

Washington Operation Lifesaver

Quarterly Volunteer Newsletter

From the State Coordinator By Kathy Hunter

Fall is here which means we can all catch our breath after a very busy summer of Operation Lifesaver events!

During the third quarter, volunteers made 17 presentations in front of 497 people. These include senior driver classes, elementary and middle school classes, and company family day events. We also staffed 18 public events, reaching 13,824 people. Our biggest event of the summer was the Spokane Interstate Fair which ran for ten days. Great work by everyone who helped out!

The most important component in all these events is you, the volunteer! Our ability to participate in major events, such as the Spokane and Chehalis fairs, comes down to having enough volunteers to cover the schedule. We are really short-handed outside of the immediate Puget Sound area and we need your help with recruiting. Spokane is down to a very small crew (small in numbers but big in heart) and our ability to participate in future fairs is questionable. Please talk to your friends and family about becoming an Operation Lifesaver volunteer, and joining us at special events just a few times a year. Information on volunteer opportunities is available at <https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/volunteer>.

While our safety message has traditionally been delivered face-to-face, again this year

we ran an extensive social media and billboard campaign which overlapped with Rail Safety Week. In addition, we purchased game-day program advertising with Eastern Washington University and University of Washington football and the Seattle Kraken hockey team. These game programs produce big advertising numbers. Look for our ads if you attend any of these games!



State Coordinator Kathy Hunter and her daughter Madison wear red for Rail Safety Week!

Every time we share our message, whether in person, on social media, or on a billboard, we plant a seed that we hope will someday sprout into a good decision for rail safety. Thank you for being part of our team and happy holidays to you and your family!

The View from the Cab

(We received this note recently from Tim Fredericksen. Tim is an Amtrak engineer out of Portland, OR, and represents Amtrak as a member of the Washington Operation Lifesaver Executive Committee.)



“I had a trespasser strike last night (in Oregon) and it reminded me how traumatic it is for everyone involved. Luckily, I saw the guys right away and put it in emergency and only struck one of them. The EMT’s were there quickly and while injured he’ll survive. I’m thankful for you and all the people involved in Operation Lifesaver. Keep up the important work.”

Thanks,
Tim Fredricksen

Fiesta de Salud – Engaging with Rural Latino Communities

By Mike Turcott

I often wonder if we are doing everything possible to get our message to where it needs to be heard, or if we are just “picking the low-hanging fruit” by going to local model train shows or other routine, familiar events. What are we doing to reach people who don’t necessarily know about trains,

and for whom English might not be their first language?

I realized that we really needed to be more engaged with the Spanish-speaking communities across the state, especially in the Yakima Valley and Columbia Basin areas. I began contacting various organizations and smaller cities, looking for events where WAOL would be a good fit.

I was pleasantly surprised when we were contacted by Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) of Washington and invited to participate in Fiestas de Salud (Health Fairs) in Othello and Royal City. OIC of Washington is an economic development and career training agency, headquartered in Yakima. Since 1971, OIC has served black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities, as well as low-income and underrepresented individuals and families across rural Washington State.



At the Othello event I met Ofelia (pictured above) representing Unidos Nueva Alianza Foundation (United New Alliance or UNA). UNA Foundation serves nine central Washinton counties that represent Hispanic/Latinx, immigrants, refugees,

agriculture/farm workers, women & men, LGBTQ+, low-income, disabled, and systemically marginalized and underserved communities.

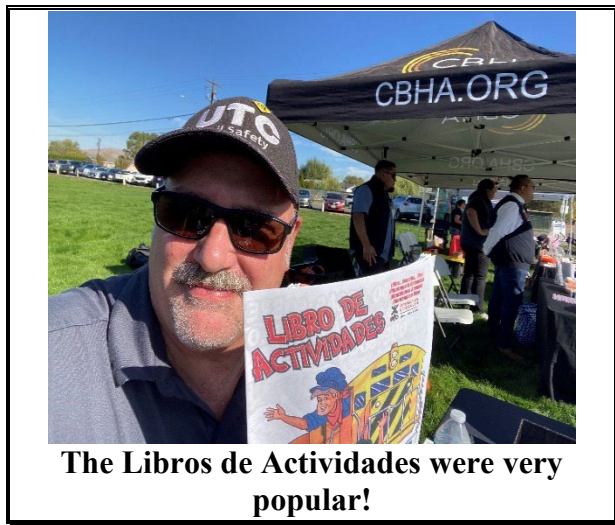
I was a little nervous because my Spanish is extremely limited. I found (no surprise) that ALL of the kids speak English and are just as fascinated with our rail safety wheel as kids anywhere else. For some of the adults, English was not their first language, but I found that a smile and “buenas tardes” (good afternoon) goes a long way to making a new friend.

Ofelia also invited us to her organization’s Resource and Health Fairs for Farm Working Communities in Mattawa and Mabton. ¡Perfecto!

A few of the adults liked the Spanish version of the brochures “*Myths or Reality*” and “*Key Safety Tips.*” However, my observation here and at other events is that brochures overall don’t seem to be as popular as they used to be.



