CONNECTIONS Convention Raises the Bar on Education; Installs New Leadership; Recognizes Excellence With Awards

ASLRRA’s annual CONNECTIONS Convention, held April 6-9 in Orlando, Fla., featured 36 educational sessions for 1,700 representatives of the short line and regional railroad industry, installed a new chairman and vice chairman, and honored the industry’s highest achievers.

The three-dozen education sessions were each geared toward a specific industry category such as marketing, technology, and human resources, ensuring that attendees could maximize their experience by learning more about topics most relevant to their particular positions. Nearly 200 exhibitors provided opportunities for education in the Expo Hall.

Keynote speakers included Patrick Fuchs, Surface Transportation Board Member, and Louisa Fernandez-Willey, Senior Economist, AAR who provided forward-looking views of the industry and the challenges ahead.

At the ASLRRA member meeting, Doc Claussen, Vice Chairman of Gulf & Ohio Railways was installed as chairman, while Stefan Loeb, Executive Vice President & Chief Commercial Officer at Watco Companies LLC, was named vice chairman. Shea McLaughlin, National Account Manager - Railroad Signaling Division of CDL Electric, was elected to the Board of Directors to serve a two-year term representing Associate Business Members. He replaces Steven Youschak, Executive Vice President of ARE. Judy Petry, President and General Manager, Farmrail System, Inc. was thanked and honored for her recent service as ASLRRA Chairman. Save the Date for CONNECTIONS 2020: May 2-5, 2020 in Grapevine, Texas.

Convention Awards Recognize Noteworthy People, Companies

ASLRRA also presented its annual awards to railroads and individual employees during the convention’s General Sessions. President and CEO of Anacostia Rail Holdings Company Peter Gilbertson was the recipient of the 2019 Thomas L. Schlosser Distinguished Service Award for over 30 years of service to the short line industry. As the former chairman of Regional Railroads of America, he pushed for the merger between the RRA and the American Short Line Association that resulted in today’s ASLRRA.

Cleo Johnson, Jr., maintenance-of-way foreman at Mississippi Export Railroad, won the Safety Person of the Year award for his significant contribution to building a culture of safety at MSE, built on Johnson’s willingness to lead by example.

The Safety Professional of the Year award went to David Nagy, executive director of safety at Springfield Terminal d/b/a Pan Am Railway. His accomplishments include the development of training programs for personnel and community first responders, and his work to build relationships with local police and fire departments.
The Delaware-Lackawanna Railroad, Lake State Railway Company and Texas & New Mexico Railway each won an ASLRRA Business Development Award for their achievements in leveraging the uniqueness of their operation and its partners to deliver customer value, and the Buckingham Branch Railroad Company won the Veterans Recruitment Award for its significant efforts to recruit, hire and retain employees who are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces.

ASLRRA also thanked outgoing Board Chair Judy Petry for her service, especially in guiding the Association through its recent search for a new president.

**Association Signs on to Two Letters Advising Against Border Closure**

Reacting to President Donald Trump’s recent threats to completely close the border between the U.S. and Mexico, ASLRRA joined a number of organizations in signing letters to government officials outlining the harmful effects of such a move.

One letter, addressed to economic adviser Larry Kudlow and White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney with copies sent to the U.S. secretaries of commerce, the treasury and homeland security, was signed by groups like the Association of Global Automakers, the National Grain and Feed Association and the American Association of Exporters and Importers.

The letter emphasized the need for all cross-border freight to be allowed to flow unimpeded by either truck or rail. It highlighted the potential harm to the U.S. economy closure could inflict, affecting millions of workers and costing the automobile, agriculture, chemical and other industries billions of dollars.

While the president ultimately said he would not go through with a full border closure prior to the letter’s delivery, the continued threat of a slowdown at the border prompted letter signers to proceed with submitting the document to the White House.

The second letter ASLRRA signed, directed to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, President Trump and members of Congress, pointed out that U.S. trade with Mexico exceeds $1.7 billion daily, and nearly half a million workers, students, shoppers, tourists and others cross the border legally each day.
PHMSA Issues Notice of Emergency Waiver Order for Nebraska and Iowa Disasters

On March 29 the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration issued an emergency waiver order to those conducting operations under the direction of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 7 or United States Coast Guard (USCG) Eighth District within the Nebraska and Iowa disaster area.

The waiver supports the EPA and USCG in taking appropriate actions to prepare for, respond to and recover from a threat to public health, welfare or the environment caused by actual or potential oil and hazardous materials incidents resulting from the Nebraska and Iowa disasters.

PHMSA's Administrator has determined that regulatory relief is in the public interest and necessary to ensure the safe transportation in commerce of hazardous materials while the EPA and USCG execute their recovery and cleanup efforts in the disaster areas.

The order is effective immediately and shall remain in effect for 60 days from the date of issuance.

ASLRRA’s Gelnar to Join TSA Committee as Voting Member

ASLRRA Vice President of Safety and Compliance J.R. Gelnar will serve as a voting member representing freight rail on the Transportation Security Administration's newly formed Surface Transportation Security Advisory Committee. The committee will advise TSA on surface transportation security issues.

