, which educated commuters in other cities such as Boston.

“Many of the commuters were surprised to hear that Amtrak service might stop,” said Kevin Hussey, a member of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes (BMWE). “The Amtrak board won’t negotiate with us so a service shutdown may be our only option.”

“We want every rail commuter to call Congress and ask them to tell the Amtrak board of directors to bargain fairly with the rail unions,” said Fred Simpson, president of the BMWE.

With thousands of commuters passing through the Newark station daily, rail workers passed out nearly all of their fliers and spoke to many commuters. “I bet the switchboard at the U.S. Capitol is going to be busy today,” said Mark Kenny, General Chairman of the BLET’s Amtrak General Committee of Adjustment. “But we have to use every available opportunity to get some movement on this issue.”

This year the Amtrak board of directors continued its stall tactics on union bargaining. In addition, the Amtrak board announced its intention to cut apart Amtrak, leaving the eastern corridor intact, but requiring local governments to foot the bill for local service.

The Teamsters Rail Conference represents more than 70,000 rail workers nationwide including the memberships of the BMWE and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET).

Amtrak Board of Directors criticized by Congress for firing David Gunn

Amtrak, the National Railroad Passenger Corp., is recruiting Locomotive Engineers to work in the following areas:

- Jacksonville, Fla.
- Lorton, Va. (Auto Train)
- Florence, S.C.
- Raleigh, N.C.
- Miami, Fla.
- Charlotte, N.C.

Duties include the safe operation of diesel-electric locomotives, complying with train orders, wayside signals, railroad operating rules, special instructions, and federal, state and local regulations to transport passengers and equipment safely and efficiently. Must also perform air brake tests as required and must frequently make timely and critical decisions under stressful conditions.

Applicants must have a high school diploma or GED. Candidates must also have a current Class 1 Engineer Certificate and must have operated under a road rule when hired. Must also be able to read hand-operated switches.

Applicants must be at least 21 years of age, pass a physical examination, and meet other required physical fitness standards. Candidates must be able to report to their crew within a two-hour call period.

Resume must be received by December 31, 2005. Please mail resumes as soon as possible to:

Amtrak Human Resources, Attn: ENG 900 2nd Street, NE Washington, D.C. 20002

Resume may also be faxed to:

Attn: Engineer — (Location Desired)
Fax: (202) 906-3349

EOE, FLM, LV — Amtrak is an equal employment opportunity employer.

Bylaws, a quorum would be five said that under the board's rum in the last few years. He had apparently not had a quo- tive Steven LaTourette, the chairman of the subcommittee, tive LaTourette, the board fired Gunn, Representa- crats denounced the board for ber 15, Republicans and Demo- structure Committee Subcom- House Transportation & Infra- resistant criticized by many .

President David Gunn on No- “Many of the commuters were surprised to hear that Amtrak service might stop,” said Kevin Hussey, a member of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE). “The Amtrak board won’t negotiate with us so a service shutdown may be our only option.”

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The Teamsters Rail Conference represents more than 70,000 rail workers nationwide including the memberships of the BMWE and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET).
Events that can affect retirement benefits

Rights to benefits under the Railroad Retirement Act also carry responsibilities and earnings limitations that can affect the payment of these benefits to the employee or to members of the employee’s family. If these events are not reported, benefit overpayments can occur that have to be repaid, sometimes with interest and penalties.

Events that can affect the payment of a retirement benefit, with changes in the amount of such benefit payments; post-retirement work and earnings; the death of an annuitant; changes in marital status; a child leaving the care of a spouse or widow(er); a student ceasing full-time attendance.

The following questions and answers describe how these events affect railroad retirement benefits and what should be done to prevent overpayments.

1. How can the award of social security benefits result in a railroad retirement annuity overpayment?

The tier I portion of a railroad retirement annuity is based on both the railroad retirement and social security credits earned by the annuitant. If the social security credits are, therefore, reduced by the amount of any actual social security benefit paid on the basis of nonrailroad employment, in order to prevent a duplication of benefits based on the same earnings.

