Watco's Kansas & Oklahoma Railroad serves the Williams facility near McPherson, Kansas

Photo by Paul Swanson
by Tracie VanBeclaere  
Managing Editor

What’s the best way to celebrate a huge milestone such as a 20-year anniversary? If you’re in the purchasing department, ignore it would be the answer. Or that’s what the team wanted John Ostrander, WTS purchasing manager, to think they were doing when his 20th anniversary of working at Watco rolled around. Ostrander, or, “John O” as he is known to many, sat in his office that day with nary a sound, not a thank you, not a congratulations - nothing.

And then, two weeks later, he got a call from Pittsburg, Kan., at the same time his wife Flo walked into his office and told him she was fired (just a ruse to explain her presence) and his office began filling with West Region Team Members, starting with Eastern Idaho’s general manager, Bill Goldsberry. The Pittsburg call turned into a conference call as Ron Close, SVP supply chain management and Penny Wood, purchase card and cell phone administrator joined in to thank Ostrander for his 20 years of service and to wish him the best in his next twenty.

Why the two week delay? The plaque that was presented to Ostrander at the celebration couldn’t be completed in time and once it arrived extra time was needed to plan the event so Flo could be able to attend. The plaque features a railroad spike on a miniature set of tracks with engraved recognizing his 20 years of service. It was presented to him by Goldsberry and the team crowded into his Twin Falls office.

The team shared cake and snacks as they reminisced about his early days when he started out as a locomotive mechanic. Ostrander worked as a locomotive mechanic for a year or so before becoming the manager for Watco Transportation vehicle maintenance/repair and then the vice president of track maintenance for the Northwest Region. In 2002 he joined the purchasing department as manager of purchasing for operations and track.

Close said, “We really needed to let John O know how much we appreciate him. Twenty years to give to one company is remarkable. He’s taught all of us a lot, his knowledge has been a huge asset.”

“I consider John not only a team member but a friend as well,” added Close.

“I want to thank Rick and Dick (Webb) for the foresight they had to put this thing together which has allowed me to have this career and be here for 20 years,” said Ostrander. “It’s been a good 20 years. And as a warning to other team members - watch out for Ron Close!”

While John O was being taunted by the team in the Twin Falls office, two other West Region team members were hitting that same 20 year anniversary mark as well. John Brown, SVP special projects, Jack Lisle, materials coordinator, and Ostrander all started working for the Eastern Idaho Railroad (EIRR) in November of 1993 when Watco purchased the line from the Union Pacific (UP).

Since Brown works out of his home office, he had a few guests; Scott Adams, and Bo Fox of the West Region track department and Gary Wagenseller, Boise Valley Railroad general manager, stop by his home office to present his award.

John Brown started out as roadmaster after Watco had acquired the EIRR from the UP, where John had worked for 18 years throughout the Northwest. After two years as EIRR roadmaster John was named general manager of the EIRR. In 1997 Brown became the Vice President of Transportation and oversaw all Watco railroads, marketing, track and operations. When Watco regionalized the railroads in 2005 because of growth he became the Chief Operating Officer of the West Region. In 2010, Brown was named Senior Vice President, Special Projects. He was instrumental in the planning and start-up of Watco’s Western Australia Railroad operations along with being involved in other key projects.

Brown said, “I am very proud to have been given the opportunity to contribute to the worthwhile and achievable Watco vision for so many years - a vision that continues to drive our company toward excellence and long range success every day. Providing Outstanding Customer Satisfaction and Improved Profitability both over the long term has never been a matter of chance, it’s a matter of choice; it’s not something to wait for, it’s something to be achieved. The memories of working and winning with so many great Watco Team Members over the years has been truly remarkable. Being surrounded by some of the best in the business has really made the last 20 years a great experience.

“Over the years team members like Jack Lisle and John Ostrander and many others who have contributed so much to Watco; contributions that in many instances laid the early foundation that helped Watco to continuously improve over the years. To be able to be part of building something as great as Watco with such great people that benefit so many, first across America and now in Australia, has truly been an amazing and fulfilling experience, one that most people can only dream of. Thank you all!”

Jack Lisle, the last of the trio, was presented his plaque at the shop in Rupert, Idaho by Goldsberry and the team members at that location. Lisle came on board as a conductor with 16 years of experience with the UP and quickly advanced to trainmaster. He was instrumental in both the EIRR’s startup and was a major contributor to the development of its strategic operating performance. In 1998 Lisle was promoted to general manager where under his leadership the EIRR continued to be recognized as a top performer in the shortline industry by setting numerous performance bench marks for UPRR interchanging short lines over the years.

In November of 2011 Lisle was named materials coordinator. “I’ve been here for 20 years and never regretted my decision to join the Watco Team,” said Lisle. “It’s nice being part of a company that treats you like a human being rather than a number.”

