Watco Team sets safety record in 2015

By Andra Bryan Stefanoni
Contributing Writer

With 2015 in the history books and work hours for all locations documented, Travis Herod, senior vice president of safety, says it was a record-setting year.

“When gauging our performance from a safety standpoint, Watco uses key indicators to visualize whether we’re better now than we were in the past,” Herod explained.

That means computing for each 200,000 hours worked how many times someone required medical treatment beyond first aid, or lost time, and how many incidents there were due to human factors.

“By those measurements, 2015 was not just a resounding success for Watco and our individual location and service groups, it was our most successful year from a safety perspective, shattering records set in 2014,” he said.

Herod said he believes numerous Watco railroads are on tap to receive numerous awards from the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association.

The ASLRRA values safe practices across the industry, and annually recognizes members for their contributions and achievement. The ASLRRA Safety Awards, the President’s Awards and the Safety Person of the Year Award are awarded at the ASLRRA Connections conference each spring.

Jake Award with Distinction

Herod predicted 25 Watco railroads are on tap to receive a Jake Award with Distinction for having no FRA reportable injuries. Those railroads include: Alabama Southern, Arkansas Southern, Austin Western, Great Northwest, Kaw River, Mission Mountain, Mississippi Southern, Palouse River & Coulee City, Pennsylvania Southwestern, South Kansas & Oklahoma, Stillwater Central, Vicksburg Southern, Yellowstone Valley, Baton Rouge, Pacific Sun, Grand Elk, Alabama Warrior, Boise Valley, Autauga Northern, Swan Ranch, Pecos Valley Southern, San Antonio Central, Blue Ridge Southern, Bogalusa Bayou, and Lubbock and Western.

Jake Award

Herod predicted four railroads likely will earn a Jake Award, giving to any member railroad that finished the year with an FRA frequency rate less than or equal to the industry average, but had at least one FRA reportable injury. Those railroads include: Louisiana Southern, Timber Rock, Birmingham Terminal, and Wisconsin & Southern. Currently,

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The Houston Liquids Team from Greens Port and Deer Park have gone injury-free since their start-up in April of 2013.

the ASLRRA Average is reported at 2.65, Herod said. The number will go up, or down slightly, as the full year is compiled.

While awards are limited to railroads, Herod also wanted to recognize 25 switching locations and 41 terminals and ports for going RPI free in 2015:

Switching Locations
Alabama - McIntosh, Prattville
Arkansas - El Dorado
Indiana - Hammond
Louisiana - Boise-DeRidder, MeadWestvaco-De-Ridder, Brimstone, Lake Charles, Lena, Mansfield, Westlake
Missouri - Kansas City
Nebraska - Genoa
Oregon - Toldeo
Texas - Alvin, Deer Park, Galena Park, Houston, Houston ING, Port Neches
Washington - Wallula
Wyoming - Gillette Black Thunder, Green River OCI, Green River Solvay

Terminals and Ports
Alabama - Port Birmingham
Arizona - Glendale
Arkansas - Pine Bluff
California - Stockton Food Grade, Stockton Fertilizer
Colorado - Tampa
Illinois - Chicago Heights, Rockford, Triumph
Indiana - Hammond
Kansas - Pittsburg Warehouse
Louisiana - Baton Rouge
Michigan - Willis
Mississippi - Vicksburg
Missouri - Sarpy, St. Louis
Nebraska - Omaha
New Mexico - Loving
New York - Bronx, Brooklyn
New Jersey - Bayway, Port Newark
North Dakota - Fryburg, Tioga
Ohio - Euclid, Cincinnati, Columbus
Oklahoma - Stroud
Pennsylvania - Industry, PES
Tennessee - New Johnsonville
Texas - Galena Park, GPIP Crude/Ethanol/Rail/Dock/RE/Material Handling, Houston Ferro, Houston KM&T, Pecos, Port Arthur, Refugio
Utah - Wellington
Virginia - Roanoke
West Virginia - Brooklyn Junction

Herod noted that beginning January 1st of this year, Watco has begun recording all incidents in a new reporting system, KMI/Velocity.

“Since the automatic man-hour reporting function is operational, users can go to their dashboard for near real time updates on our status regarding safety, run reports for specific inquiries, and other fantastic functionality that’s going to be game changing for us,” Herod said.

The numbers are in and it looks like Watco Team Members are thinking more about the future. Since January 1st of 2015, there have been an additional 952 new enrollments in the 401K plan. Of those, 243 came from the January 2016 enrollment.