The tier I dual benefit reduction also applies to the annuity of an employee who is entitled to railroad retirement and social security retirement benefits of $1 for every $2 in earnings over the exempt amount. The Board or Social Security Administration would determine whether any railroad retirement benefits due under this section should be reduced.

2. What other types of benefit payments, besides social security benefits, require dual benefit reductions in a railroad retirement annuity?

For employees first eligible for a railroad retirement annuity and a Federal, State or local government pension (defined as a reduction in each year of tier I for receipt of a public pension based in part or in whole, on employment not covered by social security or railroad retirement after 1985. This also applies to certain other payments not covered by social security, such as payments from a non-profit organization or from a foreign government or a foreign employer. However, it does not include military service pensions, payments by the Department of Veterans Affairs, certain benefits payable by a foreign government as a result of a totalization agreement between that government and the United States.

The tier I portion of a spouse or widow’s retirement annuity is reduced by the amount of her earnings from nonrailroad employment, but also for the earnings of the employee. The Board or Social Security Administration would determine whether any railroad retirement benefits due under this section should be reduced.

3. Can earnings cause railroad retirement overpayments?

Unreported post-retirement work and earnings in nonrailroad employment are a major cause of overpayments in railroad retirement annuities. Like social security benefits, railroad retirement tier I benefits paid to employees and spouses, plus tier I, tier II, and vested dual benefits paid to survivors, are subject to earnings deductions if post-retirement earnings exceed certain exempt amounts, which increase annually.

These earnings deductions do not apply to those who have attained full social security retirement age. Full retirement age for employees and pre-retirement railroad employee born before 1938 to age 67 for those born in 1960 or later. Full retirement age for survivor annuity benefits of $1 for those born before 1940 to age 67 for those born in 1962 or later.

For those under full retirement age throughout the year, the earnings deduction is $1 for every $2 of earnings over the exempt amount. The tier I portion of a spouse or widow’s retirement annuity is reduced by the amount of her earnings from nonrailroad employment, but also for the earnings of the employee. The Board or Social Security Administration would determine whether any railroad retirement benefits due under this section should be reduced.

4. How do post-retirement earnings affect disability annuities?

Special restrictions limiting earnings to $400 per month, exclusive of disability-related work expenses, apply to disabled railroad retirement employee annuities.

In addition, any work performed by a disabled annuitant may be considered an indication of an individual’s recovery from disability regardless of the amount of earnings. Therefore, any earnings by a disability annuitant must be reported promptly to avoid potential overpayments.

These disability work restrictions apply until the disabled employee annuitant attains full retirement age. This is the age at which the nonrailroad employee would be subject to the additional earnings deductions that apply in these cases.

5. What effect does railroad work have on an annuity?

No railroad retirement annuity is payable to a railroad retirement annuitant if the employee, spouse or survivor annuitant performs compensated service for a railroad or railroad union. This includes local lodge or division secretary collecting insurance premiums, regardless of the amount of salary.

6. What should be done when a railroad retirement annuitant dies?

The Board should be notified immediately of the death of any retirement or survivor annuitant. Payment of a railroad retirement annuity stops as soon as the Board receives knowledge of how late in the month death occurs and work, and by a local lodge or division secretary collecting insurance premiums, regardless of the amount of salary.

7. What are some other events that can affect payments to Railroad Retirement Act beneficiaries, such as spouses and widows and/or other survivors?

A spouse or divorced spouse must immediately notify the Board if the railroad employee upon whose service the annuity is based dies. A spouse must notify the Board if her or his marriage ends in divorce or annulment and a widow(er) or divorced spouse must notify the Board if she or he remarries.

Also, benefits paid to widowed and surviving divorced spouses that are based on the beneficiary’s earnings for a married child are usually retroactive, they can result in substantial overpayments.

See Retirement Benefits, Page 7
Most railroad retirement annuities, like social security benefits, are scheduled to increase in January 2006 on the basis of the rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the 12 months preceding October 2005.

