ASLRA Will Induct First Three Honorees Into New Short Line Railroad Industry Hall of Fame

ASLRA will honor three outstanding members of the railroad industry as the inaugural class to be inducted into the Association’s new Short Line Railroad Industry Hall of Fame. The ceremony will take place at this year’s Connections convention.

Each year, a panel of five industry leaders will select three honorees for the hall of fame. ASLRA wants to recognize those visionaries whose dedication, commitment and achievement best exemplify the qualities of innovation, entrepreneurialism, perseverance and service that have advanced the short line railroad industry.

“As an industry, we have been blessed to stand on the shoulders of strong leaders who have driven our continued success,” said Chuck Baker, President of ASLRA. “The Hall of Fame idea came from the membership who wanted to recognize the pioneers of our industry. Each year we will induct three individuals, one of whom will be posthumously into the Hall of Fame. We will recognize the inaugural class at ASLRA’s Connections convention this May.”

The 2020 Short Line Railroad Industry Hall of Fame inductees are:

Eugene (Gene) H. Blabey, II - Chairman and Managing Partner, Western New York & Pennsylvania Railroad, LLC (WNYP); Director, Arkansas & Missouri Railroad
Blabey combined a career in journalism with a 50-year involvement with the short line railroad industry. After retiring as United Press International’s Vice President and General Manager for Europe, Blabey went on to form three short line railroads including the Livonia, Avon & Lakeview, the Maryland & Delaware Railroad and the Virginia & Maryland Railroad. Blabey has served the ASLRA as a member of the Board of Directors representing the Eastern Region, on the Passenger and Legislative Policy Committees and the Railroad Industry Working Group.

Mortimer (Mort) B. Fuller, III - Executive Chairman, Genesee & Wyoming, Inc.
Through the execution of Fuller’s extraordinary vision to acquire a controlling interest in his family business and, over his 40-year tenure as CEO and Chairman, G&W grew from a 14-mile short line railroad in upstate New York with 1977 revenues of $4.4 million to a portfolio of 122 freight railroads worldwide with 2017 revenues of $2.2 billion. Fuller launched the first Railroad Day on the Hill, initially for short lines, an event which has become one of the most effective railroad industry lobbying events in Washington, DC. Fuller has served the ASLRA as a member of the Board of Directors representing the Eastern Region, and was the 2018 recipient of ASLRA’s Thomas L. Schlosser Distinguished Service Award.

Marjorie P. (Maggie) Silver (posthumously) - Former Chairman of the Board, Pinsly Railroad Company
Silver’s 40-year career culminating as Chairman of the company her father founded was a first for a woman in railroading. Silver was a member of the board of the American Short Line Railroad
Association, ASLRA’s predecessor organization, and later served on the ASLRA Board of Directors, remaining active in association and board activities after her 2007 retirement from the railroad. She also was a past president of the New England Railroad Club and held a leadership role at the Massachusetts Railroad Association.

**CDC Issues Recommendations for Proper Workplace Cleaning, Disinfection to Prevent COVID-19 Spread**

*Note: As of today, there are no plans to cancel or postpone ASLRA’s Connections convention, scheduled for May 2-5 in Grapevine, Texas. ASLRA is monitoring the situation and will provide updates in the event of any changes.*

In addition to its previously issued interim guidance to help businesses and employers deal with the coronavirus disease, or COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also published interim recommendations for environmental cleaning and disinfection.

The CDC’s guidance is intended for community, non-healthcare facilities with rooms or areas where a person with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 may have visited. Information includes timing and location of surface cleaning and disinfection; techniques and solutions to use when cleaning; and proper hand hygiene and personal protective equipment use.

Additional considerations for employers include ensuring employees are familiar with COVID-19 symptoms and providing appropriate training for all cleaning staff. For more information on the disease itself, including general information, situation updates and travel guidelines, go to the CDC’s coronavirus disease 2019 page [here](#).

ASLRA’s [website](#) also features important links regarding the virus on its Disaster Preparedness landing page under the Safety & Compliance tab. Included is a link to an article by the Transportation Research Board titled “Transportation in the face of communicable disease,” which offers more information regarding crisis planning and response, emergency preparedness and legal issues.
ASLRA Committee Develops Locomotive Interchange Inspection Forms

The ASLRA Mechanical Committee, with input from Class I’s, has developed 4-axle or 6-axle locomotive interchange inspection forms to assist member railroads in complying with Class I railroad requirements.

In the past, there were multiple forms with varying requirements depending on the Class I railroad. The committee reviewed all the existing Class I forms and consolidated all the requirements. After multiple communications with Class I’s, two consolidated forms were developed and provided to committee members.

Over the past several months, the forms have been provided to and utilized by interchanging railroads, reducing inconsistencies, simplifying the process and providing a timelier interchange, especially regarding defect detection. These forms are on the ASLRA website under the Safety and Compliance tab. Members must be logged in to access the documents. Please contact JR Gelnar at jrgelnar@aslrra.org with any questions.

Railroad Retirement Board Website Features Variety of Tax Information

This tax season, the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) reminds its customers that the best source of federal income tax and railroad retirement benefit information is the agency’s website, rrb.gov.

