Watco’s first North Carolina railroad celebrates start-up

It’s not hard to figure out where the name of Watco’s newest acquisition in North Carolina came from. The scenic Blue Ridge Mountains are a beautiful backdrop for Watco’s most recent short line start-up, the Blue Ridge Southern Railroad. The line was an acquisition from Norfolk Southern Railway. On Saturday, July 26th, the team enjoyed a successful first day of operations.

Ron Spencer, manager of Customer Service, said, “The BLU start-up was very successful. All Customers were served on schedule and the BLU crews did a great job of communicating and working with our Customers. We look forward to great things on the BLU and a great future of growth with our Customers in North Carolina.”

The Blue Ridge Southern is referred to as the BLU by team members because of the railroad marks assigned to it. It’s also a description of the color of the mountains that surround it. The bluish color of the mountains when seen from a distance is caused by trees releasing isoprene into the atmosphere, contributing to the characteristic haze seen in most photographs of the mountains.

The BLU’s 91.8 miles of track consists of three branch lines that feed into Norfolk Southern’s terminal in Asheville. The lines are the T-Line, which runs west of Asheville; the W-Line, which runs south of Asheville; and the TR-Line which branches off the W-Line south of Asheville. Thirty-one team members will be taking care of the Customers on the BLU. The BLU will initially operate with 10 locomotives, seven SD40’s and three GP39’s. Commodities that will be shipped on the line consist of forest products, aggregates, and energy products.

BLU Customer Service Representative Jake Langford said, “I’m looking forward to working with the BLU Team, they’ve been so friendly and eager to help me learn about the line. The Customers are wonderful and we’re all very excited about this new opportunity.”

Trooper on a train at the Grand Elk

Law enforcement agencies in western Michigan are teaming up with Operation Lifesaver and railroads to cut down on violations involving railroad crossings that occur on a daily basis. On July 30 Michigan State Police Trooper Chris Matthews rode on one of the Grand Elk (GDLK) locomotives to see first hand the violations and even ticket those involved.

Trooper Matthews rode from Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids and back. By using a radio contact on the ground, tickets were given out for seven crossing violations and eight trespassing violations. GDLK Locomotive Engineer Patrick Kinney drove the locomotive that Trooper Matthews rode in. He said there have been some close calls with trespassers. He said, “I hope they understand, trains don’t stop fast and can’t swerve out of the way to miss you at a crossing.”

Trooper Matthews said, “It’s a new view that will prove helpful. “The perspective is big. I saw how many people violated the laws today and how many issues the train crew had. Being on the road you have a limited perspective.”

“Most people don’t realize just how dangerous it is to ignore the crossing signs,” says David Cornelius of Michigan Operation Lifesaver. “When you are dealing with a 600-ton train, the minute or two it takes to get through isn’t worth risking your life.”

Kinney says, despite repeated warnings, many still don’t listen. He hopes those who risked it will walk away with not only a ticket, but a message: “Don’t risk your life, it affects us all.”

As Operation Lifesaver says, the rule to remember is - see tracks, think train.
Zwolle Team treated to memorial luncheon

Last summer was tough for the team at the Zwolle, Louisiana mechanical shop, Blaster Derian Collier, who was only 27, died of a heart attack while working. The team lost a gentle soul with an amazing attitude who loved his job and those he worked with. On July 17, a year after his death, Derian’s mother, Andrea Collier, drove five hours to treat the Zwolle Team to a luncheon in his memory. “It was an honor for me to do it,” said Andrea Collier, “I talked to him on the phone each night and he would tell me how much he liked everyone at work and how he enjoyed what he was doing.”

Derian was a three sport athlete in high school, playing football, basketball and running track. He attended Grambling State University in 2005. Derian was a fan of the Dallas Cowboys football team and the luncheon was based on a Cowboys theme.

Kevin Roth, director of operations, North Region, said, “In the North Region we have four transload facilities and the Yellowstone Valley Railroad. I wanted to do something for all the team members to say ‘thank you’ for all the hard work they do every day. I also wanted to take advantage of an opportunity to bring everyone together so they can get to know team members from other sites. So we put together the first ever Watco Family Fun Day.”

There were approximately 100 team members at the event. They were served hamburgers, hotdogs, and the fixings, but the events that were held were the big draw. There were several different events for the kids to participate in, a water balloon toss, a sack race, and an egg and spoon race. When they were done with all their events, participation medals were given to all the kids.