“I think there are a lot of positives from that data,” said Jason Bushman, benefits manager. “I think we should celebrate the fact that there have been close to 1,000 new enrollments over the course of a year and that there’s been a 12% increase in plan participation.

Any Watco team member interested in finding out more information about the 401k plan can visit the Watco Team page on the web site at www.watco-companies.com or contact the Benefits Team at benefits@watco-companies.com.
Engineer has big plans to putt around

by Andra Bryan Stefanoni
Contributing Writer

When Chief Engineer Rick Hollis retired last month, he had just one regret after spending 42 years in the rail industry.

“I wish I could have found Watco 30 years ago, but as the saying goes, ‘Good things come to those who wait,’” he said.

Hollis, who joined the Engineering & Track Department in Birmingham, Alabama, six years ago, worked for four different short line railroads before joining the Watco team.

“None of them compare to Watco as far as the family atmosphere and the way they care about their people,” he said.

CEO Rick Webb, in turn, wished Hollis well and said he will always be considered part of the Watco family. “If it wasn’t for talented and dedicated people like yourself we would never have made it past our first switching operation in 1983,” Webb said.

Hollis started his career working on the track

In 2011, he became chief engineer and was responsible for five railways, offering support for roadmasters, setting up capital projects, managing finances, and ensuring deadlines were met. As such, he put in a lot of road miles.

Now, he’s ready to focus on a different kind of travel: to golf tournaments in the Southeastern Seniors Tour starting in April.

“Our circuit covers Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida,” says Hollis, whose handicap is 8.

He played a few years ago, garnering a few second place finishes in tournaments. It was difficult to balance with work, marriage, and four grandchildren.

“Now I’ll have a lot more time to play and keep up with dance recitals, gymnastics meets, and basketball games, too,” said Hollis, 65.

And while he’s also looking forward to having a lot more time to putter around the house, his retirement is bittersweet, he said.

“If you’re happy in your job, you’re happy in your life, and since I’ve come to Watco, I’ve been thrilled,” he said.

New Mexico team meets safety milestone

by Michaela Kinyon
Contributing Writer

There are a lot of things going on in the Loving, New Mexico terminal, not the least of which is their recent safety anniversary. It has been one year since there has been a reportable injury at the Loving location, not one injury since the start-up, and the Loving team members have done a great deal to ensure that this streak continues.

The team members celebrated by having two different dinners of hamburgers, chips, and drinks for the different crews. The week crews celebrated their victory on January 19th, with the weekend crew celebrating the following weekend.

“Watco has a great safety group,” Elizalde continued. “We want to go home to our families and with all our parts, and this group of guys has done a great job in instilling the importance of safety on a job like this.”

The Loving terminal location holds safety meetings every day for every single crew that comes on, and they are currently attempting to come up with a safety slogan specifically for the location. The plan is to make a flag of the slogan and fly it over the facility.

When asked about being an example for future Loving team members as well as other locations, Elizalde said, “We try and set a standard that everyone will want to achieve. I want to make sure that the next location that opens up is saying that they want to hold their team to the standards we hold our team members to.”

A federal tax credit, reauthorized by Congress in December, will help short lines continue to make improvements to infrastructure to better serve Customers.

“All rural areas with short line rail service have benefitted from this credit,” said Jeff Van Schaick, Watco’s assistant vice president of government affairs. “It’s incentivized investment.”

In the 1970s, the rail industry was suffering. The industry already had seen its share of peaks and valleys — from the devastating Great Depression when rail industry revenue fell by 50 percent, through World War II when rail traffic fell 28 percent, through the 1950s and 60s when trucks and boats became a common means of transporting goods.

Federal regulations hampered growth, and most major railroads in the Northeast and in the Midwest went bankrupt. The rate of return on investment had been falling and hit an all-time low. Railroads lacked the funds to maintain tracks, so they fell into disrepair and were unsafe.

The Staggers Act of 1980, which brought balanced regulation into play, turned that around and railroads experienced a rebirth: Rail rates are down, meaning Customers can move almost twice as much freight for about the same price it paid 30 years ago. And railroads operate on infrastructure that they own, build, maintain, and pay for, in comparison to public roadways and waterways financed by taxpayers.

But in 2005, the federal tax credit, known as 45G, took it a step further: It provided the incentive for short lines to make repairs and improvements.

“Short line operators who bought sections of track that had been abandoned by Class I lines took over track that had potentially seen years and years of deferred maintenance,” he said. “It’s hard to grow a business on a light density line if you have a piece of track that doesn’t operate well.”