The Benefits tab on the RRB’s main menu features a section titled Income Tax. There, users can find general tax publications, news releases and articles, downloadable forms, and a link to the myRRB website. On the myRRB site, customers can request copies of RRB-issued income tax statements, as well as access other information.

FMCSA Approves Request for Exemption from Certain HOS Rules for Some Railroad Employees

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has granted an exemption to ASLRA member R.J. Corman Railroad Services, Cranemasters, Inc. and the National Railroad Construction and Maintenance Association (NRC) from certain hours-of-service (HOS) rules for commercial motor vehicle operators. ASLRA is pleased with the FMCSA’s decision.

The exemption will allow railroad employees subject to HOS rules to respond to unplanned or emergency events occurring outside or extending beyond the employee’s normal work hours. The FMCSA determined that approving the exemption would increase safety more than if the request were denied.

According to the exemption, which was recently published in the Federal Register, these employees will no longer be prevented from “driving a property-carrying commercial motor vehicle (CMV) after the 14th hour after coming on duty and driving after accumulating 60 hours of on-duty time in 7 consecutive days (60-hour rule), or 70 hours of on-duty time in 8 consecutive days (70-hour rule).”
Thank You to All Who Joined ASLRRA at Railroad Day 2020

ASLRRA thanks all those who participated in this year’s Railroad Day on Capitol Hill on March 4, helping bring attention to the key issues facing railroads of all sizes.

The 450 rail-industry employees who traveled to Washington, D.C. to join the over 300 meetings with U.S. policymakers sent a unified message that emphasized permanence for the 45G tax credit, a request to retain the current limits to truck size and weight on our nation’s roads, and support the current balanced economic regulatory environment.

“The U.S. freight rail industry is the world’s premier freight rail system and is almost entirely privately funded,” said ASLRRA President Chuck Baker in a press release. “It is imperative that Congress understand our challenges so that policymakers can ensure that the industry remains a competitive, effective, and environmentally sustainable form of transportation, connecting industry and small towns to the U.S. and world economies.”

ASLRRA Announcements

Even After Three Decades Norma Torres, Head of Brownsville & Rio Grande International Railway, is Not Slowing Down

To further tell the short line story, ASLRRA profiles some of the movers and shakers in the railroad industry.

Spending half a lifetime at a company is not common these days, but Norma Torres, president and chief operating officer at ASLRRA member Brownsville & Rio Grande International Railway (BRG), is used to defying convention. When she was picked to lead BRG in 2001, Torres was the first female president of a short line in Texas.

A recent profile on the Progressive Railroading website notes the myriad ways BRG has grown under Torres’s watch. Monthly carloads have risen from 300 to over 3,000. The railroad has not had a Federal Railroad Administration-reportable derailment since 2002, and the number of employees has more than tripled to 37.

In 2018 BRG set a carload record at 46,043 units and experienced an almost 20 percent revenue increase and 25 percent carload gain. And in 2019, to top it off, OmniTRAX, which acquired BRG in 2014, bestowed on the company its Railroad of the Year Award.

All of these accomplishments come as Torres is set to celebrate 30 years with BRG, and at a time when the Port of Brownville, which BRG serves, will gain a new $1.6 billion steel mill and distribution facility. The Big River Steel facility will join those of Ternium S.A. and West Plains LLC, two other major customers for BRG.

Though many are quick to credit Torres’s leadership, knowledge and passion as a key drivers behind BRG’s success, Torres herself points back to BRG’s employees and those at OmniTRAX for their contributions.
Indeed, maintaining a strong safety culture requires an all-hands-on-deck approach. BRG encourages employees to report potential safety hazards and rewards those who do. Torres also notes the importance of the company’s management team in emphasizing safe practices.

As Torres says in the profile, “Safety is No. 1, but customer service is close behind it,” and building relationships with customers is part of the short line culture that enables Torres and BRG to maximize growth. The railroad works closely with its customers, and daily communication and face-to-face meetings are crucial.

Some of the biggest challenges for Torres involve keeping up with the company’s growth, making sure infrastructure is in good condition and adding motive power as needed to meet demand. Future plans include building a unit train track and more tracks at the port.

Last year BRG acquired two road locomotives to expand its road unit fleet to five, and if projections for increased carloads holds true, Torres will have enough work to keep her busy for many years to come.

**Apply for a Scholarship to Attend the Connections Convention, or Donate Items to Help Support Scholarships**

Applications are being accepted for scholarships that will send up to four small-railroad employees to this year’s Connections convention at the Gaylord Texan in Grapevine, Texas.

Aside from being an ASLRRA member-railroad employee in good standing, eligible recipients cannot have attended a Connections convention in the past three years, and the member railroad should have fewer than 15 employees and less than $3 million annual revenue.

Each scholarship, which is paid for by ASLRRA’s Short Line Education Fund, will cover registration fees, three nights at the Gaylord Texan and travel expenses up to $500. Interested applicants must submit a completed form via email to Sabrina Waiss at swaiss@aslrra.org by March 20.

