Watco Celebrates 30 Years of Customer First
Watco celebrates 30 years of Customer First

by Tracie VanBecelaere
Managing Editor

Anyone who has heard the story of Watco’s beginning has heard about the original eight team members that were out switching cars that first steamy July day in 100 degree weather. Those team members were Mark Blazer, Ed Mayberry, Linn Herman, Herb McKeown, Carl McKeown, Curtis Hare, Benny Wise, and Jeff Mayberry. However, there is one name that is missing from that list of eight. He was out there in the heat and humidity working 12-16 hour days along with the other eight to ensure that the Customer, Boise Southern (Boise Cascade), was being taken care of. That man was Dick Webb.

Mark Blazer is now Watco’s senior vice president of strategic development and said he remembers that day vividly. “It was 100 degrees with 95 percent humidity. Dick was a switcher on day one so he switched cars and sweated just like the rest of us.”

After working some 20 years in the rail industry Dick came up with the idea of industrial contract switching. This was facilitated by the Staggers Act of 1980 which deregulated the railroad industry. Prior to the Staggers Act, the government controlled much of the activity of the railroad companies. Deregulation gave the railroads the ability to involve other operators, control their costs and pricing, and sell off lines that they didn’t want to run anymore. Dick saw that many of the rail customer’s hands were tied by the service that the Class I railroads were able to provide. By stepping in and having a crew available around the clock dedicated to that single business to switch cars, companies could control their work flow, making their business more efficient and profitable.

Through his connections made in his career in rail industry with the Kansas City Southern Railway, Dick connected with Boise Southern in DeRidder, La., and proposed his idea of contract switching.

On June 22, 1983 a 30-day contract was signed with Boise that stated starting July 1, 1983 Watco had 30 days to prove they could provide the right service or the contract would be cancelled. Watco has operated under that same contract since that day and has served that Customer for 10,958 consecutive days. Although the Customer First Foundation Principles weren’t written on paper at the time, they were shown in the actions of the team members serving our very first Customer.

Blazer said, “Our job was to take care of the Customer so if they asked us to do something that another railroad wouldn’t have done, we did it.”

That one Customer has now grown into 2,489 Customers and covers a range of industries such as lumber, fuels, grains, aggregates, steel, and others. In addition to providing contract switching Watco has managed to add services such as freight rail, mechanical, terminal and port, and compliance.

Rick Webb, Watco CEO, said, “Our services are built around Customer needs and when we add a new service it’s because our Customers have asked us if we could provide that service for them. They are driving our growth.”

The team in Pittsburg celebrated the event with a video presentation and barbecue lunch followed by comments from Kansas Senator Jerry Moran and Watco CEO Rick Webb. After the comments the group of approximately 250 headed outside for the unveiling of the new street sign, Watco Team Drive. Longtime team members Kirk Hawley, Lori Magee, and Dena Patterson held the ladder for Lois Ziesenis as she pulled the cloth off to reveal the new street sign.

Webb said seeing the sign everyday would inspire him because it was the Watco Team’s drive that brought the company to where it is today and that drive that will take the company where it will be 30 years from now.

Right photo: Kansas Senator Jerry Moran congratulates Watco Companies for 30 years of serving Customers. Middle photo: Watco Team Members and guests at the anniversary luncheon. Bottom right photo: Watco Team Members and guests at the unveiling of the Watco Team Drive street sign. Bottom left photo: One of the early Watco locomotives switching cars for Boise in DeRidder, La.
EIRR serving Idaho for 20 years

Just a few days before Watco Companies celebrated its 30th Anniversary the team members of the Eastern Idaho Railroad (EIRR) were celebrating another big Watco milestone, their 20th anniversary.

The 270 mile short line was purchased from the Union Pacific and was one of the largest single short lines sales in UP history. The railroad travels through the scenic Magic Valley amidst the Snake River and beautiful waterfalls.

The EIRR Team celebrated with a dinner on June 29 at a Burley, Idaho steakhouse. More noticeably, the team painted two commemorative locomotives. A design contest was held and team members Terry Lee and Michael Brinkerhoff were winners whose designs were selected to be featured on the locomotives. Lee designed the nose graphic and Brinkerhoff came up with the design for the side of the locomotive. Both team members won a $100 gift card for their entries in the competition.