¡Delicioso!



The Libros de Actividades were very popular!

Operation Lifesaver, Inc. has several educational items available in Spanish. I ordered 200 activity books in Spanish (*Libro de Actividades*) just to try them out. I found that these are very popular items at events everywhere, not just in Spanish-speaking communities!



Traditional dancing on a beautiful fall day in Royal City

These are really fun events and I’m looking forward to more of these in 2024.

Remembering Wayne

Langbehn

By Mike Turcott

I met Wayne shortly after becoming an Operation Lifesaver Presenter in the late 1990s. I was struck by Wayne's professionalism, his wisdom, and his commitment to the program. I regret not being able to work more events with Wayne. Wayne would have turned 100 years old this year and it is hard to believe he's been gone for more than 10 years.

What follows is Wayne's obituary, reprinted verbatim, sent to me by OLAV Gary Emmons.

Wayne W. Langbehn loved railroading. And his passion for the vocation made it easy for him to stand before any group and warn them of the deadly perils of trespassing on railroad right-of-way or disregarding railroad highway warning signals.

"We really are going to miss Wayne," said WUTC's, Operation Lifesaver (O/L) director Bob Boston. "I'm not sure how many O/L briefings and presentations Wayne made during his 20-plus year tenure, but it has to be close to a thousand."

And, according to Boston, Wayne took his O/L briefing schedule as seriously and proudly as a railroad conductor would take his on-time train departure schedule.

"The trunk of his car was always filled with O/L presentation material—ready to go at any time or any place," Boston beamed. "He was the best."

Wayne didn't find railroading; it found him. Born to German immigrant farmers in the

small town of Tekoa (pronounced tee-koh, just south of Spokane), Washington, (August 12, 1923), Wayne didn't have the same interest in dirt farming as his dad. Growing up in the depression era, Wayne quickly observed that railroads were the mainstay of many small-town economies.



Wayne prepares to play for an audience at South Center Mall near Tukwila, WA on his birthday, August 12, 2001. Wayne said that the organ and railroading were the two favorite things in his life.

Gary Emmons photo.

"I remember Tekoa as a bustling railroad town, with lots of passenger train service, a roundhouse and a 24-hour a day telegraph office," Wayne once mused. "In fact, I've never told anyone this, but I first hired out with the Union Pacific as a telegraph operator at Tekoa. And I was a good one. But one day working second trick (4 pm to midnight shift) I got to talkin' to a brakeman and we compared paycheck amounts. My gosh. His check was double mine. The next day I applied for train service and got hired as an extra brakeman. I've liked my paychecks ever since," he beamed.

Wayne's railroad career migrated to the Seattle area. And after serving in the US Navy during the Korean conflict he ended

up working in and around Seattle in yard switching service, but occasionally catching the UP's Seattle to Portland passenger train (number 458 and number 457) as a conductor on the extra board. He was also a conductor/brakeman on the UP Local, servicing businesses and factories between Argo (south Seattle) and Fife.

"My interest in rail and public safety really started one spring afternoon in 1973," Wayne once reflected. "I was the conductor on the UP Local riding in our caboose between Sumner and Fife. We were traveling at track speed (about 45 MPH) when all of a sudden, I heard my engineer blowing the whistle in a panic and then I felt the train's air brakes go into emergency. And I heard this awful gnashing of metal sound. The train stopped abruptly. I got off the caboose and looked up near the head end. Through the cloud of dust, I saw a fully loaded dump truck sheared in half by the blunt power of our colliding GP-40 locomotive. What a mess! Thank goodness everyone walked away from the collision without any serious injuries."

He said that he made up his mind right then and there to spread the word about rail safety to as many as he could.

When Wayne retired from the UP, he remained very active in the railroad community serving as Washington's senior, premier O/L briefer, a docent on AMTRAK's Coast Starlite between Seattle and Portland, a Washington O/L sponsored outreach program 'school on the trains' coach to young school-aged children, and president of the UP's retirees club. His passion for railroading was equal to if not greater than his passion for playing the electronic organ. He loved good organ music!

O/L presenter and retired Air Force Colonel Gary Emmons accompanied Wayne on one his last O/L presentations at the Burien Fire House in 2010—during that community's Burien Days festivities.

"He always amazed me," Emmons said. "Even in his late 80s, he had more energy than a locomotive. He made sure everyone—child to adult—received an O/L handout followed by a stern word about being careful around trains and staying off the tracks. O/L won't be the same without him."

Wayne passed away on April 11, 2012. He was buried, with full military honors, at Tahoma National Cemetery, near Kent.

"It's hard to say how many lives Wayne saved with his rail safety briefings—maybe dozens or hundreds," Boston said. "But I know one thing for sure: Wayne W. Langbehn's commitment and passion for rail safety and getting the word out to the public at large will set a very high standard for the rest of us for years to come."



Wayne has a seat in the dome car of a Union Pacific Operation Lifesaver train at Fife, WA , Oct. 11, 2005.

Volunteer Event Scrapbook