“We made a big deal out of it by getting everyone together and had a little presentation ceremony and the kids got to pose for pictures and then they got a big round of applause from all the grown-ups. The children really enjoyed what they were doing,” said Roth.

You can’t let the kids have all the fun so, the Bakken Games were created. Since the region is right in the middle of the Bakken oil field the name was adopted for the event. The concept of the Bakken Games is to have each terminal represented by a combination of team members and family members to compete against the other terminals in different events. Points are given to the terminal that wins each event and at the end of the day the terminal with the highest point total wins the event and takes home the Bakken Cup and all the bragging rights that come with it. The Bakken Cup is a nice trophy that the winning facilities name is engraved on and they get to display the trophy at their site for one year (until the next Bakken Games). Then, they have to relinquish the trophy and all the glory and must compete again to win the right to take the trophy home. This event got a lot of competitive “trash” talk going between the terminals. Team members from the Stanley, Tioga, Dore, and Fryburg terminals competed in the games. When the dust had settled, the team members from the Tioga facility won the event and took the trophy home.

Things were getting heated up in the North Region on July 13th but the good news is that the weapons of choice were pies. The Watco Terminal and Port Services North Region Teams were celebrating Family Fun Day. The event was held at Oak Park in Minot, North Dakota and was open to all Watco Team Members and their families within the region.

Kevin Roth, director of operations, North Region, said, “We made a big deal out of it by getting everyone together and had a little presentation ceremony and the kids got to pose for pictures and then they got a big round of applause from all the grown-ups. The children really seemed to enjoy it,” said Roth.

Roth said, “I would like to say thanks to everyone for being such good sports about the pie contest. The Watco Family Fun Day was a lot of fun and I have been told by team members that they are already looking forward to next years event.”
Watco railroads add new technology to locomotives

Several Watco locomotives throughout the system are being equipped with technology that will allow them to do more than just pull railcars. The new system, Wi-Tronix, will provide feedback on safety, efficiency, and Customer Service. There are 111 locomotives running on the Blue Ridge Southern, Kansas & Oklahoma, South Kansas and Oklahoma, and Wisconsin & Southern railroads that are equipped with the system. The CBH locomotives in Western Australia are also equipped with the modules and information can be viewed by the team members on the Western Australia Rail Team.

When it comes to safety, the modules provide a variety of information that helps the engineer, conductor, the Dispatch Center, and management improve safety measures. During an outbreak of severe weather not knowing what to expect is one of the worst feelings. Thanks to one of the features Wi-Tronix offers, the team members at the Dispatch Center are notified when severe weather is occurring or expected near the route of a locomotive. Dispatch then has time to notify the team on the locomotive and if necessary, send help to move the team to a safer location until the danger has passed. Another safety feature monitors hot track and will let the crew know when speeds need to be reduced due to extreme temperatures and it will also send an alert if the team in the locomotive has not acted on the notice. There is also the opportunity to observe and modify at-risk behaviors to ensure that all safety rules are being followed.

Wi-Tronix modules also help monitor the locomotive fleets’ performance and locomotive “health”. There are certain steps that engineers can take that will assist in fuel conservation and the system can generate scorecards on not only fuel usage but reports can be downloaded and e-mailed to team members for accounting purposes as well.

If the locomotive is having mechanical issues it can be caught before it becomes a major problem. Alerts are sent out every five minutes and the locomotive team has identified 11 alerts that are mandatory to be reviewed by a trainmaster within five days of the occurrence. Most of these mandatory alerts are for the safe operation of the locomotives (breaking patterns, speeds, etc.). The device also tracks the time that the locomotive is actually running so that managers can determine how best to schedule team members and jobs in order to reduce down time.

One of the biggest benefits of the system is that it sends our team real-time notices on location so that Customers can be alerted as to when to expect product or empty cars to be delivered. This is very helpful during harvest when timing is crucial in getting cars in and out of the elevators.

Randal Lewis, senior equipment control, WTS Car Accounting, said, “This technology has been beneficial for tracking train movement and generating arrival and departure notifications at the grain facilities allowing for better communication with the Customers.”

This is a cutting edge technology that is currently being used by Class I railroads and shows Watco’s investment in managing resources and relationships over the long-term. Additional features will be available through the technology that can provide the team with better communication tools to assist the Customer in managing their portion of the supply chain more efficiently. Focusing on the Customer First Foundation Principles led to implementing this technology.

