Ayers Electronic Systems is the Newest Provider of PTC Resources for ASLRRA’s Member Discount Program

Ayers Electronic Systems (aE), is the latest company to join ASLRRA’s Member Discount Program as a preferred provider, offering a comprehensive approach to implementing positive train control (PTC) designed for short line railroads.

When working with a railroad, aE will start with an analysis of the business environment. Then, the company will develop an implementation plan, which includes PTC system specification and recommendation, procurement services, rigorous testing of command, control, communications and monitoring systems and a training plan. Finally, to help ensure the railroad is sticking to its implementation plan, aE can provide standardization assistance to help monitor day-to-day operations.

“We are pleased to be able to offer a management solution for short lines who must equip with PTC per regulation, or as required by their Class I partners,” said ASLRRA President Chuck Baker. “Via our agreement with aE, short lines will be able to analyze their business processes, select products that meet their specific needs, and develop an implementation and training plan that will comply with the complex provisions of PTC regulations, all at a price that is reasonable for our small business railroad members.”

ASLRRA has brought together a number of providers offering PTC products and services to members at discounted prices. Click here to learn more about aE and the products it provides, or here to learn about the PTC resources available through ASLRRA’s Member Discount Program.

It’s Not Too Late to Register for Next Week’s ASLRRA Southern Region Meeting

Yes, ASLRRA’s final regional meeting is already next week, but it is not too late to register to join other industry professionals at the Southern Region Meeting in Charlotte, N.C. Nov. 11-13.

Meeting participants will have the opportunity to learn about a wide variety of topics affecting short line railroads.

Space is also available for other training opportunities. The FRA Part 225 Accident and Incident Reporting Seminar will be held in conjunction with the meeting, while the SLSI safety train tour takes place Nov. 13 and the SLSI hazardous materials training is Nov. 14.

When not engaged in ASLRRA’s educational sessions, attendees will also have multiple chances to network and participate in social events. Follow the link for more information or to register.
Railroad Retirement Board Discusses Military Service Credit and Says Benefits, Earnings Limits Will Increase in 2020

The Railroad Retirement Board’s (RRB) newest edition of its monthly question and answer series explains when military service can be counted as rail service under the Railroad Retirement Act.

Offering credit for military service to railroad employees is intended to prevent those employees from losing retirement credits due to military service during a war or period of national emergency.

In addition to their Q&A, the RRB released information concerning increases in benefits and earnings limits in 2020. A rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the third quarter 2018 to the third quarter 2019 will result in an increase for most railroad retirement annuities in January.

Tier I and tier II benefits will both increase, tier I by 1.6 percent and tier II by 0.5 percent. Vested dual benefit payments and supplemental annuities paid by the RRB are not adjusted based on the change in CPI.

There will also be an increase to railroad retiree earnings limits in 2020, since the earnings limits are indexed to average national wage increases.

Follow the links above for more information about these changes to retiree benefits and earnings limits.

ASLRRRA and the RRB are hosting a series of webinars to help railroads better understand benefits. See below in our Webinars section!
Tax Extenders Need Congressional Action

As detailed in a recent Bloomberg Government online article, many industries, including short line railroads, have been hoping legislators would be able to attach a tax extenders package onto a major spending bill, which is needed by Nov. 21 to fund the government and prevent a shut down. However, according to Senate Appropriations Chairman Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), it’s looking more likely that legislators will be passing a short-term stopgap instead.

If a tax extenders package cannot be added to a larger funding bill, stakeholders will most likely have missed what lobbyists are calling the “last train out of the station.” Not all those invested in this legislation have such a dire view, though.

“It’s most certainly a risk [that funding will not pass],” said ASLRA President Chuck Baker in the article. “But we don’t see any good reason why an approps CR in November couldn’t carry a tax package if bipartisan and bicameral tax leadership can agree on a package.”

Indeed, House Democrats have indicated a desire to have a shorter-term stopgap funding resolution - one that would end before Christmas - giving more time to develop the legislative vehicle on which 45G and other tax extenders could finally catch a ride.

ASLRA New Members

Serrmi

ASLRA is pleased to welcome Serrmi Products LLC as an associate business member. Serrmi’s primary products are instrument houses and cases that can be customized and built to order for use in railroad, electrical, utilities, communications, telecommunications, petrochemical, solar and generators. Our primary contact is Lynn Meredith, who can be reached at info@serrmiprod.com.
ASLRRRA Announcements

Make it Easier to Screen and Hire Contractors with eVerifile’s eShortLine Program

Each week, ASLRRRA will highlight one of its carefully chosen Member Discount Program providers to help members learn more about the companies offering valuable services at discounted prices.