Van Schaick credits Chief Commercial Officer Ed McKechnie, who also now chairs the American Short Line Railroad. 

Continued on page 3
Watco truck driver Gerald Kattner never expected to have anything to do with show business. But his efforts helped make possible the largest show Pittsburg High School’s Theatre Department has ever produced.

When the curtain goes up on “Shrek, The Musical,” on Feb. 17 at Memorial Auditorium in Pittsburg, thousands of audience goers will be transported to a fairytale kingdom, home to a giant green ogre and many other fairytale characters and creatures.

The professionally built set is sizable and complex, and valued at $20,000. PHS Director Greg Shaw was able to get everything — valued at $20,000 — for just $1,000 from Kansas City’s White Theatre and Theatre in the Park, so long as he could find a way to transport everything the 100 miles to Pittsburg.

Watco came to the rescue with the offer of a 53-foot truck and Kattner, who said transporting a theatrical set “was a first” for him. “When Watco found out we had the chance to transport the set, Watco also stored it for three months, then warehouse personnel took care of all the details and reloading it so Kattner could deliver it to the stage door at Memorial just before Christmas.

“Once again, this is a wonderful example of patrons and businesses in Pittsburg going beyond the extra mile to make sure our students have as many opportunities as possible,” Shaw said.

“We simply cannot accomplish everything that we want to accomplish without the generous extension of resources that our community continues to provide. It allows our students to achieve great things.”

Watco CEO Rick Webb said that at Watco’s core is the belief that it’s important to give back and to help nurture strong communities, and that starts with schools.


Watco driver Gerald Kattner with a piece of the Shrek set he brought from Kansas City to Pittsburg High School’s Theatre Department.

Philadelphia Team receives Outstanding Safety Award

by Michaela Kinyon
Contributing Writer

The Safety-First culture perpetuated at Watco Companies is incredibly important in everything done within the company, and it seems others have caught on. This past month, Watco Terminal and Port Services (WTPS) received the Outstanding Safety Award from their Customer Philadelphia Energy Solutions (PES).

WTPS is one of the contractors for the PES refinery, working alongside other contractors to ensure that the job of running the business is done safely and efficiently. The Outstanding Safety Award was given by PES to any of the contractors that had over 8,000 hours of work performed without a reportable injury.

When asked about the factors that led to this award, Shift Supervisor Gary Plotts stated, “As a company, we have developed a very proactive safety program. There is no job that is too small for us to not worry about Safety; whether it’s a big one or something as small as shoveling snow.”

Before every shift, team members get a briefing over the jobs they are to perform, going over the hazards and making sure everyone knows how to perform the task in a safe and efficient manner. The goal is to always do the job safely and to do it right.

“[Safety] is not a light switch,” said Plotts. “It has to be a culture, to be in your head all the time. Drilling this into the heads of the team members helps them work well as a team and continues into the rest of their lives. I want them to be safe anywhere they go, not just at work.”

Another aspect of the importance of safety has to do with marketing. “This success also helps us get business,” said Terminal Manager Joseph Ryder. “No one wants to hire a company that has a high injury ratio. By performing jobs safely, we also help the marketing team get business.”

The team members at the PES refinery actually worked over 67,300 hours injury free last year, well over the 8,000 hours required for the award. At this point, the team is actually over 827 days injury free.

“I’m proud of that,” said Plotts. “I would wear it in a medal on my chest if I could.”

The team members that work with the refinery have yet to celebrate their award, although they are planning to do so in February.

“Refineries and railroads are both hazardous,” said Plotts. “Mixing them together is a double-edged sword. The fact that we manage to do that safely says a lot about us as a team and as a company.”

45G tax credit

Continued from page 2 - Association, with the tax credit coming to fruition and continuing for 12 years.

The tax credit put from $300 to $400 million annually in capital and maintenance expenditures, and provided short lines with 50 cents credit for every dollar spent. Railroads are now thriving, which means Customers are too.

“There were 200 short lines in the 1980s, and today there are 550,” Van Schaick said.

McKechnie downplayed his role, noting that there were many involved in seeing it to fruition.

He credited Rep. Lynn Jenkins (R-Kansas), for her role as one of the measure’s lead co-sponsors, and Schaick, who helped to build broad coalitions.

“Our goal was to connect Congress to customers to explain the importance of freight to underserviced areas,” McKechnie said.

He’s seen the impact it’s had on short lines, and the Customers they serve.

