Happy Holidays!

Thousands turn out for annual CSX Santa Special

Thousands of children and families turned out on November 17 for the 65th annual CSX Santa Claus Special. The annual train follows a 110-mile stretch in the rural mountain communities of Eastern Kentucky, western Virginia and Northeast Tennessee, and is one of Appalachia’s most anticipated holiday traditions.

Santa himself rode in the caboose and was part of the team that distributed more than 15 tons of toys at 14 stops along the route.

Another major player on the team was locomotive engineer Alf Peoples, a CSX engineer and member of Division 781 in Erwin, Tenn. Brother Peoples worked as locomotive engineer of the Santa Claus Special this year.

Brother Peoples is a veteran Santa Train engineer, and involvement with the program runs in his family. “I was the engineer of the Santa Train once before in 1990 on the 48th annual Special,” said Brother Peoples, who first joined the Brotherhood on December 1, 1980. “My father was a firefighter on the Santa Train years ago.”

According to Brother Peoples, the train left Erwin, Tenn., on November 16 and traveled to Kingsport, Tenn., where the toys and food for the needy were loaded on the train. They then traveled to Shelby, Ky., for the night, and on November 17, the Santa Train began its run from Shelby, Ky. to Kingsport, Tenn.

Country singer Patty Loveless was the special guest on the train this year. Brother Peoples said that including Shelby, one of the 14 stops along the route catered to children with special needs.

“As important as the locomotive engineer is on the Santa Train, a team of volunteers make sure everyone stays safe along the route,” he said.

When we arrive in Kingsport Santa gets off the train to be in the Kingsport Christmas Parade,” Brother Peoples said.

“This has been called the world’s longest Christmas Parade.” •
10 years of safety SENSE

Groundbreaking safety program at CSX launched in 1997

Railroading is, and always has been, a dangerous occupation. But the years 1996 and 1997 were particularly deadly for members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen. During that span 12 BLET members lost their lives in on-the-job accidents.

The Union Pacific Railroad, in 1997, was plagued by its takeover of the Southern Pacific and faced a fundamental breakdown in the safety of its train operations. But the problems weren’t limited to UP — BLET members at CSX Transportation also endured their share of unsafe work practices, injuries and death. Out of this wreckage was born a program that has dramatically improved safety and has saved many lives.

SENSE, or Structured Employee Network for Safety Empowerment, was formed on the CSX property by the BLET in response to unsafe working conditions and fatal accidents. Following the Safety Strike, BLET leaders proposed the SENSE safety program to CSX officials in Jacksonville, Fla. The program was immediately adopted and gradually put into effect across the entire CSX system. SENSE went into effect on January 23, 1998.

Now, 10 years later, safety has improved dramatically at CSX thanks to the BLET and the SENSE program. “I am certain SENSE has saved untold lives,” said Bud Morse, SENSE Safety Coordinator on CSX’s Chicago Division.

Because of the daily hard work of many BLET SENSE leaders across the system, the following improvements have been achieved for BLET members:

- Following the acquisition of Conrail, from 2000 to 2006 FRA-reportable train accidents at CSX have improved 43 percent, with a combined reduction of 53% for all engineers, conductors and trainmen.
- All Locomotive Engineer Injuries, including FRA-reportable injuries, improved over 27 percent during the same period. Year-to-date in 2007, the number of locomotive engineer injuries has declined over 50 percent over the year 2000.
- During the same time frame, FRA human factor train accidents declined over 10 percent, while all human factor train accidents (including FRA reportable) declined over 29 percent.
- The program gives front-line locomotive engineers the ability to address safety concerns and recommend improvements through a network that ultimately reaches CSX senior management.
- “Management finally recognized that the people out here doing the jobs are the ones they need to be listening to,” said John Claytor, a Locomotive Engineer with 40 years service and a member of BLET Division 34 in Columbus Ohio. “That’s one of the reasons why it’s a successful program. CSX knows the BLET is not fooling around with safety.”

How SENSE works

SENSE uses employee mentoring to create the environment for an accident-free workplace, replacing confrontation with communication and trust.

