ASLRRA Recognizes Career Dedication to Railroad Safety

2020 Safety Person and Safety Professional of the Year Selected

WASHINGTON, June 24, 2020 – The American Short Line Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA) has honored two individuals for their dedication to railroad safety, naming Jose Jimenez, Machinist, The Belt Railway Company of Chicago (BRC) as Safety Person of the Year, and Travis Herod, SVP of Environmental, Health and Safety at Watco Companies (Watco) as the Safety Professional of the Year.

“Our short line members value safety above all else, staying focused on keeping everybody on and around the railroad safe, despite multiple competing priorities.” said Chuck Baker, President of ASLRRA. “The 2020 award winners have prioritized safety day in and day out throughout their careers, on their own railroads, and in their communities. We are honored to recognize their dedication to bringing each employee home safely every night, and grateful for their contributions to the freight rail industry.”

Safety Person of the Year - Jose Jimenez, Machinist, The Belt Railway Company of Chicago

This award pays homage to a non-management employee who exhibits knowledge and practice of safety procedures within their company, with no reported self-injuries, and contributes off-duty time to safety procedures and awareness in their communities.
In May of 2019, Belt Railway experienced their second reportable injury of the year. A detailed analysis of the causal factors of the recent injuries and the group’s processes and procedures came from the determination of Jose Jimenez, a 24-year veteran of the Mechanical Department at the BRC.

Jimenez identified that the hazards did not lie in the major infrequent projects, such as engine overhauls. Instead, the lack of standard processes within the common tasks of the department exposed a set of risks that had been overlooked. Standard tasks of a shop were reviewed, which directly influenced the approach that his shop took towards risk reduction in their workplace.

“Jose is an employee that any railway could only hope to have, one who takes an interest in the lives of others, and who spends personal time helping people, some of whom he may never have known,” says Harold Kirman, Secretary and Director of Compliance. Kirman went on to say that Jimenez “serves as an inspiration to his colleagues, and to the entire BRC organization, never being satisfied with the status quo, while setting an example for all of us to follow.”

Mr. Jimenez took the lead in producing new and improved safety procedures within his workplace. Through the adjustments of pinch points, safety chains, general housekeeping, and the use of proper tools, he altered the effectiveness of his work group, and the safety of what they did, resulting in renewed focus on the part of the workgroup to put their performance in line with the BRC’s core competencies, ensuring that each of them went home safely every day. As the results improved, motivation improved, and his actions began to influence the entire team. Most importantly, the BRC has seen no additional injuries since the project was initiated.

Off-duty, Jimenez continues to heed the strong call to service as his son’s basketball coach, engaging in school activities, and serving as a volunteer for the Special Olympics alongside his wife Maggie.

**Safety Professional of the Year** - Travis Herod, SVP of Environmental, Health and Safety, Watco. This award distinguishes an individual who demonstrates excellence via their communication and leadership skills in the interest of safety, is selfless in his or her actions, and consistently documents safety achievements as a team leader.
Throughout his 20-year career, Travis Herod has been a driving force behind Watco’s safety programs and training courses, including leading the company’s new shift in safety philosophy, Watco’s Safety Management System. The program has led to a much more proactive approach in preventing incidents and accidents, while also creating higher levels of engagement from Watco team members. This includes safety suggestions, near-miss reporting, and SAFE Observations. According to the company, the results from the program in 2019 were profound, finishing the year with record low safety metrics, and 2020 is trending even better, headed for a second record-breaking year in a row.

“Travis has initiated a number of programs and training courses geared towards not only teaching safety but also being proactive when it comes to safety,” said Nick Coomes, Chief Operating Officer of Watco. “Travis is widely respected both within Watco and throughout the rail industry including by customers, suppliers, vendors, and other operators. He leads by example but is also able to develop impactful relationships fostering safe behaviors.”

Herod’s emphasis on safety extends beyond his on-duty time at Watco. Throughout the course of a workday, Herod reminds coworkers of safety procedures, both for work and at home. He serves as a mentor to new leaders in the safety industry. Each Sunday evening, he e-mails the entire Watco team with a safety message on relevant topics and positive encouragement. On weekends and evenings, he volunteers for community safety organizations such as Operation Lifesaver and the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association, which supports veterans causes, and veterans suicide prevention initiatives. On their horse farm in Alabama, he and his wife provide VA home visits, nursing home visits, and veterans and special needs outreach through equestrian activities.

Herod holds industry safety certificates including Licensed Safety Professional (LSP) through the National Association of Safety Professionals (NASP), and a Certificate in Safety Management through the American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP).

For additional information on the award winners, and specifications for these awards, click here.

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**About ASLRRA** - The American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA) is a non-profit trade association representing the interests of the nation’s 603 short line and regional railroads and railroad supply company members in legislative and regulatory matters. Short lines operate 47,500 miles of track in 49 states, or approximately 29% of the national railroad network, touching in origination or termination one out of every five cars moving on the national railroad system, serving customers who otherwise would be cut off from the national railroad network. www.aslrra.org