This past year has been exciting and challenging for the Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad.

Exciting in that our company went the entire year without a reportable injury or derailment. That is a tremendous accomplishment by the entire CSS team. It took a concerted peer-to-peer effort by everyone to reinforce safe work practices and rules compliance. Our customers also contributed to this effort by maintaining their spur tracks and facilities, making it safe for our crews. Many thanks to everyone for doing your part and contributing to our success.

We added new customers in 2015. JBC Rail Services set up shop in the Midwest Warehousing property at Kingsbury in La Porte County. JBC has rehabilitated several miles of track within the old Kingsbury Ordinance Plant and is marketing the site for various rail served purposes. Scrap Metal Services commenced shipments from their facility in New Carlisle. Construction began on a new a new spur track to serve Hickman, Williams & Company, to be located between Michigan City and La Porte. On behalf of the entire CSS team, we thank our new customers for their business and our existing customers for their continued support of our services.

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CSS celebrates safety record
Mechanical Department achieves 3 years injury free

The Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad reached a milestone on March 18, 2016, when they celebrated three years of no FRA reportable injuries in their Mechanical Department.

The Mechanical Department’s main function is to inspect, maintain and repair rail cars and locomotives operating on the CSS. They also provide inspection services for high value dimensional loads and equipment for safe movement over the railroad.

Employees of the Mechanical Department are represented by the Transportation Communication Union/IAM, Brotherhood of Railway Carmen division.

Bruce Kehe, CSS’s chief mechanical officer, has managed the Mechanical Department for three and a half years. Bruce said, “During my entire career, this is the most conscientious group of workers I’ve worked with, not only in terms of productivity but also of safety. It’s a real pleasure to work with these guys every day.”

Several of the changes that Bruce has championed during his tenure have reduced the risk of injury and made the work more efficient. Examples of these changes include the purchase of a 15-ton mobile crane, recoiling compressed air hose reels, ergonomic storage tables, installation of a new locomotive exhaust hood, as well as the updating of repair shops lighting and electrical service.

CSS has promoted a strong safety culture through the implementation of some new programs. The ACE (Actively Caring Employees) program was introduced in 2011 to support a culture where peers coach each other by providing rewarding and corrective feedback. Also introduced was the Safety Challenge Coin contest, where an employee is expected to present a safety challenge coin every time they speak to a supervisor about safety. Points are issued and the employee with the most safety challenge points at the end of the year wins a prize.

Bruce said, “Upper management stressed the importance of safety and then supported us by giving us the resources we needed to make the shop safer. This commitment fosters a positive environment, as everyone sees that the company is serious in promoting safety.”

David Luchene, a CSS carman and one of the company’s ACE representatives, stated, “I’m happy that all of us can do this. Everyone feels good about this accomplishment. We also feel the gratitude from the managers, and this makes us feel even more proud of this accomplishment.”

Anacostia Rail Holdings’ Chief Safety and Compliance Officer, Tom Leopold, said, “I have been very impressed with the leadership and strong focus on safety that Bruce Kehe has shown since taking over management of the CSS Mechanical Department. The safety culture in the shop is one of pride, professionalism and, most importantly, keeping people safe.
An Anacostia Company

CSS earns ASLRRA 2015 Jake Award with Distinction

Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad has earned a significant rail safety award. The American Short Line & Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA) has honored CSS with a Jake Award with Distinction for 2015. The award will be given at the ASLRRA annual meeting in National Harbor, Maryland in April, 2016. The award is bestowed to member railroads with no Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) reportable injuries for the previous year.

Three additional Anacostia Rail Holdings railroads also earned safety awards: Northern Lines Railway received a Jake Award with Distinction while Louisville & Indiana Railroad and Pacific Harbor Line both won Jake Awards by finishing the calendar year with an FRA frequency rate less than or equal to the industry average.

CSS was previously honored with a Jake Award in 2014.

The Jake Award Program was created by Lowell S. “Jake” Jacobson, a Railway Age “Railroader of the Year” recipient who wanted to recognize safety achievements in the short line railroad industry.

The ASLRRA Safety Committee adopted the Jake Awards in 1999, continuing to reward the high safety standards of the short line railroad industry.

Another exciting development was the startup of NIPSCO’s new flue gas desulfurization unit (also called a “scrubber”) at its Michigan City generating station, after a four month outage. Not only does this plant now meet the latest and strictest emission standards, a benefit we can all enjoy, but it secures the future of this plant, which is a major CSS customer and employer in Michigan City.

The year was challenging in that, overall, our coal business was soft. This reflected the multi-month outage at the Michigan City generating plant, as well as the fact that low natural gas prices reduced coal demand. This is a national trend. CSS remains focused on providing the best service possible to our coal customers while doing our utmost to develop new customers to further diversify our traffic base.

Finally, this will be my last column as leader of CSS. On February 29, 2016, we welcomed Todd Bjornstad as this railroad’s new president. Todd comes to us with 25 years of experience in the industry on both large and small railroads. He will be a great fit. I know he looks forward to meeting all of our employees and customers. I shall remain CEO of CSS for a transition period, and will then join our parent company, Anacostia Rail Holdings. I have had a very gratifying nearly six years at Chicago South Shore. Our employees and our customers are top flight. I am truly blessed.

From the desk of Andrew Fox

(continued from Page 1)

2015 Safety Challenge Coin winner

Every year, Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad conducts the Safety Challenge Coin contest, whereby employees are expected to carry a special safety challenge coin in their possession while at work. At any given time, while managers are discussing rules, safety concerns, or safety meetings; reviewing the rule of the week; performing check rides; or observing tests, they can prompt employees to present their safety coin. An additional benefit is bestowed when, in return, the employees prompt managers to present their own coin. Mike Shore, vice president of operations, keeps track of the points and, at the end of a calendar year, the points are tallied.

This year’s winner was Brian Zebell, a conductor for CSS. Brian picked up his prize, a 55” flat-screen television, in March.

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Kelly Sun was completing a Masters degree in Transportation Systems Analysis and Planning from Northwestern University when she came across the Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad’s internship opportunity. It sounded like an interesting opportunity, so she applied for the position.

The project involved completing the H-Tram model. It required populating a database with physical features that are present within 1000 feet of railroad tracks, such as fire police stations, hospitals, homes, schools, and arenas. It also takes into account physical characteristics such as railroad curves, signal locations, and speeds.

Kelly, a native of China and the daughter of a railway official, worked with Andrew Fox, then the president of CSS, to complete this project. Working off of railroad-provided data and from public sources, she was able to populate the database so that the model would run. The work involved reading and understanding track charts, as well as traveling to various locations to review city and county charts and graphs which were not accessible online.

“Her familiarity with railway engineering was invaluable to the project,” said Andrew. He added, “She completed the project in just three weeks. She did a superb job.”