“America’s short line network has dramatically improved as a result of this credit,” he said. “It’s allowed companies like Watco to replace rail and install bigger, heavier ties — and more of them. It’s clearly meant greater service to our Customers. It’s meant moving goods across the country more efficiently and more expediently, and that’s what we’re all about.”
Team completes Dick Webb railyard cleanup

By Andra Bryan Stefanoni  
Contributing Writer

The photos tell it best: in the first, piles of debris — metal, wood, paper, cardboard — littering 14 acres along a track in Houston. In the second, bare ground cleared of debris. And in the third, Watco team members tired but smiling.

Mike McAllister, vice president of operations in Houston, said the intent was to remove debris piles from previous track projects, improve the visual appearance of the area, and set up the staging area for the operation and mechanical structures on more than 14 acres at the TPC Houston switching site.

The Houston Liquid Terminal and Houston Material Handling Teams worked together, using a forklift, backhoe, bush hog, weed trimmers, and elbow grease.

"This was an exciting project or the two groups to work together on and show what they are capable of accomplishing collectively," McAllister said. "Besides the visual improvement, they were able to improve walkways around the roadways and track and identify potential safety hazardous camouflaged by the vegetation."

Dan Smith, executive vice president of operations in Pittsburgh, said the end result was one he was proud of. It's likely someone else would be proud, too — the person for whom the railyard was named last April.

A sign in front of it reads: "This yard is dedicated to Charles R. (Dick) Webb, founder of Watco Companies. Through his vision, dedication and focus on serving Customers he created a legacy that will continue to serve future generations."

The railyard has a 125 car capacity and team members switch cars in and out of the facility on a daily basis.

“What a great fundamental to reinforce: if you see something that needs fixed, fix it,” Smith said of the team effort. "Simple principle, but one we sometimes take for granted.”

Team member Frank Edwards said when they began the job, they knew it would be a challenging one.

“But all team members worked safely and communicated to make this job go well and effectively. All team members stood out and went above and beyond the Watco Foundation Principles,” he said. Gilberto Larrasquitu said that the positive impact they made on the site was evident after a few days.

Zachary Hammons said his time spent at TPC Houston was "overall, an awesome experience." "Time and time we were praised on how well of a job we were doing,” he said. "It’s nice to be recognized for your hard work.”

Alfie Hutchinson said he enjoyed the camaraderie of working together as a team, and was proud of the difference they made.

Nate Henderson, senior vice president of operations in Houston, said the project demonstrated the commitment of the Houston team working together towards one collective goal, something McAllister echoed.

"The recognition is that if our teams are dedicated and focused on putting this much emphasis on picking up that one piece of paper or blade of grass, then imagine their capabilities when they are operating a locomotive or heavy equipment, loading a barge, or handling pipe,” McAllister said.

Ann Arbor Railroad sends water to Flint

By Andra Bryan Stefanoni  
Contributing Writer

When a water crisis struck Flint, Michigan, the Ann Arbor Railroad based out of Toledo, Ohio, provided help.

Flint’s water became contaminated when the city, facing financial struggles, switched from the Detroit municipal water system in 2014 to the Flint River as a water source to save money. But lack of oversight meant the water wasn’t treated properly, and lead from pipes leached into the city meanwhile was left without clean drinking water.

About 100 miles away in Toledo, Ohio, Rosa Parks Elementary began collecting bottled water as a life lesson to students about paying it forward.

"As public servants, we all know the reality of not being able to drink the water that comes from our taps and drinking fountains," said Dr. James Jones, assistant principal. "When we heard about what was happening in Flint, we knew we had to help."

When the Ann Arbor Railroad found out about the collection, team members helped organize a donation. "It's a great project," said Ron Chadwick, general manager of the Ann Arbor Railroad. "Anything we can do to teach today's children that life is about more than just themselves will keep our communities strong."

The railroad delivered its contribution on Jan. 27, something Jones described as "wonderful." As a result, Jones and representatives from his school were able to deliver 618 cases (16,786 bottles) of water to Flint on Feb. 2.

"We at Rosa Parks would like to say thank you for your generous donation of water," Jones said. "This has been a humbling experience to see how we are all TPS proud and helping others as proud Toledoans!"
Pacific Sun Railroad meets PTC mandate

by Andra Bryan Stefanoni
Contributing Writer

The Pacific Sun Railroad met its deadline of Dec. 31 to have the federally mandated Positive Train Control installed in locomotives, something of which General Manager Jim Moore is proud.