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 4.1 percent, which is the percentage of the CPI rise. Tier II benefits will increase by 1.3 percent, the 2.35 percent of the CPI rise. The vested dual benefit payments and supplemental annuities also paid by the Railroad Retirement Board are not adjusted for the CPI rise.

In January 2006, the average regular railroad retirement employee annuity will increase $55 a month to $1,738 and the average of combined benefits for an employee and spouse will increase $76 a month to $2,501. For those aged widow(er)s eligible for an increase, the average annuity will increase $31 a month to $805. However, widow(er)s whose annuities are paid under the Railroad Retirement and Survivors’ Improvement Act of 2001 will not receive an annual cost-of-living adjustment until the exempt amount is exceeded by the amount that would have been paid under prior law, counting all interim cost-of-living increases otherwise payable. Almost 33 percent of the widow(er)s on the Board’s rolls are being paid under the 2001 law.

If a railroad retirement or survivor annuitant also receives a social security benefit or any other government benefit, such as a public service pension or another railroad retirement annuity, 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 amount of her or his railroad retirement benefit.

In late December the Railroad Retirement Board will mail notices to all annuitants providing a breakdown of the annuity rates payable to them in January 2006.

Changes will allow retirees to earn more in 2006 under Railroad Retirement and Survivors’ Improvement Act of 2001.

Those railroad retirement annuitants subject to earnings restrictions can earn more in 2006 without having their benefits reduced, as a result of increases in earnings limits indexed to average national wage increases.

Like social security benefits, some railroad retirement benefit payments are subject to deductions if an annuitant’s earnings exceed certain exempt amounts. These earnings restrictions apply to those who have not attained full social security retirement age.

For employee and spouse annuitants, full retirement age ranges from age 65 for those born before 1938 to age 67 for those born in 1960 or later. For survivors and dependent persons, full retirement age ranges from age 65 for those born before 1940 to age 67 for those born in 1962 or later.

For those under full retirement age throughout 2006, the exempt earnings amount rises to $12,480 from $12,000 in 2005. For beneficiaries attaining full retirement age in 2006, the exempt earnings amounts, for the months before the full retirement age is attained, rise to $33,240 in 2006 from $31,900 in 2005.

For those under full retirement age, the earnings deduction is $1 in benefits for every $2 of earnings over the exempt amount. For those attaining full retirement age in 2006, the deduction is $1 for every $3 of earnings over the exempt amount in the months before the month full retirement age is attained.

When applicable, these earnings deductions are assessed on the tier I and vested dual benefit portions of railroad retirement employee and spouse annuities, and the tier I, tier II, and supplemental portions of survivor benefits.

All earnings received for services rendered, plus any net earnings from self-employment, are considered when assessing deductions for earnings. Interest, dividends, certain rental income, or income from stocks, bonds, or other investments are not considered earnings for this purpose.

Retired employees and spouses, regardless of age, who work for their last pre-retirement nonrailroad employer are also subject to an additional earnings deduction, in their tier I and supplemental benefits, of $1 for every $2 in earnings up to a maximum reduction of 50 percent. This earnings restriction does not change from year to year and does not allow for an exempt amount.

A spouse benefit is subject to reduction not only for the spouse’s earnings, but also for the earnings of the employee, regardless of whether the earnings are from service for the last pre-retirement nonrailroad employer or other post-retirement employment.

Special work restrictions applicable to disability annuitants do not change in 2006.

Regardless of age and/or earnings, no railroad retirement annuity is payable for any month in which an annuitant (retired employee, spouse or survivor) works for a railroad employer or railroad union.

As a young person growing up in the country, my father’s work permitted him to always be home every night and all holidays. I attended school in town, and crossed the railroad track each day as I walked to my classes. In those days, railroad workers were “looked down upon” by some as being an inferior class of people because of their menial labor, their traveling to and from working areas, and the type of clothing they wore — mostly overalls, which were usually dirty from coal dust and soot, and an engineer’s cap, and a bandana tied around his neck. However, I wondered why this feeling of inferiority, as the men always wore big smiles and blew the train’s whistle to me, they were very friendly, polite people.

