NEW SAND FACILITY IS A REALITY IN PRAIRIE DU CHIEN

As construction nears completion, WSOR's new sand loading facility in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin shines as an example of what can be accomplished when we combine our Watco Customer First Foundation Principles with persistence and teamwork. The project entailed the construction of a 105-car industry yard, a switching lead, and a sand loading building. The 96 foot high facility can unload sand from a truck in under four minutes and easily load 100 tons of sand into a railcar in under seven minutes. Both unloading and loading is done indoors. Our Customer, Pattison Sand Company who leases and operates the facility, expects to ship over 5000 carloads of sand annually, most of which will be in 100 car unit trains destined to the oil and gas industry.

As impressive as the new, efficient and higher capacity facility may be, we need to truly celebrate the equally impressive and creative teamwork demonstrated by many WSOR, Watco and Pattison Sand Company team members. Our team put our Foundation Principles into action to address the needs and concerns of many external and internal Customers to successfully complete the construction of this facility.

The team faced and overcame numerous obstacles during the 2½ years this project took to complete. The team considered 14 different sites along WSOR’s main line that runs between high bluffs and the Wisconsin River, thru the backwaters of the Mississippi River and terminates in the City of Prairie Du Chien on St. Feriole Island. The bluffs and water posed difficulties for other sites, building height restrictions created by a nearby airport prevented some, and still others could only be accessed by using another railroad's property. Even the best site challenged the Watco engineering team's creativity because it is sandwiched between another railroad’s track, a bridge to the island, the Mississippi River, and a state highway. To complicate matters, our narrow right of way had adjacent land owners that opposed to the project.

Selecting the site location was just the beginning of many challenges the team would face. The WSOR team and our Customer listened and found solutions to address various community and governmental concerns. The design enclosed the unloading and loading within facility, installed a larger dust collection equipment and located the ladder track away from neighboring homes to address neighbors’ concerns about air quality and noise from loading and train operations. In response to City leaders' concerns, the ladder track capacity was maximized to assemble the unit trains in order to reduce switching on St. Feriole Island, (which is the center of the City’s tourism economy due to its recreational use and historical significance). The team also acquired land and purchased wetland mitigation credits to address State and Federal agencies concern over the project’s environmental impact resulting from its location in a Mississippi River flood plain and to reduce the wetland area impacted by the construction of the ladder track. This also enabled the facility to be placed on the only area of the site that was not in the flood plain. In order to minimize truck traffic on the roadways, the team coordinated with the City and State to vacate a street and place the entrance to the facility at the only break in the adjacent divided state highway. All of these challenges took time to resolve and required patience from both Watco and Pattison Sand. Our purchasing and construction team worked with our vendors to lessen the effect of these delays on their businesses including creating a storage area for large pieces of equipment at the vendor’s fabrication facility.

As each train leaves our Customer, our team can smile knowing the train stands as a testament to what we can accomplish when we place our Customers first, work hard, act as team. When we have a commitment to persevere we can overcome challenges to do the right thing for our Customers and the communities we serve.
WSOR is also pleased to announce that Doug Conway has joined its parent company Watco as Vice President of Marketing & Sales. Doug will be responsible for business development and supporting the sales and marketing Team in grain and grain-related products including ethanol and fertilizer for the Great Lakes Region that includes the Wisconsin & Southern, Grand Elk and Ann Arbor railroads.

Doug has over 24 years of railroading experience in business development, marketing, sales, logistics and Customer service. He was most recently with the Canadian Pacific where he held various marketing and sales positions in their grain team. He attended the University of Missouri where he graduated with a B.S. in Logistics.

Doug and his wife Kathleen are based in Minneapolis, MN. The Conway’s love traveling where they enjoy hiking, swimming, boating and meeting the locals.
Some growth opportunities are a long time in the making. Wisconsin & Southern’s predecessor in Janesville, the Wisconsin & Calumet Railroad, first courted Universal Forest Products as a rail customer about 20 years ago, according to Ken Clemmons (then WICT Superintendent; now retired WSOR Manager of Sales and Industrial Development).

Today, the local Universal affiliate – UFP Janesville, LLC manufactures lumber and wood products. They provide value-added services by manufacturing decking, framing, handrail components, fencing, and picnic tables from inbound raw lumber. Their primary customers are retail stores that sell to the Do-It-Yourself market in the Midwest.