The EIRR has been know as a railroad for firsts and has a number of accomplishments and metrics that they developed to measure job performance and to drive improvements. The EIRR was the first to focus as a additional marketing strategy of rail car storage revenues to create additional non-operational revenues. The team efficiently delivered on time refer cars to the extent that UP said it was futile to measure their performance as it had never missed its mark for two consecutive years. The EIRR was the first Watco short line to install hour meters on all locomotives to measure and improve locomotive performance, maintenance and fuel consumption (at the time there was no other options as today such as Wi-Tronix etc.). This in part netted a reduction of the locomotive fleet from approximately 20 to 14 engines. The EIRR had the first in-house cost effective production tie gang. The Rail Dogs and later Ranger Dogs were first conceived on the EIRR as a morale and team building project. There are many more accomplishments too numerous to list.

Jerry Carter, West Region director of operations, said, "The EIRR has come so far since I started my career with Watco. I’m so very proud of all of the team members. Way to go - I’m looking forward to another twenty years."

Watco’s Franklin Depot

Watco has a new depot in Franklin, Kan., but don’t expect a train to be leaving the station anytime soon. The train at this depot is a miniature one made by craftsman Bob Hurt and the "depot" was donated by Watco to the Miner’s Hall Museum.

The train was originally stationed at Pittsburg’s Immigrant Park but vandals and weather caused the train to be moved out of the elements. When the Miner’s Museum was showcased as part of the Smithsonian’s “The Way We Worked” exhibit the train found it way back out when railroads were the featured industry. It was a was a good fit for the location. Children visiting the museum can lean how trains brought people to Southeast Kansas to work the coal mines and to transport the coal from local mines.

A shelter was built to protect the train from the elements and tracks were built to more closely resemble how a train travels.

Baseball league named after Watco Founder

There was one place during the summer months that you would most likely have been able to find Watco founder Dick Webb was the ballpark. In his youth he served as a batboy for the Pittsburg Browns, a Class D team in the K-O-M League. Even more memorably, he served as batboy for the Independence Yankees when they came to town in 1949 with a young kid named Mickey Mantle. Years later Webb would go to the field and watch his son and grandsons play at many different ballparks.

Although he lost his battle to lung cancer in 2009, Webb’s presence is still felt on the fields due to the fact that one of the JL Hutch baseball leagues was recently named in his honor.

“The machine pitch league was the one league that we didn’t have a name attached to,” Chris Ratzlaff, JL Hutchinson board president, said.

“Dick Webb did a lot for the community and for baseball, in particular, so we felt it fitting to dedicate the league to him.”

Dick Webb throws out the opening pitch at the 2007 16-and-under World Series held at the JayCee Ballpark in Pittsburg, Kan.

Safety has NO finish line

Summer Spike Safety Slogan - Clarence Collins, Hockley, Texas Mechanical Shop
Watco’s first railroad still leads the way

by Bob McElwee
Training and Development Specialist

Last month Mark Bolinger, Central Region HRM, and I were invited by South Kansas and Oklahoma Railroad (SKOL) General Manager Matt Despos to attend a meeting with his managers that focused on the question of how to be better managers. Robert Balzer, AGM; Trevor Pool, Owasso trainmaster; Todd Trammell, Cherryvale trainmaster; Michael Salts, Cherryvale trainmaster; Bryan Covey, Coffeyville trainmaster; Randy Letter, Pittsburg trainmaster; Zach Collingsworth, roadmaster, and Brent Booth, locomotive shop foremen attended and participated in the workshop.

This meeting was the first in a series of planned meetings in which managers are taught the concept of “continuous improvement” in their roles as managers and leaders. Such topics of how to help team members deal with changes in workplace policy and procedures, intra-management unity, improving team member interaction, setting realistic expectations for team members, overcoming apathy and indifference, improving safety, dealing effectively and efficiently with rewarding team members for good work, and helping team members understand how to apply the Customer First Foundation Principles dominated the meeting.

The group also spent some time discussing ways in which the location’s three lowest “Work Climate Survey” scores could be improved. In this and other ways, these team members/leaders show that they take seriously their obligation to help the team members they lead and succeed to see their future in meeting their professional and personal goals, and expectations.

All of the managers present recognized that the SKOL railroad simultaneously has much to be proud of and thankful for. At the same time it, like all company locations, needs to improve in areas such as Customer satisfaction, and long term relationship building with both internal and external Customers.

The meeting concluded with Matt giving a general assignment to each manager and scheduling another meeting in six weeks for them to report on the results of their efforts.

Another project Despos worked on was to make the team members breakroom a more comfortable and usable space.