ASLRRRA preferred provider eVerifile’s eShortLine program combines security, convenience and trusted expertise to reduce supplier and employee risk for short line railroads. This uniquely tailored, comprehensive contractor screening program eases the burden and cost of screening and hiring third-party contractors. ASLRRRA members receive exclusive discounted pricing.

Through the eShortLine program, railroads can choose from multiple package options to fit individual company needs. A trusted provider, eVerifile also offers industry expertise, efficiency and consistency. The company has over a decade of industry experience and is a single-source provider of background screening, verifications, drug testing, physicals, training, testing and badging.

The eShortLine program is an extension of eRailSafe, the Class I railroad workplace safety program administered by eVerifile. Learn more about the eShortLine program at ASLRRRA’s Member Discount Program page.

Knowing Each Other’s Family Helps Old Augusta Railroad Operate Injury Free for Over Two Decades

To further tell the short line story, ASLRRRA will profile some of its members who are noteworthy movers and shakers in the railroad industry. The long-term success of these railroads makes their achievements worth sharing.

In the railroad industry, unlike in many other professions, railroad employees are not only responsible for the safety of themselves and their coworkers, but also employees at businesses they serve and members of the general public safe as well. It is for that reason that ASLRRRA and other organizations champion safe rail operations, and why ASLRRRA member Old Augusta Railroad’s exemplary safety record helps set it apart from the competition.

Based on their records, the Old Augusta Railroad (OAR) has had only one recordable incident since it was granted common carrier status as a Class III short line in 1983. This year, OAR will celebrate 25 consecutive years of injury-free operations.

OAR’s many years without any reportable injuries has also been recognized by ASLRRRA through the Association’s Jake Awards. OAR is one of only nine railroads that has won a Jake Award every year since the award’s introduction in 1999.

Photo Courtesy of Keith LaPorte

Old Augusta Railroad employees pose in front of one of the company’s locomotives. This year, OAR is celebrating 25 consecutive years of injury-free performance. Front row (L to R) Jacob Cripps, Jenny Watson, Kim Tumlin and Keith LaPorte. Back row (L to R) Rodney Jones, Kirk Giger, Wayne Lowery, George Wells, Bobby Sheffield, Leo Gillie and Wes Jones
In addition to their Jake Awards, Keith LaPorte, OAR’s transportation operations manager, has been honored for his work promoting a strong safety culture. In 2016 he received ASLRRA’s Safety Person of the Year Award, which recognizes a non-management member railroad employee for applying a wide range of safety knowledge and practices on the job and in the community.

Part of OAR’s success is due to the railroad’s “consistent and intentional focus on safety for each individual and for the team,” said OAR General Manager Jacob Cripps. OAR requested a safety culture assessment in 2016 from the Short Line Safety Institute, which was key to helping OAR improve its overall safety culture.

LaPorte also credits the railroad’s smaller size as a factor in its safe operations. Of the company’s 11 employees, seven are train and engine service employees qualified as both engineers and conductors.

“This culture is one where employees take ownership for their own safety as well as watching out for each other’s safety,” he said. “Having a small crew base makes safety even more personal in that each employee knows each other’s family and they feel a responsibility…to ensure that each employee goes home the same way they came to work.”

OAR operates 2.5 miles of mainline track in Mississippi. With two MP15 locomotives, the railroad serves the Leaf River Cellulose mill, handling over 10,000 railcars per year.

**ASLRRA Offers On-Site Compliance Assessments Evaluating Day-to-Day Operations and Compliance Practices**

ASLRRA’s expert Compliance Assessments are a valuable resource available exclusively to member railroads. During a comprehensive on-site assessment, an ASLRRA representative will visit the railroad to perform a customized evaluation that may include documentation review, field observations and interaction with management and field personnel followed by a verbal close-out conducted with the railroad.

In many instances, these assessments have a positive impact by eliminating possible violations, enhancing regulatory education and creating a safer environment for all. Other benefits include the development of a better understanding of the Federal Railroad Administration’s audit process and the creation of a self-audit process with necessary checklist materials.