Safety issues and concerns are channeled through union representatives to front-line field supervisors. Issue resolutions are reported back through the SENSE channels to employees.

Each BLET division is broken down into groups of 10 with one appointed to report safety concerns to the Team Captains. A Division Contact, appointed by members of the division, handles the concerns with a local designated carrier officer. If the issue is not resolved at the local level, the Division Contact takes the concern to the BLET Division Safety Coordinator.

When the program first started in 1997 there were three BLET Regional Safety Coordinators who covered huge regional territories. These were Curtis Driggers, Richard Taylor (deceased) and Don Miller. Larry James provided support from the National Office through the Education & Training Department.

The results of this change have been very positive, both in accident reduction, personal injury reduction, elimination of unsafe conditions and providing education to the BLET membership on a large variety of issues. These include rule compliance and application, technology, decertification events, many issues associated with locomotives and equipment, as well as many Federal mandates that are sweeping the railroad industry that effect BLET members.

SENSE has also provided input that led to positive changes and improvements to certain operating rules on CSX. BLET SENSE representatives over the past 10 years have been actively involved and provided volumes of input to improve working conditions for BLET members through SAC-P projects and RSAC Meetings with the FRA.

The BLET Division Safety Coordinator and all concerns not resolved at the local level are channeled to the designated division level carrier officer. If the concern is not resolved here, it goes on to the respective BLET General Chair and Chief Executive Officer.
The network follows a seven-step process to target and correct safety issues. It creates a process where safety concerns are documented and filed. "It puts supervisors on alert," said Tim Love of Division 781 in Erwin, Tenn. "They have to act because our safety issues are put into writing, not by word of mouth. It holds the supervisors' feet to the fire."

Over the years, the program has resulted in many positive improvements, and has truly empowered the workers. "For our members, it has opened their eyes and they see what the union can do, and that it does get things done," Love said.

Florence Division
Roger Peace, current Coordinator of the Florence Division, credits Curtis Driggers for establishing SENSE on the Division. "Curtis was instrumental in starting things with SENSE here," Peace said. "He laid a solid foundation for us to build on."

Peace said SENSE has addressed numerous issues over the years and continues to be a driving force for safety improvement on the Florence Division.

Baltimore Division
Marty Crouthers, Eastern Coordinator for the Baltimore Division, said SENSE has really improved safety in his area. "We are hands-on correcting safety issues, and it works out really well," Crouthers said. "If we have a recurring problem, then we'll hold a Safety Bills to correct it."

Crouthers said now that the Summer Spike is over, SENSE is focusing on slips, trips and falls. He says engineers are currently being urged to stay focused on the task at hand during the holiday season.

Sonny Hamm, Coordinator for the entire Baltimore Division, said safety is a total team effort. "SENSE is a wonderful, wonderful program," Hamm said. "We have made so many advances and gains over the last few years."

Also working on the Baltimore Division is Bill Hominski (Western Division Coordinator) and Gary Cage (Southern Division Coordinator). Hamm thanked his Division Contacts as well. John Shifflet, Baltimore, Kendall Gordon, Brunswick; Tom Danner, Cumberland, Ted Doorley, Connellsville; Mike Humbert, Pittsburgh, Gary Cage, Richmond, and Marty Crouthers and Denny Simon, Philadelphia.

"When it comes to SENSE and safety, we are all team players," Hamm said. "Without them, the SENSE program wouldn't be successful."

Atlanta Division
Gary Burton of Division 498 (Abbeville, S.C.) represents the Atlanta Division. He credits SENSE for making his workplace safer.

"SENSE allows us to go home to our family the same way we left them," he said. "We do the job right, 100 percent all the time. Not only do we tell coworkers when they do something wrong, but also when they do something right."

He says the Atlanta Division has had a major turnaround since the implementation of SENSE. "We've reduced injuries greatly and our FRA decertifications have gone down," he said. "We're one of the top Divisions on CSX systemwide."

Looking toward the future, he says SENSE will only make things better as time goes by.

"SENSE will only get better as we bring more people into the program," he said.