“We’re the only short line in California to have it completed,” he said.

But testing of the system still remains, and that’s tricky and time consuming, Moore added.

“Since we operate jointly with BNSF and North County Transit District on the same track, testing has to be a coordinated effort, and there’s a lot of testing that has to be done,” he said.

This month, PSSR will store 10 additional passenger cars for North County Transit to be used solely for the passenger line’s testing.

“On our lines, we have to come up with the worst scenario, on the steepest grade, and we have to put that train together. We’re talking 20 loads, three locomotives, 2.2 percent grade,” Moore said. “We have to put the train into an emergency — that’s full speed, 55 mph — and we have to do that five times.”

The track must be inspected after each run, and the wheels must cool down before the test can be repeated.

“The whole time, we’ll be logged into the PTC and the system will know what it takes to slow that train,” Moore said.

The system, designed to prevent possible collisions like the 2008 California collision that killed 25, is to slow or stop a train if it’s traveling too fast or something is wrong.

But Moore says there are many other uses to the system, as well, including tracking locomotive movement and engineer qualifications.

“That’s the neat thing about it; engineers are qualified for certain lines, and those are entered into a computer database. When an engineer boards the system, he inputs the route he’s going, and if he isn’t qualified to go somewhere, it won’t let him go there,” Moore said.

“Being familiar with the territory you’re traveling is important; signal placement is different everywhere and you have to know the crest of all the hills, when to apply the brakes, and so on,” he said.

Another feature that Moore said he sees as a positive is when a train is close to entering the limits of a maintenance area, the system requires the engineer to acknowledge that it’s a maintenance area and to slow the train. If an engineer doesn’t, the system will slow the train automatically.

Students join the Watco Team

by Andra Bryan Stefanoni
Contributing Writer

Some fourth graders joined the Watco payroll on Kansas Day. Sort of.

They were part of an innovative learning experience called “Just Imagine Kansas,” an annual event in which fourth grade classes create and operate a model town for a day.

The event was started in the mid-1990s by Babs Tims, a fourth grade elementary school teacher in Pittsburg, Kansas, where Watco was founded by Dick Webb.

“The idea is for students to learn while doing what the name says, ‘to imagine,’” Tims said. “We want them making the decisions, using their creativity.”

A $500 grant from the Pittsburg Community Schools Foundation provided seed money, and area businesses donated goods and financial support, including Watco.

“It was good to see the kids at our table incorporating Watco’s Customer First principles,” said Brad Snow, All Aboard Foundation president.

Fourth grade classes spent weeks leading up to the event taking on the roles of business leaders, including planning their budgets, creating signs, packaging up products, filling out work schedules, printing business cards, and learning to make change.

“This allows us to tie together in our curriculum elements of economy, government and history while making it engaging to kids,” Tims said.

Each business represented, from Dillons to Spirit Aircraft to Watco Companies, had a direct tie to Southeast Kansas.

“We wanted to highlight things that have really played a role in Kansas,” Tims said. “Education, aircraft, farming, photography, the railroad — so many very successful businesses started right here in our town have been key players in those areas.”

Dick Webb’s widow, Kaye Lynn Webb, was among those with a Watco connection who visited the event, stopping to visit with the “employees” and agreeing to an interview by the fourth grade newspaper staff.

“This is just great,” said Webb, who attended the school as a child. “It’s great to see them learning real world things.”

Positive Train Control (PTC) was a piece of The Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008. The locomotive above and the Amtrak train in back were affected by the legislation and are required to have PTC installed.

Dispatcher loses battle to cancer

by Andra Bryan Stefanoni
Contributing Writer

The January edition of The Dispatch, we told the story of Carol Cook, a dispatcher and the difference that Watco team members — most of whom Carol had never met — made in her life as she battled cancer.

From many states away, they descended upon the farmhouse in Cheney, Kansas, that she and her husband, Dale, had been renovating for several years, in an effort to finish it for her before Christmas. She called them her “angels.”

Carol lost her battle against cancer on the morning of Jan. 16. As her family wrote in the obituary that appeared in The Wichita Eagle, she “climbed onto her Harley-Davidson trike and went soaring up the highway to Heaven.”

Carol is survived by Dale, her husband of 22 years; 8 children; 9 grandchildren; a sister; a niece and nephew; many extended friends and family; and fellow members of the American Legion Post No. 401. The obituary also lists as Carol’s survivors “her co-workers and friends at Watco Companies where she dispatched trains for 10 years.”