“We thought it would be a neat idea to have the Customer First Foundation Principles put on the door so that when the team members left for their jobs each day they could be reminded of those principles. It turned out really good and is something a little different than just a poster,” said Despos. “We wanted to give the team members a nice place to start the day, eat their lunch, and just call their own.”

Hollidaysburg Team Members enjoy a day at the ballpark

On June 18, 19, and 20th, what started out as a plant managers’ meeting in Hollidaysburg, Pa., ended up becoming a Watco Mechanical Services Team Member meeting. They had not only the plant managers, regional managers, and numerous members of upper management, but also representatives from safety, quality, human resources/recruiting, accounting/finance, and the performance management group.

The meeting agenda included presentations by each of the groups and how Watco’s path for future success ties directly to the Customer First Foundation Principals. The agenda was conducted in an open forum with questions, discussions, and dialogue encouraged throughout each of the presentations.

Along with the “formal” meetings, there was what was termed “Watco Night at the Ballpark” on Tuesday evening at the local minor league baseball field, the Altoona Curve. They had sent out advance invitations not only to the meeting attendees, but also to the team members from the Hollidaysburg facility and their families.

“Everyone enjoyed getting to meet many of the families of the team members we work with every day,” said Matt Grove, Hollidaysburg plant manager.

The initial purchase was 172 tickets, and they even had to get a few more at the gate to accommodate everyone that wanted to attend. Unfortunately, Mother Nature did not want to cooperate. It turned into a rather wet evening, but all in attendance were in good spirits and enjoyed the night out. Of course, the best part was the home team winning in overtime (bottom of the 10th inning) 5-4 after an hour and twenty minute rain delay.

Additional highlights were a catered meal at the local country club, a guided tour of the Hollidaysburg shop, and for those still in town Thursday evening, there was an impromptu cook-out on the back patio of the hotel. The cook-out was a very informal and relaxed atmosphere that allowed everyone to talk with those team members they may only see a few times a year. Tentative arrangements, made during the cook-out, were to hold the next year’s meeting at the Fitzgerald, Ga., facility.

Matt Despos, general manager of the South Kansas and Oklahoma Railroad.

The door was wrapped in the Customer First Foundation Principles so that each day when the South Kansas and Oklahoma Team Members leave for their duties it will serve as a reminder to take care of our Customers.
Pittsburg Port Authority takes inspection trip

Gary Beachner had an opportunity to see his Chanute grain elevators from a different perspective on May 31. He was on board the Wisconsin and Southern Railroad’s (WSOR) business car as it rolled by Beachner Grain’s Chanute, Kansas location.

Beachner is a member of the Pittsburg (Kan.) Port Authority, a non-government entity set up to promote the area’s economic development and job growth. Members of the group, along with city representatives and Watco Team Members rode the train as part of an inspection trip to see what the efforts of the group have brought forth. The group helped facilitate the usage of tax credits to maintain the infrastructure of some sections of the SKOL.

Those attending the event were PPA members Mark Werner, Jim Emerson, Gary Beachner, and John Patterson. Blake Benson attended to represent the City of Pittsburg and John Rosacker from the Kansas Department of Transportation.

The group toured the new Cherryvale, Kan., locomotive shop and then boarded the train for a short trip from the Cherryvale Yard to Chanute, Kan.

Bottom: Members of the Watco Team and Pittsburg Port Authority ride the WSOR business car on an inspection trip on the SKOL. Right: Gary Beachner gets a view of his elevators from the train.

Engine 1023 gets blasted

Work recently began to restore Engine 1023 which is now sitting at the Webb Family Museum Complex at the Carona Depot. Crews sandblasted the engine 1023 and its tinder box, which had sat for close to six decades in Pittsburg’s Schlanger Park before moving to the Carona Depot last summer. A coat of primer followed the sandblasting and then the black paint was sprayed on.

A minor disaster was avoided when a nearby farmer started preparing to harvest his wheat which would’ve resulted in a ruined paint job. Thankfully he agreed to wait a couple of days to let the paint dry before continuing. The work has been funded through the Heart of the Heartlands rail preservation group.

W.B. “Bus” Johnson, Kaye Lynne Webb’s father and Dick Webb’s father-in-law, was superintendent of machinery for the Kansas City Southern Railway based in Pittsburg, Kan. Johnson was instrumental in saving the locomotive from being scrapped and saving it for future generations.

Just a few more finishing touches and Engine 1023 will be looking almost as good as new.