Learn more about Compliance Assessments and other valuable member resources at the Safety & Compliance page on ASLRRA’s website.
ASLRRA Out and About

Operation Lifesaver Authorized Volunteers Bring Safety Message to High Schoolers in Kansas

A group of recently certified Operation Lifesaver Authorized Volunteers (OLAVs) brought the nonprofit organization’s safety message to 271 students and 26 staff members at Frontenac High School in Frontenac, Kan.

For the presentation, Shea McLaughlin, ASLRRA Associate Board Member and national account manager for member CDL Electric’s Railroad Signaling Division, worked with Afton Lundy, director of railroad services at CDL Electric, and Amber Brown and Jana Austerman, communications and marketing and director of commercial support and pricing, respectively, at member Watco Companies. Together they taught the audience about how to stay safe at railroad crossings, including providing explanations of different railroad signs and distractions to avoid when near trains.

McLaughlin, Lundy, Brown and Austerman were part of a larger group from CDL and Watco who finished training with Operation Lifesaver and became authorized volunteers in August. As OLAVs, they can offer rail safety education presentations to further Operation Lifesaver’s goal, which is to reduce injuries and fatalities caused by trespassing and other unsafe behavior on or near railroad tracks and crossings.

AGLRRRA Webinars

Learn More About Railroad Retirement Benefits from the RRB’s Webinars

To help industry employees understand and access important benefits, ASLRRA has partnered with the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) to host a series of three webinars.
While the first webinar focusing on general eligibility requirements, retirement and disability benefits was held yesterday, members who were unable to view the presentation live can still access a recording on ASLRRA’s website here.

Upcoming presentations are scheduled for Nov. 21 and Dec. 5. The former will address eligibility requirements for spouses and divorced spouses and work limits after retirement, while the latter focuses on survivor eligibility requirements and additional general benefits information. The presentations are free to both ASLRRA members and non-members. Advance registration is required.

In addition to having on-demand access to the RRB’s first webinar, ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinars page includes nearly 90 recordings with recent webinar topics. Titles include “Private Grade Crossing Safety,” “Meeting PTC Host Requirements,” “Crossings - The Necessary Evil We Must Contend With,” and “Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) 101 - Railroad Communications.”

On-demand webinars are free to members, and available to non-members with a subscription. Visit ASLRRA’s webinars page to view a complete list of upcoming webinar topics, register online and view on-demand webinars.

ASLRRA’s Upcoming Webinars

**Ops Testing with Employee Performance Tracking for Compliance** - Nov. 14, 2019

This webinar, presented by CloudMoyo’s Senior Railroad Consultant and Program Manager Ashok Madhavan, will cover operations testing with performance tracking and employee accountability for safety compliance. Madhavan will share tips to build a robust program, track employee performance through accountability tools, and help labor relations to improve safety.

**Sales & Use Tax: Supreme Court Rulings Effect on Short Lines** - Nov. 20, 2019

Sales and use tax laws are complicated. Michael Fralix, CPA at Bowers & Company, will review the sales tax exposure that the majority of short line railroads will face, and review what alternatives they have to ensure compliance.

**RRB Spouse Benefits and Working After Retirement** - Nov. 21, 2019

Jodi Huskey, a Railroad Retirement Board district manager, will discuss railroad retirement eligibility requirements for spouses and divorced spouses and review work limits after retirement in the second of three Railroad Retirement Board webinars. This webinar is free for all ASLRRA members and non-members.

Click here for more ASLRRA events.

Industry Events

**RT&S Magazine Accepting Nominations for Project Awards**

Railway Track and Structures magazine is now accepting nominations for its first-ever rail and transit projects awards, which will be announced next year.

Railroads can submit nominations for the 2020 RT&S Top Projects awards in the following categories: New Construction (Rail), Maintenance (Rail), New Construction (Bridges), Maintenance (Bridges) and Best Use of Technology on a Project. Nominations are due Dec. 13. Follow the link to nominate a project for an RT&S award.
KSRRA Rail Freight Conference Registration Now Open

Registration is now open for the Keystone State Railroad Association (KSRRA) Rail Freight Conference, which will be held April 15-16, 2020 in Lancaster, Penn.

The conference’s social events include a golf outing, evening reception and a Strasburg Rail Road train excursion and shop tour. Presentations cover topics related to precision scheduled railroading, marketing, railroading careers and autonomous trucking.

Discounted early registration rates end March 13. Follow the link for more information or to register.

Click here for a listing of industry events.

Views & News is published by American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association. Please contact Amy Krouse, editor, with questions or comments.