Her service was held on Jan. 22 under the direction of Downing & Lahey Mortuary in Wichita. There was no burial as Carol requested cremation. Her ashes will be scattered into the ocean off of Port Richie, Florida, in the spring when she and Dale take one last road trip together on the trike.

Memorial donations may be made to Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice, 313 S. Market St., Wichita, KS 67202.

Those who would like to share tributes to Carol may do so at www.dlwichita.com.
Four Watco short lines recently completed the pilot testing phase of version I of the new ROAM mobile rail operating system. The new tablet-based application was developed by Watco to allow train crews to interact with WATSS, the rail management system, while the crews are out in the field.

The Alabama Southern, Blue Ridge Southern, Boise Valley, and the Kansas & Oklahoma railroads were all involved in the ROAM pilot process. These roads were selected for the pilot program due to the variety in their size, location, and the types of jobs that they perform.

"Each of the roads we selected was very different," said Fallyne Deao, a member of the ROAM rollout team. "The KO covers a large area and has multiple sub divisions, whereas the ABS, BVRR, and BLU are smaller railroads with each being a unique operation. We wanted to get a variety in the data input to be sure that everything was being transferred to the WATTS system correctly."

For the pilot phase, the rollout team made on-site visits to each of the railroads and provided individual training to the crews. Once they received their training, the crews would start recording all movements on the tablets and the ROAM rollout team and Watco Customer Service would verify that the information was being recorded in the WATTS system correctly. The rollout team will continue to validate the moves the crews are performing in ROAM for another month. They will then begin a general rollout to roads using WATSS starting at the end of February at the Texas & New Mexico Railway. The general rollout will be done in three phases and will feature a "train the trainer" approach rather than training individual crews. The new trainers will include various operations management team members. The plan is to finish the general rollout by May.

Customer Service Manager Courtney Burkes said the mobile system puts the tools back in the hands of the team members who are actually on site and creates more timely reporting. "ROAM minimizes the time that the crew has to call in to check for blocking or if cars have been released. The cars are moved more efficiently because the data is more readily available to the team."

Josh Briggs, a conductor for the Kansas & Oklahoma Railroad, recently took part in the pilot testing.

"ROAM will help us better serve our customers by simplifying the workload," said Briggs. Some of the benefits of the system are that it: increases on-time percentage, places cars in correct sequence for the next shift, decreases the need to call customer service, and helps eliminate lost cars.

Version 2 of the ROAM system will be based on feedback and ideas from the field. After the completion of the ROAM system rollout of ROAM Version 1, the applications team will work on implementing system enhancements in ROAM Version 2.

"What was really positive about this project is that our group went out into the field and worked with the operations team and found out what they needed. I wasn't just a push from the tech side, it was based on operational needs. We'll continue this process and work with feedback from operations and customers to continue improving the ROAM system," said Rob Smith, business solutions analyst.

Current ROAM Version 1 system capabilities include: showing a current detailed list of car inventory, searching for cars within the road, moving cars-ARI (local or wheel moves), IPS (intra plant switch), PAC (placing cars at customer), resequencing cars, and creating switch lists.

Involved in the creation and testing of the ROAM system are Josh Braden, IT director, Kyle Brown, software developer; Jared Hurst, software developer; and Tom Scheidemantel, senior developer; Phil Henessee, IT director of new development; Hayley Becker, systems analyst; Rob Smith, business solutions analyst; Fallyne Deao, business solutions analyst; Courtney Burkes, Customer Service Manager, and the Customer Service Representatives that take care of the railroads in the pilot program.

Members of the Blue Ridge Southern Railroad (BLU) team braved the snow and the cold in order to ensure that operations continued and neighbors had plenty to eat. The Asheville, North Carolina, area experienced a record 18 inches of snow during the third week of January. Rather than just shutting down entirely, the team members of the BLU did what they could to ensure that the terminal stayed up and running as well as possible.

"We had to make hourly decisions as to whether we could operate safely without endangering team members," stated BLU General Manager Darl Farris. "We involved the team members in those decisions.

Managers of the BLU asked team members whether they felt safe coming into work and involved them in the decisions. For some, the roads were too bad to go into work, but many team members were able to make it.

"Many of our Customers had to shut down, but we wanted to keep running as well as we could in order to provide service for those that did stay open," said Farris.

Operations were reduced by half, but all the Customers in operation were taken care of, and it was all done without any reportable injuries.

Maintenance teams worked around the clock to ensure that ice was removed from tracks and switches so the track and engineering teams could operate safely.