Richard Thomas has been traveling the West Region since 2007, sharing his knowledge and training team members on safety. Thomas hung up his hard hat and retired from his duties as safety trainer on June 30.

Travis Herod, vice president of transportation safety and compliance, said, “Richard will be greatly missed, and is leaving very big shoes to fill. His years of experience, and his professionalism were a large part of Watco’s, and the West Region’s, success. I believe what made him so successful was he never forgot how each rule, every change, every practice, affected the person actually working. He had a heart for the railroader who is out there day in and day out, making things happen, and made every decision by first thinking through how any change would affect those who’s boots were in the ballast. He was a true railroader.”

Thomas was born in Prattville, Ala., and his family moved to California when he was 10. He attended Bakersfield Junior College and played on the baseball team. Thomas claims he wasn’t good enough to fulfill his pro baseball dreams so he moved on into the real world.

‘Thomas’ railroad career began with the ATSF in 1973. He went to work for the San Joaquin Valley Railroad in 1992, and in 2003 went to the Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach holding many positions including conductor, engineer, and trainmaster before he joined the Watco Team in 2007 as a Regional Safety Manager in the West Region.

Although stationed in Twin Falls, Idaho when he first started, Thomas later moved the family back to California. He spent quite a bit of time traveling he didn’t need to be working from any particular location.

Thomas and his wife Teri have three kids. The oldest son Kevin and his wife Liz have three children; Gregory, Phillip, and Madilyn. Thomas’ middle daughter Cristi has two kids; Victor and Melody. His third daughter Kerri, is an assistant branch manager at Hertz.

Thomas said losing his mother last year made him realize how important it was that he retire. That would give him more time to spend with his children and grandchildren. He said one of the hardest decisions he has ever had to make was retiring because of the team that he worked with and they made that even more evident when we held the party to see him off.

Team members pictured with retiring team member Richard Thomas are: back row, Joe Via, Matt Lewis, Scott Presley, Troy Forbis, Jason Stutzman, and Garrett Bolyard. Front row (l-r) John Naing, Teri Ellis, Teri Thomas, Richard Thomas, and Jerry Carter.

Thomas plans to travel some, really more for the family than himself. He said the job he had allowed him to travel to parts of this beautiful country that only a few get to do. Thomas loves to fish but never really got to go much so fishing with the grandkids is on his to-do list. Golfing will probably consume a lot of his time as well.

Rumor is, he has enough railroad memorabilia to start up his own museum, maybe there’s a new career waiting as a curator.
Ann Arbor Team provides service with a bang

by Logan Falletti
Communications Intern

While fireworks were exploding overhead, the Ann Arbor (AA) Team was making a fanfare of their own. The AA team worked straight through the Independence Day weekend loading cars for Chrysler and GM. Three train crews, 12 support personnel, and a loading contractor helped Watco better serve a few of its largest automotive industry Customers at an unprecedented level.

Chrysler had requested services if empty equipment was available to load, something not all distribution locations provided. Chrysler instructed CSX and Norfolk Southern Railway to deliver as many multi-level cars as possible to AA. Steps for the Fourth of July loading included: loading, switching, and interchanging 190 multi-levels for Chrysler and GM. At the end of the holiday weekend, they had loaded 633 multi-levels, or approximately 6,300 vehicles.

“These actions by the AA Team exemplify what it means to go above and beyond what our Customer expects. This reinforces the Watco culture of listening to the Customer, executing to their expectations flawlessly, and as Chrysler has demonstrated, these actions will lead to additional opportunities,” said Rick Baden, Watco president.

The facility received 5,000 additional vehicles from greater Detroit and Canadian plants to be processed and loaded at the Ottawa South facility.

Janesville Car Shop Team celebrates injury-free milestone

Team members at the Janesville Car Shop celebrated a great milestone on June 18. The team hit the four year mark for going injury-free.

John Falk, WSOR chief mechanical officer, said, “Their goal in Janesville is to hold the record for being Watco’s longest injury-free shop. I could not be prouder of what they have accomplished to meet this goal in the last four years. It’s a testament to their dedication to going home safely each and every day. It was done by coming into work with a positive attitude, proper job briefings, looking out for their fellow team members, following the safety rules, good communication on tasks being performed, proper tools to do the job safely and efficiently, proper equipment maintenance and a can do attitude.”