Communication in a Changing Organization

By Ashley Jarvis
Watco University
Training Administrative Assistant

It is important in times of change to engage our team members, and help them to focus on the reasons for change. It is one thing to be informed, and a different thing entirely to understand. It is only when a team member truly understands why things are changing that they will become dedicated to the goals and objectives in question. An excellent example of this is linking team members with one of our most important Customer First Foundation Principles, “Improving Customer Satisfaction.” When the focus of your communication efforts is customer satisfaction, it becomes easier to establish a direct link between our strategies and business outcomes. It also creates a greater sense of engagement amongst team members, because they feel a significant increase in empowerment and understanding in how their role supports the customer experience, and also in how they can improve it.

It is important to make use of engagement tools, which are communication efforts that are designed to involve the team member in one way or another, in addition to informational tools, which often involve bulletins, e-mail, or general announcements. When you take the steps to involve your team members in the change, they identify more with the goals of the organization. Remember to reassure and be reassured that staying motivated and positive, and accepting failure as a part of change will make the transition process a much smoother ride. Doing this will encourage team members to accept responsibility for their part in organizational change, whether it be in strategy, process, or overall change.

There is much more to be said about organizational change, and you can learn more about this topic in our RAIL Course of the Month: Embracing Organizational Change.

RAIL Course of the Month: Embracing Organizational Change

Upcoming Watco U Classes:
101 in Refugio, TX July 16-18
201 in Pittsburg, KS Aug 13-15
101 in Pittsburg, KS Aug 20-22
Fitzgerald Team Member retires for another calling

You’d think after 31 years at the Fitzgerald, Georgia Mechanical Shop Gary Griffin would just kick back and relax. But that’s not the way he rolls. After leaving his duties as inspector at the shop he will take over as pastor at the Omega, Georgia United Methodist Church.

Not only did Gary serve as inspector at the mechanical shop but he also wears the hat of musician as well. Gary is famous in Fitzgerald for helping create the “Dueling Chickens” for the Annual Fitzgerald Chicken Festival. The music is similar to the familiar dueling banjos but instead sounds like two chickens squawking back and forth and has been adopted as the official festival “song”.

Gary and his wife Leighann have been in a bluegrass band as time permits with Leighann playing the guitar and Gary on the banjo and writing songs. Gary’s music has also provided him the opportunity to perform with singer Tricia Underwood. “Her uncle and I attended the same church and got to be good friends and so I became her “unofficial uncle” and got to play for her while she sang at an event,” said Gary.

Not only does Gary enjoy making music but he also likes taking his beagles out running rabbits. He’s never hunted any but just enjoys taking the dogs out. Gary also likes to fish and read, which is a good thing as he will be doing plenty of reading while attending college courses in the summers as part of his new job. Gary and Leighann have two daughters and two granddaughters.

“Although Watco was a good steady job, what I got out of it most were the many friendships I will take with me. From the hundreds of team members that I have known to the many Customers I consider friends,” said Gary.

Longtime Neodesha Team Member Passes Away

Charles Keith Watkins, Jr., 59, of Neodesha, died at 2:16 a.m., Thursday, June 20, 2013, in the Emergency Room at Wilson Medical Center in Neodesha. He had been in his usual health and death was unexpected.

He was born November 4, 1953, in Parsons, Kansas, to Charles Keith Watkins, Sr. and Martha Jane (Baker) Watkins. He grew up in rural Parsons where he attended Service Valley Elementary School and was a 1971 graduate of Labette County High School in Altamont.

For a time, he worked at Peabody Tec Tank and later as a mechanic at Parsons Motors. He then began his 34-year career at Watco at Neodesha where he worked in shipping and receiving in the repair shop. He had served as a representative for the Transportation Communications Union – Local 6026.

He was a member of the Church of the Nazarene in Parsons and the Cherryvale Bass Masters. He enjoyed woodcarving, making fishing lures and fishing, especially in tournaments.

He and Debra Hentzen were married February 14, 1972. She preceded him in death on December 14, 2002. On April 10, 2004, he and Robin L. Heape were married in Parsons. She survives him. He survived the home.

In addition to his wife, survivors include: his mother, Martha Cochran and her husband, Levar from Parsons, Kan. A son, Dustin Watkins from Bartlesville, Okla. A daughter, Tina Russell and her husband, Ken from Bartlesville, Okla. Four grandchildren: Kimberly Watkins, Blaine Watkins, Drake Anderson and Dom Anderson. He was preceded in death by his father, Charles Keith Watkins, Sr.; and one sister, Leana Cochran.

