Watco and Greenbrier form joint venture

Watco Companies, LLC (Watco) and The Greenbrier Companies, Inc. (Greenbrier) announced the creation of a new company formed by combining Watco’s 15 rail car shops with Greenbrier’s 22 shops. This is a 50/50 joint venture creating GBW Railcar Services, LLC (GBW) and is projected to be finalized in the second quarter of 2014.

GBW will employ more than 2,100 team members and Watco’s other profit centers will not be affected by the joint venture. Jim Cowan, formerly with Greenbrier, will lead the new company as CEO and it will be governed by a Board of Directors consisting of four members - two appointed by Greenbrier and two by Watco. The two appointed by Watco are Gary Lundy, Chairman, and Terry Towner, Vice Chairman.

Watco CEO Rick Webb said, “The combination of our repair businesses creates additional opportunities to serve the Customers of both companies. GBW will utilize Greenbrier’s and Watco’s strengths to find new and better ways to offer railcar services to our Customers in a manner that creates value for them and for GBW. Together these combined attributes will make GBW stronger than the sum of its individual parts. Moreover, we are thrilled that Jim Cowan, with his unique skills, will lead GBW. This joint venture is a testament to the vision my father had when he created Watco 31 years ago. His vision was to create a company that could meet the needs of our Customers on a daily basis. We will now be able to do this all over North America. This is his vision and this will benefit our Customers. For that, I am very grateful.”

The timing of this joint venture is perfect because of the tank car recertification requirements that are coming down the pipeline. GBW will have the scale to meet the certification and maintenance requirements of the growing North American tank car fleet. There are 272,100 DOT-111 tank cars online that are candidates for retrofits as part of the safety initiative being driven by the industry. There are also recently built CPC-1232 tank cars which will need to be retrofitted with features to reduce the likelihood of contents being released during a derailment.

GBW will lead in providing a solution to safety concerns by bringing necessary repair, maintenance and retrofit capacity online at a critical time. In addition to the retrofits, tank car lining solutions will be offered to Customers as well. Many of the tank car certified shops in the GBW network offer tank car lining services. Greenbrier’s strength in railcar safety design and engineering, including its recently developed “Tank Car of the Future”, and Watco’s broad range of repair services expertise positions GBW for success. GBW will be one of the largest independent railcar repair shop networks in North America ranked by number and geographic diversity. The capacity is expected to allow GBW to not only increase the tank car business, but to increase and expand railcar repair service offerings for general freight cars of nearly all types.

Alabama Warrior Railway loses team member in accident

There are no words to express the sorrow felt by the Alabama Warrior Railway Team and the entire Watco Team after losing a fellow team member to a tragic accident. Caleb Ondus Bankston, 27, died on June 24th while he was serving a Customer on the job. Caleb had been a conductor on the railway since October 2013.

Caleb was born on September 27, 1987 in Collinsville, Ala., to Jeff and Rita Bankston. He grew up helping with his parents' cattle and chicken operation and loved being outdoors.

Caleb got the ultimate outdoor experience when he appeared on the popular reality show, Survivor: Blood and Water in 2013 prior to joining the ABWR Team. Caleb was a favorite among the cast members and was known for his big smile and Southern charm. Caleb finished in 9th place on the show.

Caleb graduated from Collinsville High School and received a bachelor’s degree from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

Adam Harper, ABWR general manager said, “Caleb was one of the most genuine, sincere, and likeable people that I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. He was a true friend to everyone that he met and the sadness caused by the loss of Caleb cannot be expressed in words. The support and cohesiveness demonstrated by the ABWR team is a testament of the team’s personality, which Caleb helped develop. Caleb will truly be missed.”