SENSE Safety Coordinators from the various regions at a recent safety meeting, from left: Sonny Hamm, Baltimore Division; Bud Morse, Chicago Division; Larry James, Huntington Division East; Rick Koch, Louisville Division; Roger Peace, Florence Division; Charlie Omen, Albany Division; Rick Skidmore, Huntington Division West; Gary Burton, Atlanta Division; Bill Sauer, Great Lakes Division; and Mike Wicks, Nashville Division. Present but not pictured is Max Tillman, Jacksonville Division.

Huntington Division
Tom Lovelace is Assistant Chairman on the Huntington Division and is based in Erwin, Tenn. He said members on the SENSE Huntington Division worked hard and got inspired to improve air filters on locomotives. They took photos and documented the conditions of locomotives, including items such as the quality of the smoke air quality, and cab cleanliness. As a result, a Locomotive Cab Committee task force was established to make conditions better on all CSX locomotives systemwide.

"It's one of the biggest things we accomplished," Love said. "It went all the way to the top at CSX in Jacksonville, and it was all started through the SENSE program."

The Locomotive Cab Committee was formed on CSXT in late 2006 to address locomotive related issues. The BLET SENSE program is assisting the Cab Committee in gathering data and input from the field on locomotive issues that the Locomotive Cab Committee "LOGIC" is currently addressing or will be addressing in the future. "LOGIC" is an acronym for Locomotive Operations General Improvement Committee.

According to Steve Castro, BLE Division 481, SENSE has been a great success in the Parkersburg, WVa, area of the Huntington Division.

"We've handled hundred of forms, and it has improved working conditions, safety and quality of life," Castro said.

Some of the recent issues handled include improvements to steps and walking conditions in the yard and new operating rules on defect detectors.

Castro, who has been with the SENSE program since its inception, takes pride in the mentoring and critical incident response portions of SENSE.

"Every time a group of new hires come in, we go in and spend time with them in class," he said. "I take the time to introduce myself and let them know what I do and what the Brotherhood does. That's what we do as a Brotherhood."

Job briefings in crew rooms give SENSE representatives the opportunity to discuss members' safety concerns in a face-to-face environment.
Continued from Page 3

He's been involved in SENSE since the Albany Division of the SENSE network. By working safe, they can enjoy all aspects of their job. Morse said. “They know how to make the equipment safe so first responders can do their jobs.”

As a SENSE Coordinator, Morse works with new employees and older employees who need some extra assistance in particular areas. He spends time working with them one-on-one as well as taking in order to make them safer workers and more informed.

“It’s important to meet with the trainees and attend hiring sessions,” Morse said. “I also speak with them during their training programs. Afterwards I feel good about their safety awareness and abilities, and am proud to say I had a small part in their training. If they work safely and according to the rules, they’ll have a successful career. It’s rewarding to see them following and applying the training.”

In his mind, SENSE is about protecting each and every operating employee at CSX. “I want to make sure every operating employee goes home safe and healthy so they can have a quality of life with their family,” he said. “Injury and loss of income has a terrible affect on operating employees. Keeping people healthy and safe on the job keeps them in a positive state of mind. Working safely takes care of every one. By working safe, they can enjoy all other parts of their life.”

Albany Division

Charlie Otten represents the Albany Division of the SENSE network. He’s been involved in SENSE since 1997.

“We’ve accomplished a lot of things here,” Otten said. “We have a good group of people here across the whole division.”

The SENSE network in Albany worked with local officials to reduce trespasser hotspots, where pedestrians were parking too close to the tracks and then walking across railroad property. He also said SENSE has played a role in enhancing lighting at crew change points.

A lot of our crew changes are at night, and enhanced light makes it a win-win for everyone,” he said, noting that a tower near Selkirk is being taken down and replaced by a light tower.

He also said SENSE is working on improved paving in the Sycamore area to improve walking conditions and to cut down on slips, trips and falls. He said the success in boosting safety is the result of group efforts, not of any single group or individual.

“I’m proud to be out here helping people get home safe,” Otten said. “You have to believe in safety, and I believe in it 110 percent probably 120 percent now that I’m a full-time Safety Coordinator.”