Memorial services were held Monday, June 24, 2013, at the Church of the Nazarene in Parsons. Burial was in Edgmand Cemetery near Columbus. Memorials are suggested to the Children’s Department at the Nazarene Church or to the American Heart Association. These may be left at or mailed to Forbes-Hoffman Funeral Home, P.O. Box 374, Parsons, KS 67357.

SKOL Team Member wins iSafety prize

Jeff VanBuren won the South Kansas and Oklahoma Railroad’s (SKOL) Second Quarter iSafety prize, an iPad, for working accident/injury free for the second quarter. The iSafety 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 it will be posted at every on-duty location so all team members will know what item will be drawn for that quarter. All team members not involved in any of the below categories will be eligible.

- Critical Rule Failure
- Human Factor Incident
- Injury
- Time off work for any Discipline
- Decertified Engineer/Conductor

The first Wednesday following the end of the quarter the TS&IC chairperson will draw the name of 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.

Franklin Wann, TS&IC chairperson, said, “This program is purely team member driven and is driven by the successes of each team member working safely day in and day out. The TS&IC Committee is committed to improving the safety and working environment of the SKOL and we feel through the iSafety program we can all accomplish this goal!”

The iSafety Commitment:

- I commit to working safely and incident free every day.
- I commit to not injuring myself or other Team members.
- I commit to abiding and working by the rules.
- I commit to going home safely to my family every day.
Congratulations to the following team members celebrating their anniversaries!


2 Years: Bryan Barney, Gerald Bean, Reginald Burks, Derian Collier, Timothy Crawford, Edward Diemert, Jonathan Duncan, Kelly Flanders, Daniel Gloves, Tom Hayes, Tye Haymon, David Hougardy, Casey Irvin, Clifton Law, Craig Lewis, Ronald Lockwood, Corey Martin, Justin Martin, Jacob McCullough, Zachary McKinnon, Thomas McMullan, Daniel Peipert, Bobbie Peloquin, Freddie Rainey, Melissa Rains, Jay Schaalma, Leon Steeger, Stacy Swinford, Kaleigh Walker

3 Years: Joseph Bristow, Kenneth Christian, Brian Cosby, Jorge Delgado, Joe Fells, Michael Gwin, Matthew Hutcheson, Lee Jasmin, Patrick Kinney, Stefan Loeb, Willie Lowe, Cooper Miller, Andrew Mitchell, Matthew Morrison, Jason Myers, Anthony Shepherd, Aaron Smith, Rob Smith, Wendy Vrna, John Worthington

4 Years: Joseph Babineaux, Bryan Barney, Gerald Bean, Reginald Burks, Derian Collier, Timothy Crawford, Edward Diemert, Jonathan Duncan, Kelly Flanders, Daniel Gloves, Tom Hayes, Tye Haymon, David Hougardy, Casey Irvin, Clifton Law, Craig Lewis, Ronald Lockwood, Corey Martin, Justin Martin, Jacob McCullough, Zachary McKinnon, Thomas McMullan, Daniel Peipert, Bobbie Peloquin, Freddie Rainey, Melissa Rains, Jay Schaalma, Leon Steeger, Stacy Swinford, Kaleigh Walker

6 Years: Tandi closets, Clint Counterman, David Daniels, Bobby McFadden, Michael Milligan, Steven Ogle, Joseph Rawe, Vincent Saylor, Travis Thorpe, Derrick Umbarger, Jeremiah Williams, Jeffery Yon

7 Years: Francis Benally, Chet Clasen, Martin Gutierrez, Larry Higginbotham, Kyle Jeschke, Matt Lewis, Federico Lopez, Wesley Martin, Jennifer Muckala, Cesar Oglesby, Dianna Peak, Willie Rumppe, Kenneth Tober, Jeremy Tyler, Robert Waldheuser, Charles Young

8 Years: Antenogenis Barajas, Sammy Belmer, Bruce Christie, Phillip Cunningham, Travis Dimond, Carl Fanello, Dylan Guthrie, Cornelius Jones, Colby Jordan, Tracy Long, Brian Steiger, Toby Wampler