Voting members represent each mode of surface transportation, including passenger and freight rail, mass transit, highways, buses and trucking. Each voting member serves a two-year term, which can be extended until the TSA administrator appoints a successor.

Nonvoting members include representatives from federal departments and agencies and serve in an advisory capacity. The committee will meet at least twice a year, with one of those meetings open to the public.

FRA Issues Final Rule Regarding Railroad Noise Emission Compliance Regulations

On April 15 the Federal Railroad Administration published a final rule in the Federal Register eliminating the need for certain railroads to display a badge noting the railroads' compliance with noise emission standards.

The rule, which goes into effect immediately, will reduce economic burdens on the railroad industry and is predicted to save $1 million over a 20-year period. The only comment received on the initial proposal, which supported the FRA’s move, came from ASLRRA and the Association of American Railroads.

Surface Transportation Board Releases More Demurrage Hearing Details

The Surface Transportation Board has announced more details for its May 22 public hearing on railroad demurrage and accessorial charges. The hearing will begin at 9:30 a.m., in the Main Hearing Room (Room 101) of the U.S. International Trade Commission in Washington, D.C.

The STB sent letters to Class I railroads requesting information about quarterly revenue from demurrage and accessorial charges. Read the STB’s letters and responses from railroads here.
carriers are required to appear at the hearing through company officials, and must submit certain information to the STB by May 1.

All others interested in participating in the hearing must submit written testimony by May 8, and anyone wanting to file written submissions but who will not appear at the hearing must do so by that same day. Interested participants are encouraged to address topics that include their recent experience with demurrage and accessorial charges and the impact of changes in Class I carrier policies.

Executive Orders Seek to Minimize Infrastructure Red Tape

President Donald Trump signed two executive orders April 10 that aim to streamline the permit process for pipeline and other infrastructure projects.

The first order calls for the Environmental Protection Agency to review a part of the Clean Water Act requiring certification from individual states for applicants seeking federal permits for energy infrastructure projects that could pollute protected waters.

In addition, the order seeks to make it easier to transport natural gas through means other than pipelines, specifically making a change to a Department of Transportation safety regulation to allow approved railroad tank cars to ship natural gas in liquid form.

The second order gives the president sole responsibility for issuing, denying or altering permits for infrastructure projects crossing U.S. borders.

In response to the president’s executive orders, ASLRRA welcomes efforts to streamline infrastructure project and permit processes and enable companies to bring products to market more quickly. ASLRRA particularly supports allowing movement of liquified natural gas by rail, which is the safest surface mode of transportation for this product and could ease propane shortage issues in parts of the U.S.

Hotel Blocks are Sold Out, But Plenty of Room Remains for Those Wanting to Speak Out for Railroads in D.C.

All of ASLRRA’s room blocks for the annual Railroad Day on Capitol Hill on May 8 may be sold out, but that should not discourage people from making their way to Washington, D.C. to meet with lawmakers and talk about the issues important to the railroad industry.

By speaking to lawmakers in person, participants show the real people whose livelihoods are affected by the laws being passed in Congress. Railroad Day begins with check-in, followed by Congressional
staff appointments and an evening reception at Union Station. Follow the link above for more information, including a list of other hotels in the area, or to register.

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**ASLRRA Announcements**

**New York Times Article Brings Railroad’s Contributions to the Forefront**

A recent New York Times article profiles ASLRRA member New York & Atlantic Railway (NYA), focusing on the company’s role in moving freight through New York City and the efforts being taken by city officials to improve the train’s corridors in order to move freight from trucks to rail.

Trucks currently carry about 90 percent of New York City’s freight, and rail lines only 2 percent. With city roads at peak capacity, NYA is being seen as a crucial part of plans to ease congestion and pollution while enabling further economic growth.

The article also describes NYA’s operations, such as how the railway’s 60 employees – including eight train crews – move roughly 30,000 cars a year on rail lines shared with the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), the nation’s busiest commuter rail.

A key theme of the article is the relative anonymity in which NYA operates. As NYA engineer Alex Raia said, commuters are often surprised to see freight cars passing through their LIRR stations. This behind-the-scenes work is understood by many in the freight rail industry as many Americans, especially in urban areas, are unfamiliar with the daily contributions these railroads make to the national economy.

As an association advocating for the short line and regional railroad industry, ASLRRA can help its members tell their stories to a wider audience. Contact Director of Strategic Communications Amy Krouse at akrouse@aslrra.org or (202) 585-3438 with questions or for guidance regarding how to be featured in local news media.

**Progressive Railroading Magazine Features Profile of New ASLRRA President**

A recent article in Progressive Railroading profiles ASLRRA’s new president Chuck Baker, talking to him about his motivation in taking the position and his plans for the Association’s future.

Baker’s decision to leave his former position as president of the National Railroad Construction and Maintenance Association came down to “timing and fit,” which ultimately worked out for Baker.

“Short lines are a compelling story. They preserve rail service in small towns and the heartland,” Baker said in the article. “It’s a great story, and one I’ve shared in speeches and during presentations or meetings. Now, I get to do that full time. It’s really appealing.”