Thanks to all three of these team members for 20 years of dedicated service.
The Eastern Idaho Railroad teamed up with Operation Lifesaver for the annual Christmas Light Parade through downtown Twin Falls, Idaho.
Pitt State baseballers pose with the Gorilla locomotive

It's a good thing members of the Pittsburg State University Baseball team are an agile group. When they showed up on a cold December day to pose with Watco's Gorilla locomotive they had to climb all over the locomotive to get the best shots.

Watco is a big supporter of PSU and has many graduates of the university as team members.

"When the baseball team approached us about using the locomotive for some photographs we were more than happy to accommodate them," said Tracie Van-Becelaere, communications director. "The university partnered with us in getting the locomotive project completed and this was another way to keep it working for our community."

Most of the team members pictured are seniors except for two, Aaron Snow and Jake Stevenson. Aaron is the son of Brad Snow, Watco's director of real estate.

Pictured are top row (l-r): Mitch Streeter, #2; James Fitzgearlds, #49; Evan Thomas, #6. Second row: Kyle Dickens, #8; Brad Foss, #25; Tory Stoffregen, #1; and Tyler Thompson, #12. Third row: Jake Stevenson, #40; and Jacoby Martin, #5. Bottom row: Cody Ball, #7; Aaron Snow, #23, and Cameron Fisher, #27.

The Hollidaysburg, Pa., Fleet Department celebrated the season by having an Ugly Sweater Day. Pictured are: first row l-r: Robin Conerby and Andy Stouffer.


Christmas for the Kids

Each year Watco’s Pittsburg, Kan., Team helps the children in the community that are in foster care by working with The Farm, Inc. Three Christmas trees were placed in different spots throughout the buildings and team members took cards off the trees with three items listed on the cards that the child (identified by number) would like to receive from Santa.

In addition to the gifts, team members also made cash donations to purchase gift cards and other items for the children. Becky Fearmonti, vice president, sales and marketing, Central Regional spearheaded the effort and would like to thank the team for opening their hearts and making Christmas a bit more special for the kids.
Jett Monroe Mitchell

Timber Rock Team Member Joshua “Kyle” Mitchell and his wife Tiffany are proud to announce the birth of a son, Jett Monroe. Jett was born October 28 and weighted 4 lbs., 12 oz. and was 18 inches long.

Jett was welcomed home by his siblings; Kane, 8, Jaxon, 6, and Sage, 5. Kyle is an engineer for the Timber Rock Railroad.
Resolution Resources
helping team members reach their goals

by Tracie VanBeckelaree
Managing Editor

By the time many of you read this you will prob-
ably have already made your new year’s resolutions,
and if you’re like me, possibly already broken them
as well. Whether you’re trying to break a bad habit,
start living healthier or even learning a new
skill, Watco has a large pool of resources to
help you achieve your goal.

There are an abundance of tips avail-
able using the Health Benefits link under the
Watco Team tab on the website. Some of the
tips are geared to-
wards helping you lose
weight while others of-
fer advice on how to destress your life. For instance,
**did you know a can of sugar sweetened beverage per
day can add about 15 pounds of weight over a year?**
Or that for every pound you gain, your body creates
about an extra mile of blood vessels? Since blood
then has to travel farther, your heart is strained and
your risk of high blood pressure increases. These are
two good reasons to watch what you eat and drink.

I can always find a reason to skip breakfast but
the site states that, according to the American Heart
Association, eating breakfast may reduce the risk of
obesity, diabetes and heart disease. It says oatmeal,
whole grain cereals or eggs are all good choices and
one of the worst things you can do is not eat during
the day - that can lead to binging, which, in turn,
can lead to weight gain and health problems. So,
it looks like it’s time we all start the day off with a
healthy breakfast!

You might need more than just a tip though and
that’s when you can look through the different
monthly health topics to see if one of the
more detailed articles would be helpful. Topics such as nutri-
tion, fitness, tobacco cessation and stress are
covered in this area. The link to this site is
[https://www.watco-
companieshealthplan.com/HealthAndWell-
ness](https://www.watco-
companieshealthplan.com/HealthAndWell-
ness). This is a great
place to explore and discover information

- Childhood and Elder Care
- Healthy Lifestyle and Personal Growth
- Substance Abuse

The number to contact New Directions is 1-800-
624-5544.

Maybe you just want to work on your skills in the
workplace. If so, there are several courses that are
available on the Learning Portal under the Team
Member Self-Service link on the website. You can
learn how to give presentations, how to better man-
age your time, accounting fundamentals and many
other practices that will make you a more informed
team member.

“One thing that Watco is focused on is assisting
team members when they are seeking improvement
or need help,” said Curtiss Hemby, human resource
manager. “If a team member is where they want
to be personally or moving in that direction then
they’re going to be able to better focus on their work.
Providing these services to our team members is
just common sense as they are our most important
assets.”

Regardless of the improvements you want to make
the key is getting started. Don’t just keep wishing
things would change, be the agent of change - and
start today.

Be sure to check your FSA balance - all funds need to be used by January 31.