Anyone interested in supporting these scholarships and its recipients can do so by donating to the silent auction held during the convention. Proceeds from the auction go to the Short Line Education Fund, which supports the convention scholarships as well as a range of high-priority industry education, communications and research initiatives.

To donate, simply complete the 2020 Auction Donation Form. All donations are welcome, and because the Short Line Education Fund is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, donations are tax-deductible. For more information or to discuss a donation, please contact Sabrina Waiss.

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**ASLRRA Out and About**

**ASLRRA Staff Attends League of Railway Women Networking Event**

The League of Railway Women (LRW) held a networking event on March 3, dedicated to connecting and cultivating women in rail. The event was also intended to provide some additional preparation for LRW members attending Railroad Day on Capitol Hill on March 4.

Several ASLRRA staff members are involved with the League of Railway Women. Senior Vice President of Safety and Regulatory Policy Jo Strang was the event’s keynote speaker. General Counsel Sarah Yurasko is LRW’s vice president, and Assistant Vice President of Legislative and Regulatory Policy Crystal Gitchell is the scholarship chairperson.
Kathy Keeney, LRW Hall of Fame inductee and ASLRA Vice President of Membership and Business development, also attended the event, as did ASLRA Senior Vice President of Education and Business Services Sabrina Waiss and Accounting Manager Julie Duriga.

Participants in the League of Railway Women’s March 3 networking event gather for a photo. Several ASLRA staff members attended, and the Association’s Senior Vice President of Safety and Regulatory Policy Jo Strang (center, in red blazer) was the event’s keynote speaker.

Baker, Yurasko and Ogborn Join Member Railroads at Meeting with STB Members

ASLRA President Chuck Baker, along with ASLRA Consultant and CTITF Chair Mike Ogborn, and General Counsel Sarah Yurasko attended a March 3 meet and greet with members of the Surface Transportation Board (STB).

Representatives from six member railroads joined Baker, Yurasko and Ogborn at the event. The companies involved were Genesee & Wyoming, Watco, Gulf & Ohio Railways, R.J. Corman, Pan Am and Iowa Interstate Railroad.
ASLRRA Webinars

ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinars Feature Regulatory Topics for Employers

One area of focus for past ASLRRA webinars includes regulatory topics on worker-related issues. ASLRRA’s on-demand webinar library features several programs discussing employee health and safety issues, such as:

- Drug & Alcohol Rules and Regulations (2016)
- Protecting Roadway Workers from Zika, West Nile, Tick Bites and Other Warm-Weather Threats (2016)

Those who may have missed the webinars can still view them. All are available as recordings in ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinar library, and ASLRRA members can access the recordings for free. Non-members can have unlimited on-demand webinar access with the purchase of a 90-day or one-year subscription.

In addition to on-demand webinars, ASLRRA is always working to provide its members with top-notch education, bringing industry and subject-matter experts right to your desk. Find out about our upcoming live webinars below, and use the links to learn more or register.

Upcoming Webinars

Emergency Docket Waivers - March 12, 2020

The FRA administrator can activate an emergency relief docket if extreme conditions constitute an emergency event to railroad operations. This webinar will explain emergency dockets and provide instruction on how to file a waiver petition for temporary relief from certain safety regulations. ASLRRA’s Senior Vice President of Safety and Regulatory Policy Jo Strang and Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar will conduct the webinar.

45G - What to Do Now That It’s Renewed - March 25, 2020

45G has been renewed for five years, and the renewal comes with some special rules relating to retroactivity, accrual versus cash-basis taxpayers, 45G expenditures versus income tax expenditures, and more. In this webinar, David Ayoub and Rick Tidd, partners-in-charge at Bowers & Company, CPAs, will explain these rules and discuss how short lines can take advantage of this important credit.

Hot off the Press: What’s New at the STB? - March 26, 2020

ASLRRA General Counsel Sarah Yurasko and Baker & Miller Associate Attorney Crystal Zorbaugh will explore the structure of the Surface Transportation Board (STB), provide information on the board’s key players, discuss recent developments impacting the industry, and preview the most pressing issues before the board in the coming months.
Employer Training Resources: Registered Apprenticeships - April 22, 2020 (Note New Date)

SPRING President Michele Malski and FASTPORT Executive Director of Military Engagement and Apprenticeships Dave Harrison will explain the benefits of establishing a federally registered apprenticeship program and how to start one.

Click here for more ASLarra events.

Industry Events

FRA Offers Free Track and Railroad Workplace Safety Symposium in May

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will host a free safety event geared toward track maintenance and construction employees in the railroad industry.

This first-ever FRA Track & Railroad Workplace Safety Symposium will be held May 19-21 in Louisville, Ky. Approximately 180 FRA track inspectors and specialists are expected to attend, and the event is geared to employees of all experience levels, including track inspectors, maintenance foremen, roadmasters or other track supervisors, construction managers and senior-level engineering managers.

Breakout sessions will cover topics such as derailment prevention, rail defect detection trends and best practices, and FRA regulatory guidelines. The FRA is also welcoming recommendations for other breakout session topics, and is seeking subject-matter experts to lead various sessions.

Registration is now open, but space is limited to the first 700 people who sign up. Follow the link above to learn more, submit ideas and 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.