Caleb’s funeral service was held at Crossville Memorial Chapel on June 26, 2014 and he was buried at Dekalb Memory Gardens in Crossville, Ala. Caleb is survived by his parents; a sister, Britney Burns; her husband Nathan and daughters, Hallie and Cassie; a brother, Colton, his wife Valerie and their daughter, Rachel; grandparents, May Gaines and Wayne; and several aunts, uncles and cousins. He was preceded in death by a grandfather, Joe Gaines.
Conference attendees tour by rail

by Logan Falletti
Communications Intern

Attendees of the 20th annual Kansas Field Conference took in the scenery and valuable rail knowledge on a ride on the Kansas and Oklahoma Railroad (KO) from Wichita to Hutchinson on June 5. Around 80 participants from the legislature, senators, state representatives, Kansas Departments of Transportation and Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism, and various businesses and organizations from across the state rode the train as part of a statewide tour of environmental issues in Kansas. For the last leg of the journey, passengers boarded the restored ’50s cars named after founder Dick Webb’s oldest granddaughters, the Kaleigh Anne, Afton Leigh, and Fallyne Marie; which were pulled by the Wichita State University-themed Wooo Shock locomotive.

The state of Kansas specifically requested that Watco host a part of the tour, illustrating the positive outcomes of the work Watco has done with the state to improve the KO line since a new tax incentive program was established in 2004 to upgrade tracks. Watco’s maintenance allowed service to continue to rural grain elevators and contribute significantly to Kansas industrial growth. Pat Cedeno, Watco’s Vice President WTS Marketing Central, West, and Northeast Regions, spoke to the group about recent improvements to the track and the victories and losses the rail industry had seen in the state legislature. He was joined by KDOT Secretary Mike King. Bob Henthorne of the Kansas Geological Survey presented “Geo-technical Concerns for Roadway Construction Over the Equus Beds Aquifer.” The KGS sponsors the event every year to spread their mission of “studying and reporting on the state’s geologic resources and hazards.”

“I think it was a really good event for us to inform key decision makers in the legislature about issues facing the railroad industry in Kansas,” said Brant Littrell, marketing manager for the KO. “The ride was a great way to get our name out there and broadcast to many different groups what the KO contributes to the state.”

Watco’s IT Team wins CIO magazine’s CIO 100 award

As Watco moves into its thirty-first year of operations, there have been many advancements in the technology side of the business. Watco has come from the days of tracking car movements manually on paper in 1983 to using AEI (automatic equipment identification) readers to record car movements throughout the country. This progression could not have happened without a dedicated and knowledgeable Information Technology (IT) Team. Cheryl Correll, senior vice president of information technology, has led the IT Team since 2004 and was part of creating a more affordable version of the AEI reader. However, it was a different project that garnered the group a prestigious CIO 100 award. The award recognizes organizations around the world that exemplify the highest level of operational and strategic excellence in information technology (IT).

On behalf of Watco and the IT Team, John Harrigan, IT SAP director, turned in a submission to CIO Magazine on the WATSS (Watco Accurate Timely Support System) project. The WATSS project was created to support the wide variety of railroad-related services Watco provides and effectively execute thousands of daily railcar movements while accurately recording marketing, finance, and billing data. WATSS provides an extensive range of automated operational and administrative capabilities, among them yard and railcar inventory control, car and train scheduling, waybill control, GPS integration and automation, car ordering, and operating metrics reporting. WATSS conversions began in January 2012 and 25 railroads have transitioned over to the system. WATSS will be the primary railroad management application for Watco’s 3,000+ team members and more than 500 transportation customers throughout the US, Canada, and Australia. Correll and executives from the winning companies will be recognized at the CIO 100 Symposium & Awards Ceremony, to be held Aug. 19 at the Terranea Resort in Rancho Palos Verdes, California.

“For 27 years now, the CIO 100 awards have honored the innovative use of technology to deliver genuine business value,” said Maryfran Johnson, Editor-in-Chief of CIO magazine & Events. “Our 2014 winners are an outstanding example of the transformative power of IT to drive everything from revenue growth to competitive advantage.”

“The WATSS project and system exemplify Watco’s Customer First Foundation Principles. Customer Satisfaction: WATSS development is tailored to exceed the requirements of internal and external Customers. Profitability: internally developed and managed service solution provides cost savings and the flexibility to meet the needs of a dynamic business model. Long-term: Watco controls its own destiny and can shape the future direction of the system,” said Correll.