Louisville Division

Rick Koch said constant education is a main focus of SENSE on the Louisville Division.

As System Coordinator, Koch has regular meetings and phone conversations with his Division Coordinators. In 2008, Koch is planning a major retraining and recertification session for at least 16 SENSE Division contacts and Local Chairmen.

One of the major accomplishments on the Louisville Division was the publication of books that noted all railroad crossings with mile post information. The books provide grade crossing details across the entire Louisville Division.

The books are given to train crew members to help them identify crossings, which makes it easy to refer to specific crossings when reporting problems to dispatchers.

He said there are between 20-30 crossings in some small towns, and that it’s impossible to know the names of them all. In putting the book together, he discovered that some of the crossings had more than one name.

Great Lakes Division

Bill Sauer, System Coordinator of the Great Lakes Division, is proud of the positive impact SENSE has had over the years.

“Our safety is second to none,” Sauer said. “We have one person on all the railroads in the United States.”

Sauer said there were 33 injuries on the Great Lakes Division in 2005, 21 in 2006, and thus far, only seven in 2007.

“We have a great group of people here,” he said. “Our Division Contacts work hard for me and safety is always their number one. I keep in touch with them, which is one reason why our team does such a good job.”

Much like his counterpart on the Louisville Division, Rick Koch, Brother Sauer has provided engineers with a book that provides information on all grade crossings across his entire division.

“Engineers know when they’re coming to a grade crossing,” Sauer said. “They know the name of the crossing in case of an emergency. These books eliminate any confusion on exact locations in case of an emergency. These books can save a life,” Skidmore said.

The SENSE committee for ready reference and other important safety references involved and work on developing safeguards to keep a similar type of event from happening to another member: •

CONTINUING EDUCATION REGARDING SAFETY AND RULES IS A BIG PART OF THE SENSE program on the Nashville Division. SENSE trainers provide crews with classroom and field training to make sure they are always focused on safety. Wicks said trainmen are also included in their safety efforts.

“We have a ‘T’ in BLET now, so we have a vested interest in trainmen issues,” Wicks said.

Conclusion

“The BLET is fortunate to have such a great network of dedicated members who work very hard each and every day for all employees,” said Larry James, BLET System SENSE Coordinator. “Their timely communications, documentation and input especially on the local level allow us to strive to resolve their issues in an expeditious manner. It’s a total team effort. The National Division and the BLET-CSX General Chairmen: Don Moates, Rick Finamore, Tony Smith and Tom Roberts and others have also provided valuable support and assistance.”

The Division Safety Coordinators conduct a monthly call to compare notes, pass along information and assistance to other Division Coordinators that may help resolve an on-going issue on their respective territory.

Over and above normal housekeeping issues, in the past few years BLET SENSE members have been involved in various SAC-P projects with the FRA, have been very involved in taxi and van safety issues, have had input in development or changes to Operating and Safety Rules, improvement to train lineups, taxes, etc., and have been kept up to date on locomotives and locomotive safety and side ways signals just to name a few.

Additionally, an annual review of locomotive engineer decertification events is conducted in an effort to get to the root cause or any associated issues involved and work on developing safeguards to keep a similar type of event from happening to another member: •

BLET FOCUS

Rick Skidmore, Huntington Division Safety Coordinator said that SENSE safety has handled in excess of 100 issues on every sub division of his territory on an annual basis.

“The documentation contained on the SENSE form requires accountability by management once the unsafe practice or unsafe condition is brought to their attention,” Skidmore said.

Brother Skidmore also said that a project was implemented to identify all highway crossings by milepost location and DOT number. All locomotive engineers are checked weekly and an invitation sent to the SENSE committee for ready reference in case of an emergency. These cards eliminate any confusion to exact crossing location for emergency responders. “A few seconds or minutes can save a life,” Skidmore said.
New Auditors will assist BLET Divisions

Four part-time Auditors recently hired by the BLET National Division completed two days of training at BLET headquarters in early December.

Brothers John Bove, Roland P. Kleinsorge, Jim Thomp-son and Chuck Warder will work for the National Division on a part time basis to help BLET Divisions stay current with their monthly reports.