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When applicable, these earnings deductions are assessed on the tier I and vested dual benefit portions of railroad retirement employee and spouse annuities, and the tier I, tier II, and supplemental portions of survivor benefits.

All earnings received for services rendered, plus any net earnings from self-employment, are considered when assessing deductions for earnings. Interest, dividends, certain rental income, or income from stocks, bonds, or other investments are not considered earnings for this purpose.

Retired employees and spouses, regardless of age, who work for their last pre-retirement nonrailroad employer are also subject to an additional earnings deduction, in their tier I and supplemental benefits, of $1 for every $2 in earnings up to a maximum reduction of 50 percent. This earnings restriction does not change from year to year and does not allow for an exempt amount.

A spouse benefit is subject to reduction not only for the spouse’s earnings, but also for the earnings of the employee, regardless of whether the earnings are from service for the last pre-retirement nonrailroad employer or other post-retirement employment.

Special work restrictions applicable to disability annuitants do not change in 2006.

Regardless of age and/or earnings, no railroad retirement annuity is payable for any month in which an annuitant (retired employee, spouse or survivor) works for a railroad employer or railroad union.

9. How can an annuitant find out if an event might affect his or her railroad retirement benefit payments?

Annuitants should contact the nearest field office of the Board for information. If they write they should be sure to include their railroad retirement claim number. In any situation, the best rule is “If in doubt, call.”

Annuitants can find the address and phone number of the Board office serving their area by calling the automated RB Help Line at (500) 886-6772. They can also get this information from the Board’s Web site at www.rb.gov. Most Board offices are open from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, except on Federal holidays. •

By Mary Anna Mullins
Chaplain, Grand International Auxiliary

A few years later, as I had grown to adulthood, what did I do but marry a railroad man? I learned first hand what being a railroad spouse really meant — after having grown up in a close family atmosphere where all members were home nights and holidays, it was a big adjustment for me, being home alone most of the time, both day and night, and always spending holidays without my railroad — it seemed he was always called out at those special times when being with family was very important.

The advantage was that I became a very independent person, and as our two girls grew up, I found myself the sole disciplinarian and decision-maker for the family most of the time. Many times, when the girls had school functions involving parents, I played the dual role of father and mother.

Being very family oriented, we planned our own Christmas holidays around our railroad’s schedule so that we could have time together; celebrations with other members of our family were often carried out in traditional ways. We were a close, loving family and strive to maintain that meaningful level of closeness by adjusting our time however necessary to benefit all family members.

Many facets of a railroad family’s life require adjustments, patience and a caring attitude in order to maintain a harmonious atmosphere for all concerned — especially during the holiday season. It is true that the life of a railroad family is like no other — but with sincere effort, it can be a very rewarding, happy life! •

Retirement Benefits

Continued from Page 6

ers from the disability. Therefore, the Board must be notified if the child leaves the beneficiary’s care or marries.

Benefits are also payable to an unmarried child age 18 in full-time attendance at an elementary or secondary school or in approved home schooling until the student attains age 19. (In most cases where a student attains age 19 during the school term, benefits are limited to the two months following the month age 19 is attained.) The Board must be notified if the student marries, graduates, or ceases full-time attendance.

8. Can an annuitant contest a decision that he or she has been overpaid?

Annuitants who believe a decision regarding a benefit overpayment is incorrect may ask for reconsideration and/or waiver of the overpayment.

If not satisfied with the initial review, the annuitant may appeal to the Board’s Office of Hearings and Appeals. Further appeals can be carried to the three-member Board itself, and beyond the Board to Federal courts. Annuitants are told about these appeal rights any time a decision is made regarding a benefit overpayment.
Corporate Greed

The double threat that U.S. workers are facing from cheap labor overseas and greedy executives here at home made headlines recently when the Delphi Corp. — the world’s second largest auto parts manufacturer — announced it was filing for bankruptcy on October 8.