Each team member received a gift and they celebrated with Jimmy John subs and ice cream.

FREE 411

Tired of arguing with Suri about a phone number you’re trying to find? I’ve had screaming matches with her in the car (I lost) regarding names she apparently couldn’t quite understand and I still didn’t get the number I needed.

Instead of getting frustrated and calling 411 and being charged for the service, just program the Free 411 number into your speed dial and the information you need is literally at your fingertips. The number, 1-800-373-3411, is a voice activated system that asks the basic information and while the caller waits for the system to retrieve the requested number they are presented an audio advertisement for a business competing in that area, the caller can determine which business they wish to contact.
Congratulations to the following team members celebrating their anniversaries!


2 Years: Corey Allen, Mark Bargeron, Nicholas Bennett, Jeannine Bonnette, Brandon Carlisle, Scott Cassidy, Kevin Cook, Derrick Crandall, Kersee Currier, Cindy Davied, Zachary Dement, Kenneth Flanders, Francis Frear, Thad Fruge, Tanya Gath, Willie Gatt, Donald Janda, Linda Kennedy, Matthew Kolhof, Eric LaBrec, James Lambert, Benjamin Lowin, Reggie Lozano, Chase Manley, Robert Miller, Dennis Narvaez, Wayne Roig, Clayton Smith, Scott Staszak, Sterling Tucker, Dusty Wible, Mikayla Widick

3 Years: Tyler Adkison, Jimmy Bruno, David Carhe, Kyler Cross, Zachery Dietz, Jeff Ecret, Erik Fintt, Nicole Garretson, Ryan Griffin, Keith Johnson, Joseph Lee, Paul Leonards, Christopher McCready, Roberto Nunez, Carl Petersen, Jastin Rainwater, Roman Salazar, Eric Schmidt, Brit Sonnier, Cindy Van Becelare, Jared Voumard, Ryan Williams

4 Years: Travis Combs, Martin De Leon, Ryan Dziedzic, Jhirmark Hodge, William Jones, Nathan Keizer, Gabrielle Koehler, Alvin Maney, Seth Peterson, Carl Reese, Joshua Rivers, Clifford Rose, Willie Ross, Derrick Sepulvado, Terry Smallwood, Dyllan Vincent, Damion Williams, Justin Yakes

5 Years: Chad Arneson, Florentino Borjas, Christopher Hayes, Carl Legg

6 Years: Angelo Barrera, Raymond Barrera, Justin Dempsey, Jason Goodson, Raymond Howard, Brian Jarret, Robert McMullan, George Mincey, Dennis Sawyer, Lloyd South, Andre Williams

7 Years: Phyllis Angermeier, Marvin Ayers, Andrew Brown, Keith Cadwell, Ronald Jackson, Kyle Mansfield, Dwight Sayles, Joshua Seefeld, Robert Sua, Nathan Tuzicka, Ulysses Williams

8 Years: Donald Brown, Robin Conerby, Maurice Davis, Jimmy Dodd, Julie Fields, John Harrell, Juan Lozano, Jeff Mayfield, Kyle Moody, Matthew Sodergren, Alicia Stimpson, Terrell Westbrook