BLET Bylaws stipulate that Divisions must have an audit when they change Secre-tary-Treasurers. The high turnover in the ST office follow-ing the Triennial Division elec-tions prompted the need to hire the part-time assistance.

“Our new Auditors will help Divisions stay current,” said Bill Walpert, BLET Na-tional Secretary-Treasurer. “Everyone knows our Division STs are not trained Certified Public Accountants. Between their family life and work on the railroad, they sometimes need help to keep up with their union responsibilities.”

During their training at National Division headquar-ters, the Auditors were trained on aspects of the BLET’s online filing of reports (BLETST). Special emphasis also was placed on a close ex-amination of the books and records to verify the accuracy of the information filed on the LM Reports. They also were trained to determine that all government reports are cor-rectly filed, including forms for the Department of Labor, Inter-nal Revenue Service and Rail-road Retirement Board.

“The Auditors will depend on this training when conducting audits in the field on behalf of the National Division,” Walpert said. “They will be able to assist STs who were not able to attend training work-shops sponsored by the Educa-tion & Training Department.”

Training for the Auditors was provided by: NST Walpert; Dr. Elaine Reese, Director of Tax Compliance; Ken Kreeger, Special Representative & Co-ordinator of the BLET Educa-tion & Training Dept.; Walt Schmidt, Director of Online Service; and Bob Broka, BLET Director of Records.

The four new Auditors, who will assist BLET Divisions with timely filing of reports, at their training session at National Division headquarters in early December. Seated, from left: Chuck Warder and Jim Thompson. Standing, from left: Roland Kleinsorge and John Bove.

Brother Warder, Secre-tary-Treasurer of BLET Divi-sion 269 in Huntington, W.Va., will assist Divisions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indi-ana, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Caro-lina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and Washington. D.C. National Secretary-Trea-surer Walpert said General Chairmen would be advised if the new Auditors are given an assignment on their property. He also said the Auditors are available to lend assistance with any other unit that would need help, such as a State Leg-islative Board or General Com-mittee of Adjustment.

Angel Tree tradition continues at BLET National Division

BLET National Division staff continued their annual tradition of generosity and goodwill by participating in the Salvation Army’s ‘Angel Tree’ program. Every year, BLET employees donate gifts of toys, clothing and candy for underprivileged children in the Cleveland area. In most instances, the presents donated by the BLET staff are the only Christmas presents the children receive. The gifts are wrapped and placed under the tree in the reception area of National Division headquarters prior to pick up by Salvation Army volunteers. Dr. Elaine Reese coordinated the 2007 Angel Tree effort. As evidenced by the photo above, employees cheerfully gave to help those less fortunate.

A Sirius Christmas’ for BLET member in Iowa

Division member David Lahner writes, distributes children’s book

David Lahner, a member of BLET Division 6 in Boone, Iowa, celebrated the holiday spirit by writing, publishing and distributing his own children’s book for Christmas.

Titled “A Sirius Christmas,” the book is about a 12 year-old-boy who goes hunting in Iowa and has a magical encouter with Santa Claus.

“It’s a heartwarming story,” Brother Lahner said.

The book gets its name from the star Sirius, which Lahner says is the brightest star in the Northern hemi-sphere. The book’s main char-acter sees the star in the sky and, along with other groupings of stars, reminds him of the Star of Bethlehem.

“The book has Santa Claus in it, but it really conveys the true meaning of Christmas,” Lahner said.

The book is illustrated by Sarah Kudron, the daughter of BLET Division 6 member Joe Kudron. Lahner said he origi-nally asked Brother Kudron to illustrate the book, but he de-ferred to his daughter.

“They both have a real tal-en for art and drawing,” Lahner said. “Joe is really proud of his daughter and she did a great job illustrating it.”

Lahner didn’t write the story for money. He donated all the money generated by the book’s sale to his home town school system in Sheffield, Iowa. He donated about 1,000 books to the Sheffield-Chatham Commu-nity School. All of the books sold were and the money was used to buy new playground equipment, Lahner said.