Prior to bankruptcy filing, Delphi sought concessions from the UAW, including a wage cut of up to 63 percent and sharp increases in employee-paid health care. The company plans to use bankruptcy laws to close plants and impose lower wages and benefits on workers.

At the same time Delphi was bringing the hammer down on its workers, the company sweetened the severance packages for its top 21 salary executives.

The company had the gull to announce that executives who leave the company will receive 15 months of salary and bonuses instead of the 12 months they previously received.

Once again, U.S. workers are losing their livelihoods on an unfair playing field and face the humiliation of exiting their livelihoods on an unfair playing field.

We need to keep a vigilant watch on this White House’s proposals for Amtrak.

Funding for security measures for rail transportation continues to languish as well. After our publication of our report, “High Alert: Workers Warn of Security Breaches on the Nation’s Railroads,” there has been renewed interest by lawmakers in rail security, or the lack thereof. However, the Bush White House continues to pour funds into security for the airline industry.

To date, the disparity between the funds allocated for rail and port security is acute. Rail security receives four percent of the funds funneled to automobiles. Yet, rail accounts for over five times as many daily passengers as automobiles.

I urge you to contact your congressmen and ask them to demand increased funding for rail security measures and a long-term funding solution for Amtrak.

James P. Hoffa
General President

DECEMBER 2005 CALENDAR & EVENTS

JUNE 4-9, 2006... 79th Annual BLET-DQA Southern Meeting Convention (SMCA) Hosted by SMC Chairlain L. Reed and the members of BLET Division 205, the 79th annual SMA will be held at the Chateau Merriam at the Convention Center in Chattanooga, Tenn. More information to come when available.

JUNE 12-16, 2006... 68th Annual BLET-DQA Eastern Union Meeting Convention (EUUM) Hosted by EUUM Arrangements Chairman R.J. Chapter and the members of BLET Division 137, the 68th annual EUUM will be held at the Tropicana Casino & Resort on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, N.J. More details to come.

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.

JUNE 25-29, 2006... 27th IUT International Convention, Las Vegas, Nevada The 27th International Convention of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters will be held at Bally’s in Las Vegas. More details to come when available.

JULY 18-23, 2006... 66th Annual BLET-DQA International Western Convention (IWC) Hosted by C.V. Rockwood 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-DQA Southwestern Convention (SWCM) Hosted by A.L. Williams and the members of BLET Division 102, the 71st annual SWCM will be held at The Peabody Little Rock in Little Rock, Ark. More details to come.

Advisory Board Octobery Activity

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

Funding Amtrak, rail security

Corporate Greed

The double threat that U.S. workers are facing from cheap labor overseas and greedy executives here at home made headlines recently when the Delphi Corp. — the world’s second largest auto parts manufacturer — announced it was filing for bankruptcy on October 8.

Prior to bankruptcy filing, Delphi sought concessions from the UAW, including a wage cut of up to 63 percent and sharp increases in employee-paid health care. The company plans to use bankruptcy laws to close plants and impose lower wages and benefits on workers.

At the same time Delphi was bringing the hammer down on its workers, the company sweetened the severance packages for its top 21 salary executives. The company had the gull to announce that executives who leave the company will receive 15 months of salary and bonuses instead of the 12 months they previously received.

Once again, U.S. workers are losing their livelihoods on an unfair playing field and face the humiliation of exiting their livelihoods on an unfair playing field.

We need to keep a vigilant watch on this White House’s proposals for Amtrak.

Funding for security measures for rail transportation continues to languish as well. After our publication of our report, “High Alert: Workers Warn of Security Breaches on the Nation’s Railroads,” there has been renewed interest by lawmakers in rail security, or the lack thereof. However, the Bush White House continues to pour funds into security for the airline industry.

To date, the disparity between the funds allocated for rail and port security is acute. Rail security receives four percent of the funds funneled to automobiles. Yet, rail accounts for over five times as many daily passengers as automobiles.

I urge you to contact your congressmen and ask them to demand increased funding for rail security measures and a long-term funding solution for Amtrak.

James P. Hoffa
General President