9 Years: Jeffery Ambrose, Robert Bailey, Laura Bolt, Doug Story, Stu Towner

10 Years: Beau Embrey

11 Years: William Mays, Don Rudd, Douglas Tank

12 Years: Brian Arnold, Donn Duling, Teresa Gray, Jeffrey Schroeder, Michael Yon, Lois Ziesenis

13 Years: Charlie Chism, Audencio Cocteco, David Franks, Martin White

14 Years: Robert Hasheider, Steven Landis, Mathew Wahl

15 Years: John Chambers, Todd Iverson, Brian Stott

16 Years: Joseph Bennett, Gregory Johnson, Patrick Ottwell, James Peck, Daniel Swenson

17 Years: John Gaines, Frederick Owens, Brian Rose

18 Years: Carlton Echols

19 Years: Gisele Brown, Raymond Gray

21 Years: Chad Stalford

22 Years: Richard Mansfied

23 Years: Donald Schwanke, Danny Simonds, John Wise

24 Years: Timothy Sanchez

25 Years: Edward Hockenberry, Eugene Hoolinko, Timothy Millis, Steven Theriot

27 Years: David Bierman

28 Years: Daniel Ebarb, Calvin Everson, Wayne Stevens, Jeff VanBuren

30 Years: Mark Blazer, Tony Sanborn

33 Years: Steven Groth, George Kahlow

34 Years: Chris Flanagan

35 Years: Sammie Haggerty, Gary Perry, Nello Willie

36 Years: John Garman, John Garman, William Houck

37 Years: Rick Cox

39 Years: William Wise

42 Years: Bonnie Brumbaugh

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.

**Births**

**Aaralyn Lacey Whitman**

Kyle and Candace Whitmen are proud to announce the birth of a daughter, Aaralyn Lacey. Aaralyn was born on May 7 and weighed 6 lbs., 3 oz. Kyle is a machine operator in MOW at the Wisconsin Southern Railroad Horicon location.

**David Otis-Lee Gonzalez**

Josiah and Jennifer Gonzalez are proud to welcome their sixth child. David Otis-Lee was born on May 29 and weighed 7 lbs., 13 oz. David was welcomed home by siblings Andrew, 19; Brendan, 16; Victoria, 15; Ashlynn, 10; and Daniel, 23 months. Josiah is a blaster at the Neodesha plant, and is enjoying his third year as a Watco team member.

**Peyton Lynn Benedict-Toney**

Nathan Toney and Mattie Benedict are proud to announce the birth of a daughter, Peyton Lynn. Peyton was born on June 4 and weighed 4 lbs., 2 oz., and was 17 inches long. Mattie is a Customer Service Receptionist at the Pittsburg, Kan., location and Tracie VanBeelare, communication director, is the proud grandma.

**Announcements**

If you have a birth or a wedding announcement that you would like to have placed in The Dispatch, e-mail your information to tvan@watco.com.
Wisconsin railroads get “Luchty” in funding issue

The positive outcome of recent budget talks in Wisconsin wasn’t pure luck but in fact the result of a coordinated effort spearheaded by Ken Lucht, Watco’s director of government relations. On what turned out to be a political roller coaster over the past 4 months. Lucht and many others worked long hours going from the possibility of losing funding under the Wisconsin’s Freight Rail Preservation Program to having $52 million approved of by the Wisconsin Legislature’s Joint Committee on Finance. The budget measure was signed into law June 30th by Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. The $52 million appropriation represents almost a 75% increase in Freight Railroad Preservation Funding.

The Freight Rail Preservation Program (FRPP) was created to help Wisconsin communities and shippers preserve and enhance local freight rail service. The FRPP provides grants to preserve and rehabilitate essential rail lines and Watco’s Wisconsin and Southern Railroad (WSOR) has benefited from the grants which have helped keep the lines and bridges on the WSOR in good condition.

Lucht spent much of his time meeting with the 16 members of the Joint Committee on Finance, twice in some cases, and voicing the concerns of various rail stakeholders in Wisconsin. One key point that Lucht made were the jobs that rail brings to the state. There are more than 3,000 rail employees in the state of Wisconsin and for each rail job 4.5 additional jobs are created.

“This effort was driven by the many stakeholders that are served by the freight rail industry here in Wisconsin,” stated Ken Lucht. “Many thanks go to our Customers who showed their support and to the various municipalities, counties, trade associations, including our Class I railroad partners who never gave up on our pursuit for a better and improved freight rail system”, he added.

Wisconsin’s Freight Rail Protection Program provides for the upkeep of railroad infrastructure across the state.  
*Photo by Paul Swanson*