Lahner has donated count-less copies to various public li-braries in Iowa, primarily along U.S. Highway 30. He most recently gave a copy to the Ericson Public Library in Boone.

Lahner children Nathan, Amy and Holly, and grandchild-ren Jacob and Holly “loved the book.” It is written in memory of his late father, Dale Lahner, and with love to his mother, Luella Lahner. It is also dedicated to his former teach-ers James Cuvelier, Richard Heimer and Hank Stoffer.

An illustration from the book “A Sirius Christmas” written by David Lahner, a member of BLET Division 6 in Boone, Iowa. It is illustrated by Sarah Kudron, daughter of BLET Division 6 member Joe Kudron.
By Diane Shiftlet
BLET Auxiliary Virginia State Legislative Representative

On November 15, 2007, my husband Danny and I had the privilege of representing the BLET Auxiliary at the 4th Annual Locomotive Engineers Exposition and Transportation Council at Union Station in Washington, D.C. The Expo was hosted by the District of Columbia State Legislative Board (DC SLB). Herb Harris, Chair-

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Several BLET members recently completed an Advanced Local Chairman Workshop sponsored by the BLET Education & Training Department. The workshop was at the National Labor College/George Meany Center in Silver Spring, Md., from November 11-16.

This workshop was one day longer than the regular Local Chairman’s workshop and went into greater detail on writing, claims handling, and investigations. Among other assignments, the students were given a topic to research and report back to the class. Also, there were sessions on Duty of Fair Representation (DFR) and the Railway Labor Act (RLA). Workshop attendees also wrote several appeal letters for cases that were studied in class. A highlight of the workshop was when attendees participated in a simulated disciplinary hearing.

Upon successful completion of the course, attendees qualified for a $107 per day stipend from the North American Railway Foundation. The stipends will be paid directly to the Secretary-Treasurers of the respective divisions.

Similar workshops are planned for 2008. Dates and locations for next year are yet to be determined, but please visit the BLET website, www.ble-t.org, for details. When meetings are finalized for next year, details will be announced on the BLET website.

STs complete Education & Training workshop

Approximately 35 BLET Secretary-Treasurers completed a four-day Education & Training Department workshop in Cleveland, Ohio, from December 2-5, 2007.

First row, from left: David Torgerson, MT SLB S/T; Jeff Hiivala, S/T Div 27; Roger Adams, S/T Div 124; James Rosas, UP SR GCA S/T; Rob Armstrong, OR SLB S/T; Dave Cook, S/T Div 165; Chad Colucci, S/T Div 292; Ken Kroeger, Coordinator of Education & Training; Richard Conner, S/T Division 578; William Walpert, NST & Director of Education and Training; Walt Schmidt, Webmaster; Sue Caruso; Thomas Caruso, S/T Div 335.


Third row, from left: Edward Travis III, S/T Div 421, Justin Sterling, S/T Division 3; David Lewis, S/T Div 886, William Brooks, S/T Div 426

Last, from left: Mark Anderson, Mino, SLB S/T; Phillip Fullerton, S/T Div 336, Chris Noren, S/T Div 92; Bruce, Galloway, S/T Div 286; Chad Matthews, S/T Div 370; John Chatliff, S/T Div 199, Pedro Mendoza, S/T Div 129.
America doesn’t need another so-called ‘free trade agreement’

George Washington, protectionist, made it his policy to wear an American-made suit to his first inauguration. The father of our country understood that America has to protect its ability to make things important to America. Instead, Mexico moved to Mexico, where they now sit in the slums of Mexico, where those who are not free traders think that the giant sucking sound is coming from the border.

Free traders like to say labor unions are backward-looking protectionists. They love to dust off the old myth that Sen. Reed Smoot and Rep. Hawley’s “free trade agreement” by passing the protectionist Smoot-Hawley Act.

What free-traders never tell you is that those silos were filled with poor laborers in America who wanted to get away from the giant sucking sound of the border. We heard that sucking sound in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, when they announced the plant shut down and moved to Mexico, where they now sit in the slums of Mexico, where those who are not free traders think that the giant sucking sound is coming from the border.

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