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PNR awarded for safety

Panhandle Northern Railroad in Borger has been awarded for its commitment to excellence and safety.

After reviewing several hundred nominations, yesterday the American Short Line & Regional Railroad Association, ASLRRA, named Sam Cotton, General Manager of PNR, as the ASLRRA 2010 Safety Person of the Year. To go along with that honor, ASLRRA also named the Panhandle Northern Railroad, LLC. the "most improved railroad." To make the accomplishments even more impressive, Managing Director of OmniTRAX, the company that provides management services to PNR, Mike Ogborn said that this is the first time in ASLRRA's history that both the General Manager of a railroad and the railroad itself have been simultaneously given the award.



Photo by Don Rice

Sam Cotton, left, General Manager of Panhandle Northern Railroad, is congratulated for making safety a priority by Mike Ogborn, Managing Director of OmniTRAX. Cotton and PNR were honored yesterday with two safety awards by the American Short Line & Regional Railroad Association.

"PNR is one of 500 short line railroads in North America, and it is quite an honor for it to be recognized for its achievements," Ogborn said.

According to Ogborn, Cotton was selected as the recipient of the Safety Person of the Year from a long list of nominees submitted from throughout North America. These nominations, he said, included around 20 to 30 individuals from every railroad company in the United States and Canada. He is so deserving of the award because he is an individual who best exemplifies a model of safe work performance, as well as solid leadership in creating a culture of safety at PNR. After moving to Borger three years ago, Cotton took over as General Manager, and quickly implemented several safety plans and improvements which instilled a positive working environment among the railroad's employees. He also sat down with the employees to come up with a safety creed together, Ogborn said, that way everyone has an investment in the safety of their fellow employees. Under Cotton's leadership, PNR adopted a fulsome Safety Program which addressed improving the safety record of the railroad, as well as ensures a safer workplace. As a result of this program, Ogborn said, the entire safety culture has changed at PNR, and as a direct result of his efforts, the safety record at PNR has seen a dramatic change in its safety statistics.

In the past three years, he said, the Total Train Accident quotient has been reduced by 66 percent, and the FSI has dropped from more than seven to the perfect number of zero. Ogborn said also said that in the same time

period, PNR committed in excess of \$1 million worth of resources in developing and implementing the Safety Program.

CEO and President of OmniTRAX Gary Long, nominated Cotton because, he said, he has never had an FRA reportable injury in his entire career in the railroad industry. Also, he has exhibited a high degree of safety awareness in every job he has ever held, both within the railroad industry and in other jobs; and has contributed off-duty time to various activities promoting safety, as well as being involved in the community and other social services.

Cotton got his start in the railroad industry 13 years ago, after working as a police officer for nearly 15 years. He said that his time in law enforcement helped prepare him with the safety skills and administrative knowledge he would need in his position first with Alliance Terminal Railroad, and later with PNR. It was his proven record of safety with Alliance Terminal that brought Cotton to Borger three years ago, Ogborn said.

As General Manager of PNR, Cotton said that he acknowledges hard work, and places a lot of focus on safety everyday. He strives to pat his guys on the back just to let them know they have done a good job, and recognizes the jobs well done. While Cotton adheres to his commitment to safety, calling it a "lifestyle," he is quick to say that the railroad's success is due to the hard work and dedication of his employees. "It is the effort of everyone at PNR that made it happen," Cotton said. "I oversee things, but these guys are the ones that do the work."

Cotton said that safety is a team effort, and he reiterates the importance of safety by teaching it from the very beginning with every employee he hires.

"To say that Sam is everything you want in a safety manager is an understatement," said Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of OmniTRAX Darcy Brede. "One of Mr. Cotton's strengths is to take a tough situation and turn it around, as he did with PNR."

PNR is a former Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (now BNSF) line which operates on 31 miles of track that runs between Panhandle and Borger. Since Borger is home to the nation's largest inland petrochemical complex, PNR transports such products as carbon black, liquid petroleum gas, chemicals, petroleum products, scrap metal, and fertilizer and grain. It serves Agrium, Chevron Phillips, ConocoPhillips, Degussa Engineered Carbons, Sid Richardson, Texas Pipe, Van Waters and others.