She added, “This award shows the work we’ve done implementing innovative technologies at Watco. These technologies have helped Watco make several improvements. Being recognized as one of the CIO 100 Award winners is a great acknowledgement of the hard work of the Watco team. I appreciate their efforts to successfully implement this technology. Watco has an amazing Information Technology team!”

IT Team members who helped with the WATSS project are: Standing (l-r) Chris Corbett, Cyle Windsor, Chet Clasen, Donavan Wheeler, Josh Jacobs, Kyle Brown, Haley Becker, Mark Cutshaw, Cheryl Correll, Justin White, Lori Cox, Josh Braden, Melissa Gardner, John Harrigan, Brian E. Grewing, Jeff Mayfield, and Philip Hennessey. Kneeling are (l-r) Brandon J. Palumbo, Michael M. Ryherd, Aaron R. Coester, Robert M. Smith, Sean Cox. Not pictured are: Charles King II, Dianna M. Peak, Jesse Dylan Nickell and Teresa Gentry.
Kansas Freight Advisory Committee tours the Tulsa Port of Catoosa in Oklahoma

When visiting the state of Oklahoma there is a wide selection of sights to see, but one that might not come to mind is the Tulsa Port of Catoosa. The Tulsa Port of Catoosa is one of the nation’s largest inland river-ports. This was the destination of the Kansas Freight Advisory Committee on June 23rd. The committee was created to ensure that multimodal freight needs are addressed in the planning, investment, and operation of the Kansas transportation system. To help meet this goal, they wanted to get a better vision of the Port and the potential freight solutions it might provide to shippers in Kansas.

Sixteen people boarded the Watco excursion train outside the South Kansas and Oklahoma’s (SKOL) Owasso, Okla., office and rode the SKOL line into the Port and around the 12-mile short line system operated by the Port. David Yarbrough, the Port’s deputy director, said that even he hadn’t seen the Port from the rail side and that it offered a very different perspective. The BNSF and the SKOL deliver and take railcars from the Port to the next step in their journey.

Plans to deboard the train at the Port were scrapped due to a steady rain that fell throughout the entire trip. However, the tour and details provided by Bob Portiss, Port Director, along the route made for a very interesting trip. Mike King, Kansas Secretary of the Department of Transportation; David Yarbrough, Deputy Port Director; and Steve Hawks, Port Manager of Logistics, also spoke to the group along the ride.

This wasn’t the first time the two states have worked together on a Port related project. In 1978 Westinghouse constructed a low water wharf as a roll-on/roll-off facility and gave it to the Port Authority in return for being allowed to unload a 600-ton nuclear reactor for the Wolf Creek Generating Station in Burlington, Kan. Another tie to Kansas was provided when Portiss was talking about the first stages of the Port planning. He explained that originally, the plans were to extend the navigation system to Kansas but when the waterway was being dug funds ran out and it stopped at Catoosa.

Steve Hawks, Port Manager of Logistics, speaks to the passengers on the tour of the Port of Catoosa.

When discussing the benefits of the ability to barge products down to the Gulf of Mexico and the impact on Oklahoma’s economy KDOT’s Mike King said, “I’m all for the trickle up, trickle down that occurs when something good happens on the transportation and economic side for our states. We will usually both benefit in some way.”

The Tulsa Port of Catoosa not only brings barges of bulk freight in via the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System but it includes a 2,000-acre industrial park. This park consists of more than 60 companies, employs nearly 4,000 Oklahomans and results in an economic impact of $300 million to the state. A few of the bulk freight industries utilizing the Tulsa Port of Catoosa include fertilizer distributors, industrial gas suppliers, wheat growers and manufacturers of consumer goods.

Mississippi Southern Railroad Team celebrates nine years of injury-free service

When you have a copperhead on your logo you’re expected to be tough, and the team at the Mississippi Southern Railroad (MSR) meets that expectation. They are tough when it comes to safety and won’t have it any other way. The team celebrated their nine-year injury-free anniversary in April. Team members were given polos with the MSR logo and were recognized at the Town Hall meeting for reaching this milestone.