"This showed a lot of maturity, understanding, and dedication on the part of the BLU team members," said Farris.

Not only did the BLU team members take care of their work for the railroad, but they also took time to care for their neighbors. After finishing an assignment, the team members drove to the home of an 87-year-old WWII veteran to check on him. He lives along side the railroad, always waving at the trains as they pass and occasionally stopping by the depot to chat with the team members.

Team members shoveled his ramp and driveway, then went to the grocery store to buy him bread, fried chicken, and other foods and necessities. The man attempted to pay for the groceries using only a five dollar bill and two quarters.

Team members grabbed their own groceries and went to the grocery store to buy him bread, fried chicken, and other foods and necessities. The man attempted to pay for the groceries using only a five dollar bill and two quarters. The man attempted to pay for the groceries using only a five dollar bill and two quarters.

"I'm really proud of the team members for doing that," stated Farris. "These guys are always looking out for the opportunity to do a good deed, both for the railroad and the community."

Despite large challenges these winter months, the BLU continues to operate as well as possible. In the words of Farris, "The BLU team members get through challenges that a lot of people would think are big. They just take it in stride, because it's what they're used to. They did a great job."
Births

Braxton Tyler Miori
Amy and Jason Miori are proud to announce the birth of a baby boy, Braxton Tyler Miori. Braxton was born on December 3, 2015. Adalynn weighed 7 lbs., 11 oz., and was 20.5 inches long. Any is the Director of Payroll and Recruiting and works out of the Pittsburg, Kansas, office.

Magnolia Grace Troth
Matt and Marissa Troth are proud to announce the birth of a daughter, Magnolia Grace Troth. Magnolia was born on December 16, 2015. She weighed 8 lbs., 8 oz., and was 20.5 inches long. Matt works in the Pittsburg, Kansas, office as an interline account specialist.

February Anniversaries

Congratulations to the following team members celebrating their anniversaries!


2 Years: Kevin Adcock, Charles Alcorn, Pedro Armendariz, Cedric Bowman, Robert Carder, Darren Cloward, Colton Cottom, Dustin Dearmon, Nicholas Desjarlais, Julio Diaz, John Dietschweiler, Christopher Dietz, Michele Dimick, Richard Farley, Patrick Flower, Brooke Francisco, Raul Garcia, John Gogniat, Jerry Goodwin, Sean Hayden, Marc Hurburt, Ronald Karr, Jayson Keith, Chris King, Evan Klaevemann, Jason Kraiceck, Lance Larson, Jeffrey Lien, Gregory Lockhart, Frank Mayfield, Larry McCloud, Dee Mitchell, Ezekiel Montalvo, Cory Montoya, Odea Nowden, Zachary Overstreet, Gabriel Rivera, Juan Solis, Charles Trapp, Tana Wagoner, Kareem Warren

3 Years: Brent Aycoc, Joshua Buee, Steven Coltrin, Steven Coomes, Seth Creason, Joshua Danna, Michael DeLane, Kyle Forsman, Travis Gathagan, Dylan Hoggle, Christopher Huggett, Reed Kunnanz, Michael McMillan, Derek Prestholt, Mario Salinas, Jeffery Sams, Roger Schlecht, Laura Schmidt, Gregory Sherman, Michael Shoemaker, Wayne Smith

4 Years: David Abbey, Valerie Altenhofen, Michael Brinkerhoff, Daniel Brunk, Kyle Curry, Erin Flocchini, Paul Gage, Antonio Green, Martin Mandujano, Jacinto Mendez, Sabrina Mounts, Daniel Nielsson, Drew Otto, Tanner Pugh, Chad Shaffer, Timothy Sharritt, Matt Spade, Tyler Stapleton, Jeffery Summers, April Summit, Arthur Townsend, Chris Wright

5 Years: Dennis Cain, Keith Cameron, Kevin Dean, Josh Gwillim, Sean Jamerson, Christopher Miller, Derek Mooy, Scott Reeves, Michael Schaffer, Joseph Smith, Michael Vaughan, William Watts, Willis Whitaker

6 Years: Robert Johnson, Joe Marshall, Gilbert Perez, Dusty Young

7 Years: Jim Gees, Mark Leicht, Johnny Lima, Ronald Whitewater

8 Years: Timothy Ainsworth, Ben Coward, Brian Ezell, Ty Furgason, Joy Hill, Hugo Ortega, Joseph Patalano, Walter Robinson, Rob Smith