While Baker is not planning any radical changes to the Association, his particular areas of focus include regulatory issues, communications and educational programs and member services. One of his first priorities is lobbying for the passage of the 45G tax credit, which gives short line and regional railroads 50 cents back for every dollar spent on track rehabilitation and maintenance projects.

After ASLRRA’s annual CONNECTIONS Convention, the next big project requiring Baker’s attention is the annual Railroad Day on the Hill, a lobbying event allowing members of the railroad industry to meet with lawmakers in Washington, D.C. to advocate for railroad interests.
“In a good way, we are in D.C. for a reason, to work on regulatory issues,” said Baker. “I want to make sure we’re doing so effectively.”

**Progressive Railroading Recognizes ASLRA’s Gitchell as a 2019 Rising Star**

ASLRA’s Director of Regulatory Affairs Crystal Gitchell has been named one of *Progressive Railroading*’s 2019 Rising Stars, recognizing her as an up-and-coming leader in the railroad industry.

The 2019 Rising Stars Award goes to those under the age of 40 who have had a positive impact on his or her company, organization, department or team. Each of this year’s 25 winners has made important contributions to the railroad industry, reached significant career achievements, demonstrated leadership and/or has been active in professional associations and the community.

*Progressive Railroading* will publish profiles of each winner online and in its September issue. A dinner honoring the winners will be held in July during the American Association of Railroad Superintendents’ annual meeting.

ASLRA also congratulates those from its member companies who join Gitchell as 2019 Rising Stars. They are:

- Cathrin Banks, Maryland and Delaware Railroad Co.
- Jeffrey Brantz, Metra
- Landon Downes, Balfour Beatty Rail
- Mickaela Doyle, Watco Cos. LLC
- Kimia Khatami, Pacific Harbor Line Inc.
- Scott Schiemann, Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad Co.

**Chambers, Conlon & Hartwell Hires New Partner**

Chambers, Conlon and Hartwell, a Washington, D.C. lobbying firm that represents ASLRA, welcomes new partner Channon Hanna. Hanna will focus on various issues for ASLRA and will also work with commuter rail and public transit clients.

“Channon will be a great addition to the already strong CC&H team. Her working knowledge of the Senate Commerce Committee, which has significant jurisdiction over federal railroad legislation, will greatly benefit the short line industry,” ASLRA President Chuck Baker said in a press release.

Prior to joining CC&H, Hanna was director of government relations at Van Scoyoc Associates, managing transportation and infrastructure issues for a variety of clients.

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**New Members**
ASLRRA is pleased to welcome five new members.

**Solaris Power Systems**, based in Houston, Texas, is a provider of trackside signal batteries. It can also provide batteries for other stationary UPS, telecom and communication system applications. Our contact is National Rail Power Manager Kyle Pelt.

**White Pass & Yukon Route**, based in Skagway, Alaska, operates an excursion train known as “The Scenic Railway of the World.” Originally built in 1898 during the Klondike Gold Rush, the narrow-gauge railroad is an International Historic Civil Engineering Landmark. ASLRRA is happy to have this tourist line rejoin the Association. Our contact is Superintendent Mark Taylor.

**Rail Partners Management Group, LLC**, based in Centennial, Colo., is a rail transportation investment, management and development company that invests across the following rail industry segments: short line, regional and industrial rail operations; rail-served transload, terminal and logistics operations; rail equipment assets and services; and rail infrastructure and development assets. Our contact is Managing Partner Timothy Eklund.

Two affiliates of Rail Partners Management Group also joined ASLRRA:

**All Trans Terminal Companies, LLC**, based in Centennial, Colo., provides complete transloading and third-party logistics services through two locations at or near the Port of Houston. The Port Houston terminal, located at City Docks, specializes in rail shipment of all breakbulk steel goods. The Galena Park Railport has over 110 railcar spots and is open to a diverse mix of commodities including pipe, grain, lumber and plastics. Our contact is Managing Partner Timothy Eklund.

**Tactical Cleaning Company**, based in Chicago, Ill., has provided full-service railcar cleaning, repair, sand blasting and flaring services to the railcar industry since 2004. Its nationwide network of strategically located facilities ensures it has locations to meet equipment owners and users every need. Our contact is Managing Partner Craig Bargowski.

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**ASLRRA Events**

**Webinars**

**Tax Reform Traps and Issues** - 5/15/2019

This webinar will discuss some of the tax traps and pitfalls related to the 2017 Tax Reform Act and explain how to deal with them.

Click here for more ASLRRA events.

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**Industry Events**
Rail x Tech Conference to Showcase the Latest Advancements in Freight Rail Technology

The Association of American Railroads will hold its annual Rail x Tech conference May 7 at the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C.

The event gives participants a look at the different types of technology that will have an impact on freight rail. Companies will give participants a look at the training simulators, data-gathering tools and advanced testing techniques railroads use to maximize safety and efficiency. A lunch-time panel discussion will also discuss innovation across the transportation sector.

ASLRRA member Genesee & Wyoming Inc. will represent short line railroads at Rail x Tech, demonstrating its portable rail defect detector technology to participants. Click here 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.