Jeff Buck, general manager, said, “I’m very proud to be a part of a railroad where the team members care about one another and watch out for one another as they do. They are a great group and are always willing to learn and you can tell by this accomplishment that they take great pride in their work. Going nine years injury free is an awesome recognition and I am very proud and blessed to be a part of it and they should be very proud of it themselves.

“Having team members with experience like Randy McIntyre who has been at Watco for nine years, Danny Sims at seven years and Albert Merritt at two years makes a big difference. I can’t leave out Justin Rhodes who is now in marketing but was here for most of the time, some as general manager.

Buck added, “I also know our three newest team members Drew Phillips, Chase McGee and Greg Lockhart are great team members and doing an excellent job with safety and with keeping the MSR injury free!”
**Train Ride Benefits Agriculture Based Charter School**

There have been some great combinations in history: peanut butter and jelly, Batman and Robin, Simon and Garfunkel, and now; the Kansas and Oklahoma Railroad (KO) and the Walton Rural Life Charter School (WRL). The KO and the WRL recently got together to host a train ride to benefit the charter school. It was a perfect combination because a large part of the KO’s business is ag related and the school’s learning environment is focused on agriculture as well.

The ride, which took place on June 6th, held 250 seats and was completely sold-out. The passengers began boarding the train in Wichita at 8 a.m. and departed for a three-hour round trip. Passengers enjoyed the scenery as they were served donuts and drinks.

Laura Schmidt, Watco business development manager and WRL parent, said, “Thank you so much for accommodating the train ride. The funds that were raised allow for the school to take the kids on field trips throughout the year and provide for other needed materials and supplies necessary to continue their focus on having a hands-on learning environment focused on agriculture. Our charter school has received not only State but National recognition for their achievements which would not be possible without donations such as this event by companies like Watco that are willing to give back the local community. We do many fund-raisers throughout the year and this was by far the most successful.”

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**Texas Team Acknowledged for Special Deliveries**

The Texas Timber Rock Team who serves our Customer, Packing Corporation of America (PCA), knows how to put the T in teamwork. Recently the team combined their efforts to help with a tight car supply issue with some special inbound car switches the week of June 9th. The Customer, formerly Boise Cascade, was in a bind but the six team members all worked together to make sure that PCA received the additional cars they needed were delivered to DeRidder, La., in a timely manner.

Team members on the 211 crew, David Young and Johnny Gary, made the extra switches while James Belsha and Chad Davis from the Jasper Tun crew 212 waited for the cars to be put on the train to hand off to the 213 crew of Kyle Mitchell and George Yellott, who then took the cars to the Customer. The extra service was orchestrated by trainmaster Bubba Marshall.

Marshall said of the service, “While we at the TIBR appreciate recognition from our Customer, we try to make as many special car requests as we can for all of our Customers. The events that you are talking about with PCA is really just business as usual and all of them were a team effort. The Silbbee crews made extra effort to get the cars on the outbound train and we made those special arrangements as a team. I sincerely appreciate the recognition.”

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**Watco Team Takes First in Softball**

Watco’s Pittsburg (Kan.) Fastpitch Association’s minor league team recently took first place in their division. Manager/coach Jenni Hall said, “The girls worked really hard and played well. Everyone had a lot of fun and we’d like to thank Watco for sponsoring the team!”

Players on the team were: Gabby Basauri, Kinley Crossland, Lydia Davis, Alexi Gawlas, Jacque-line Hall, Quinn Kafka, Shaleigh Kunkler, Rileigh Manuel, Ava Steier, and Alexis Yarnell. Coaching the team were: Daron Hall, Jay Byers, Shawn Steier, Alan Yarnell and Jenni Hall.

Charlie Hall took on the duties of unofficial bat boy.
Easton and Gavin Schipper

Clinton is a track foreman for the Grand Elk Railroad. They announce the birth of a son Gavin Jay born currently residing in Frontenac.