9 Years: Robert Balzer, David Flores, Albert Glenn, Andres Lachino, Al Mee, Derek Nynan

10 Years: Michael Lewis, Richard Polk, Daniel Reeves, Joseph Reid, Warren Sanderson, John Scheehle, James Wary, Carla Wilson

11 Years: Douglas Fleming, Matthew Hinojosa, Charles Houlton, Gregory Lovelace

12 Years: Terry Gilbert, Michael Janke, Brandon Otter, George Villa

13 Years: Scott Adams, Tammy Arbuckle, James George, Gary Goodwin, James Taylor

14 Years: Sara Hanson

15 Years: Serafin Contreras, Bob Cunningham, Kevin Schoenhoff, Sylvester Strong

16 Years: James Andrews, John Clark, Michael Rock

18 Years: Daniel Jones

19 Years: Robert Williams

20 Years: Chad Rose, Troy Tracy

21 Years: Michael Sebecic

23 Years: Mark Hoskinson

29 Years: Bonita Perkins

36 Years: Geron Crotwell

SAC celebrates safety milestone

by Molly Henneke
Contributing Writer

The San Antonio Central Railroad (SAC) recently celebrated their four year safety anniversary with a lunch of pizza and wings at Alamo Pizza. They will also be rewarded with caps and/or shirts.

“Our success is largely based on great communication. Our crew is constantly in contact with each other and our customers to ensure everyone is safe. It’s important to be able to go home to our families at the end of the day,” said Jeffrey Pacheco, SAC general manager.

“Our crew also has friendly competitions over any number of things. They are a competitive group and strive to win. This quality shows through in the work that the facility does,” Pacheco added.

Pacheco stated, “We want to be the best at what we do and these little competitions that we have helps us to reach that goal, because at the end of the day, no matter who ends up coming out on top, we know that we are all in this together and without working together and being a single unit we would not be as successful as we are.”

The newsletter for Watco Companies, LLC and Watco Transportation Services, LLC
February 2016, Volume 17, Issue 2

Watco duo elected to short line association board

Jeff Van Schaick, assistant vice president of government affairs, and Stefan Loeb, executive vice president and chief marketing officer, were elected in November to the Board of Directors for the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA).

Van Schaick, representing the Pacific Region, joined Watco in July 2013. With a bachelor’s degree in politics and government from Ohio Wesleyan University, his experience is in public affairs, policy, and as a campaign field director.

Prior to joining the Watco Team, Jeff was an Associate with Chambers, Conlon & Hartwell LLC, in Washington, D.C. where he represented numerous transportation clients on Capitol Hill.

Loeb, representing the Central Region, joined Watco in 2010 as the vice president of business development. He has led and assisted with several acquisitions including the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad, Birmingham Terminal Railway, Ann Arbor Railroad, and Autauga Northern Railroad. He holds a degree in business and finance from Indiana University.

The board is chaired by Watco’s Executive Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer Ed McKechnie.

The ASLRRA is an organization that was founded in 1913, and represents approximately 550 of the short line and regional railroads throughout North America. These businesses play a vital role in the hub-and-spoke transportation network, often providing the first-mile/last-mile connection between farmers and manufacturers and the ultimate consumer.

The ASLRRA serves the railroads in many ways. They provide representation in Washington, D.C., and present the effects of various legislation on the short line railroads to legislators. They also offer a variety of industry services and professional development opportunities including training, meetings, and conferences. You can learn more about the association at www.aslrra.org.

Arkansas location celebrates nine years injury-free

by Michaela Kinyon
Contributing Writer

The team members switching for El Dorado Chemical in Arkansas celebrated their injury-free victory by going to one of the local restaurants for lunch.

“It’s not easy to move railcars seven days a week and keep a clean record,” said location manager Danyale Norman.

He also said that great attitudes, accountability, a “slow-and-easy approach”, and great Watco safety training are among the values and skills that have led to this safety anniversary.

“Here in the south, your name is anything and everything you do,” stated Norman. “We like to keep our names and the name of Watco Companies clean.”

Another important part of the El Dorado team’s achievement that Norman cites is the fact that the Tony Clark, vice president of operations, tells his team every Tuesday to remember the little things.

Some of the people that have contributed to this anniversary include Keith Lacaze, Tony Clark, David Hambrick, Danny Barrington, and all the switching managers who have given their support.

“Keep God first, and let the record speak for itself,” said Norman. “These values and attitudes are something that all of Watco Companies will continue to strive for through its Safety First Foundation Principles, and hopefully there will be many more safety anniversaries to come.”