2014 saw UFP-Janesville reach an agreement with WSOR to build a new rail spur to facilitate inbound railcar shipments of lumber and wood products. The company constructed a track into their facility in the fourth quarter (with significant assistance from WSOR Maintenance of Way forces), and a handful of inbound shipments arrived before year end.

“Wisconsin & Southern has really bent over backwards to be a good partner for us,” said Mike Myers, General Manager of Operations for UFP-Janesville, which is part of the nationwide family of Universal Forest Products companies. According to Mike, “It’s a great relationship that we are building. The folks at WSOR have helped us create solutions to challenges with our inbound supply chain.”

Things really took off in 2015 for the WSOR-UFP partnership, which is now running at a pace to handle about 500 carloads per year. WSOR is working very hard to meet our five day per week service commitment, while UFP has continued to work with their suppliers to bring in more shipments via our rail route.

“The success that we have had with UFP – Janesville shows the value that Wisconsin & Southern brings to our Customers and to the region’s economy. We were able to create a service product that exceeds their previous arrangement at a price that works for both their vendors and our company,” said Andy Laurent, Regional VP – Marketing & Sales for WSOR.

We look forward to a long-lasting relationship with UFP-Janesville!

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT: JANESVILLE BUSINESS CHOOSES WSOR

The WSOR Bridge Team, led by Bridge Supervisor Dave Bierman, has been working day and night on projects throughout our system. Dave and his team are responsible for the inspection, maintenance, and capital improvements on the WSOR’s 389 bridges. Dave, who is going on his 30th year with WSOR, works closely with his team and contractor forces to rehabilitate bridges that are in most need. The primary charge for Dave and his team involve transforming bridges that were constructed nearly 100 years ago or older, into modernized 286k structures able to withstand tomorrow’s demand for freight rail service throughout southern Wisconsin.

“Dave and his team bring tremendous value to the WSOR and to our many Customers who rely upon safe and reliable service,” stated Roger Schaalma, Superintendent of Maintenance of Way. “I look forward to working together with Dave and his team in building our track and bridges to last us another 100 years,” he added.
In May 2015, Wisconsin & Southern Railroad delivered the first “unit shuttle grain train” for Gavilon to BNSF Railway at our Crawford interchange. “The grain shuttle trains have been a great success story for all stakeholders,” notes Andy Laurent, Regional Vice President of Marketing & Sales for the WSOR.

The shuttle trains are typically made up of 110 covered hopper grain cars and may have two engines on each end of the train, which is commonly referred to as Distributed Power. When the first empty shuttle train was delivered to the WSOR at Crawford the operating team immediately took control of this historic move. The train progressed smoothly to the Gavilon facility located in Avalon, Wisconsin. Gavilon’s high speed grain load-out was able to load the entire train in under 12 hours and WSOR crews were on call to roll the train back to Crawford for a timely and successful interchange with the BNSF.

The shuttle train program requires that the operation be executed very precisely by the team members of WSOR to ensure that the train is received from BNSF, delivered to Gavilon, and then returned back to the BNSF within specific operating parameters. The operations and Maintenance of Way team members have done a great job ensuring this business is handled to Gavilon’s expectations. WSOR Trainmasters watched over the entire 290-mile round trip and organized the railroad’s operating plan specifically to expedite the train. Trainmasters Justin Yakes and Josh Beaudry were actively involved with the coordination efforts at the Crawford interchange. Trainmaster Beaudry credits the six train crews that operated the train with their professional handling, “The train crews are responsible for the safe and efficient operation of this train across the territory, and they really deserve a lot of the credit for the success of this grain operation.”

It has taken dedication from many people within Gavilon, WSOR, and BNSF to make this shuttle train operation the success story that it is. Doug Story, Vice President of Agriculture Marketing for Watco, was instrumental in the development of this operation. Doug summed up this partnership by saying, “This operation is a very successful opportunity for WSOR, Gavilon, and our Class 1 partner. It allows us to extend our reach to capture additional grain market share to destinations beyond southern Wisconsin.”

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Columbia, Crawford, Dane, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Grant, Green, Green Lake, Iowa, Jefferson, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Rock, Sauk, Sheboygan, Walworth, Washington, Waukesha, Winnebago