Derek and Brenna have been together almost nine years; a relationship that began when they were in high school. The couple enjoyed a honeymoon in the Dominican Republic where they went deep sea fishing, body boarding and snorkeling. The couple enjoyed a honeymoon in the Dominican Republic where they went deep sea fishing, body boarding and snorkeling. The couple enjoyed a honeymoon in the Dominican Republic where they went deep sea fishing, body boarding and snorkeling. The couple enjoyed a honeymoon in the Dominican Republic where they went deep sea fishing, body boarding and snorkeling. The couple enjoyed a honeymoon in the Dominican Republic where they went deep sea fishing, body boarding and snorkeling. The couple enjoyed a honeymoon in the Dominican Republic where they went deep sea fishing, body boarding and snorkeling. The couple enjoyed a honeymoon in the Dominican Republic where they went deep sea fishing, body boarding and snorkeling. 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Gatlin James Duffey

Troy and Shasta Duffey are proud to announce the birth of a son Gatlin James on May 16th. Gatlin weighed 6 lbs., 13 oz., and was 20.5 inches long. Gatlin was welcomed home by brothers Trentin, 10 and Hunter, 17 months.

Shasta is the vice president of sales and marketing for the Grand Elk and Pennsylvania Southern railroads.
Rob Bruner, engineer, won the South Kansas and Oklahoma Railroad’s (SKOL) Second Quarter iSafety prize, a $150 gift certificate, for working accident/injury free. The program was developed by the SKOL TS&IC to reward individual safety performance across the SKOL system, with the intent of having individual accountability along with all other team members.

The objective of the iSafety Program is to create a friendly competitive drive for team members to improve their personal safety and other team member’s safety daily. The program was put in place with the team member’s family in mind so they also benefit from the prizes being awarded. An item of value will be purchased at the beginning of each quarter and will be posted at each on-duty location so all team members will know what item will be drawn for that quarter. Team members not involved in any of the following categories will be eligible: Critical Rule Failure, Human Factor Incident, Injury, Time off for any Discipline, or Decertified Engineer/Conductor.

The first week following the end of the quarter the TS&IC chairperson will draw the winner. At the year’s end all team members that were not directly involved in any of the above items during all four quarters will be eligible for a year-end drawing for a grand prize. This prize will be paid for by SKOL and will be a reward for the team’s dedication to safety.

Rob Bruner, SKOL engineer.

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CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE RECEIVES KUDOS

Something that is talked about at Watco 365 days a year are the Customer First Foundation Principles. It’s even better though when the Customer is talking about our team members following those principles. Tony Byrd from Hanna Steel recently contacted Ron Spencer, manager of Customer Service, to let him know how pleased he was with the service he was receiving from the Alabama Southern Railroad’s Customer Service Representative (CSR), Jake Langford.

Byrd said in an e-mail, “I would like to take a moment of your time and express to you my appreciation of Jake Langford, our Customer Service Representative. Jake is very professional, has great communication skills, supplies information without me having to ask, and makes me feel like I’m the most important customer he has when I’m on the phone with him. Jake, no doubt, has been very instrumental in Hanna Steel growing our rail business. Jake is not only a noticeable asset to your company but to ours as well. I have had the privilege of working with his mother Vickie (CSR for other Watco short lines) and I know exactly where he gets his abilities. This, no doubt, is a great family to have working for Watco Transportation Services.”

“Communication is the key to our Customer relationships,” said Spencer. “Jake has excellent communication with the Alabama Southern’s operating team of Anwar Aiken, general manager and Nathan Champion, trainmaster. This relationship and communication allows Jake to provide Hanna Steel with the information they require on a daily basis to operate and grow their business.”

Langford said, “I appreciate the comments from Tony. He’s been very good to work with and my goal is to ensure that he gets the information he needs in order to make things flow smoothly on his end. The business has really ramped up, it’s exciting for me to be able to help Hanna Steel grow their business.”

Jake Langford, Watco Customer Service Representative.