9 Years: Arturo Camarena, Adam Hanson, Tim Herman, Leo Hogan, Paul Schiefelbein

10 Years: Thomas Erbe, Kyle Finn, Sofronia Howard, Ted Kadau, Jimmy Patterson, Kenny Rowell, Delta Wood

11 Years: Bob Devillier, Johnny Gary, Jason Hislop, Charles Mullens, Kendice Talty

12 Years: Dave Gromer, Jason Jean, Garrett Kourtney, Joshua Mitchell, Albert Olvera, Tricia Underwood

13 Years: Mark Bray, Timothy Dyer, Carl Jones

14 Years: Michael Kauffman, Mark Lynn

15 Years: James Brooks

16 Years: Mary McDuffie

17 Years: Brian Collier, Chad Davis, James Lloyd, Randel Thomas, Timothy Wiseman

18 Years: Doug Kerley, Kevin Krueger

19 Years: Gregory Duffie, Susan Lewis, Charlie Sigley

20 Years: Donald Pingel

22 Years: Kenneth Dozier, Juan Ramirez

23 Years: Maurice McGinnis

24 Years: Vincent Felton

25 Years: Jose Hernandez, John Lyon, Kevin Sepulvado

26 Years: Mark Abbott, Rodger Isbell, Darryl Marshall, Jerry Wilson

27 Years: David Kline, Thomas Master

28 Years: Sam Ricci, Gus Sepulvado

29 Years: Randy Garretson, Terry Johnston

30 Years: Michael Remedies

33 Years: Gerald Toopes, Guy Zabel

34 Years: David Brown

36 Years: Randy Glaze, Lawrence Hamilton

37 Years: Stanley Behiter, Steve Prokopich

38 Years: Raymond Barroner

39 Years: Harold Winkles

40 Years: John Clemens, Lawrence Shinavar

Births
Collin James Garner
Mitch and Rebekah Garner are proud to announce the birth of their son Collin James.
Collin was born on July 16th. He weighed 6 lbs., 7 oz., and was 19.5” long.
Rebekah is the manager of revenue accounting-invoicing and works out of the Pittsburg, Kansas office.

Bryce David Suiter
Chad and Meagan Suiter are proud to announce the birth of their son Bryce David.
Bryce was born on June 11th and he weighed 6 lbs., 12 oz., and was 20” long.
Bryce was welcomed home by his big sister Briella Ann who will be two years old in November.
Chad serves as dispatcher for the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad.

This section is dedicated to the Watco Team Members to give you a chance to share what’s happening in your corner of the Watco World.

Time’s ticking. Have you had your well check yet?
Observant SLWC Team Members keep track safe

There are times when something just doesn’t feel quite right and that’s what Stillwater Central Railroad (SLWC) Engineer Gary Griswold and Conductor Lyndon Tharp felt as they were leaving the Cherokee Yard in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The men felt an unusual movement under the train as they were approaching West Cherokee and Griswold brought the train to a controlled stop to investigate the situation. Tharp walked the train and found a broken rail underneath the sixth car back from the head end of the train.

The track gang was deployed and they were able to angle bar the rail and the train was able to continue on with just a minimal delay. The crew’s focus and meticulous attention quite possibly avoided a more serious situation.

“We always job brief our team to be safety conscious and on the look out for broken rail as it’s a common practice in our day to day operations,” said SLWC Trainmaster James Sullins. “Any rough movement of the train and sounds of the rail can identify any abnormal safety defects that’ll make you question the continued operation of the locomotive. I’m always impressed with the diligence and extra lengths our team rises to with any service disruptions to ensure the safe and efficient recovery of our operation.”

SLWC General Manager Pat Foster said, “The actions of the crew that day adverted what could have been a serious derailment. I am extremely proud of our crew, we continuously talk about situational awareness regarding the safety or team, track and or the community.”

Stillwater Central Railroad’s Engineer Gary Griswold and Conductor Lyndon Tharp.

DP trains provide more efficient service to Texas Customers

by Logan Falletti
Communications Intern

The team at the Austin Western Railroad (AWRR) in Texas had been considering the idea of distributive power trains for a few years. Last month, with the help of another team member, they ran their first DP (distributive power) train. The empty train arrived safely at Oldcastle Materials, the largest Customer on the line.

“Not only will the distributed power unit trains improve cycle times for our Customers, but they will also help reduce potential train handling risk exposure,” said Ryan Williams, marketing manager.

Safety Director Jason Cathey is quite knowledgeable when it comes to running DP trains, he learned how to run them back in 1997 when he worked for the Union Pacific Railroad. The problem was, Cathey needed to be on site to teach the operation of the DPs and he lived more than five hours away. Luckily, on July 17, fate stepped in. During a trip Cathey made from Louisiana to Austin for an unrelated meeting with Kevin Harris, general manager of the AWRR, an inbound rolled in and the two seized the chance to teach the team members how to run the double-engined trains.

“We had been talking about it for a while and thought, ‘let’s just give it a shot and see if it works.’ So we did, and it did work – really well,” said Harris.

“We ran some different scenarios. You have to run it a certain way and we talked about what occurs when you don’t, and how the system works,” said Cathey. “Kevin trusted me enough to get it to the top of the hill and thanks to what we did it worked. Kevin and his team get all the credit; I just happened to be there.”

Distributive power trains have two locomotives, one at the front and back of the train that communicate via radio. This helps reduce slack action between cars, prevent broken knuckles and car connections, and better control speeds on hills and turns that are common on the mountain grade track. The method has helped the AWRR exceed their annual operating plan by $212,630 in a single month.

The team hopes to have unit trains running more regularly by the first week of August.