

Metra ON THE BI-LEVEL

Commuter Newsletter, September 2009



The winners of Metra's Safety Poster and Safety Essay contests pose with members of the Metra Board of Directors.

Kids win with "Look, Listen and Live"

The winners of Metra's 2008-2009 safety campaign contest, designed to promote railroad safety practices to students in grades K-12 throughout the Chicago region, were honored at last month's meeting of the Board Of Directors.

The winners of the Safety Poster and first-ever Safety Essay contests were picked from among 3,000 entries from students at hundreds of schools, marking a doubling of student participation from last year's campaign.

"We are thrilled that each year the campaign continues to grow and engage even more children in railroad safety," said Philip Pagano, Metra executive director.

To date, the safety campaign's outreach efforts include the distribution of more than 3,000 Metra safety calendars, more than 500,000 safety posters and nearly three million pencil kits to schools throughout the region.

For the past three years, the Metra Safety Poster Contest has invited students to submit poster designs displaying important railroad safety messages. This year's poster contest theme was "Safety Rules: Look, Listen and Live."

The Safety Essay Contest was added this year. Participants were asked to express in 300 words or less why it is important to practice safe behavior near trains and railroad tracks.

Also new this year, Metra gave an award to the school with the most entries and handed out a "People's Choice Award" in the Safety Poster Contest to a winner selected by the public.

First-, second- and third-place winners were chosen from each grade level for the Metra Safety Poster Contest. One winner from each grade group – elementary school, middle school and high school – was chosen for the Safety Essay Contest. First-place poster contest winners and essay contest winners received a laptop computer, while second- and third-place poster contest winners received \$250 and \$100 gift cards, respectively. The top participating school

also received a computer and the "People's Choice Award" winner received a \$250 gift card. See a list of winners on Page 4.

The first-place poster designs will be featured as next year's safety posters and distributed to more than 2,000 schools. The posters will also be featured in station displays, in Metra's 2010 safety calendar, on monthly tickets and on Metra's contest website. Winning essays will also be featured on the website in addition to promotional safety materials.

Metra is currently planning for the next campaign. Information about the 2009-2010 campaign will be available soon at www.metracontest.com.



Don't forget: Metra's new and improved website debuts 9/9/09. Order tickets, set up a customized "My Metra" account, plan your trips and do much, much more. All at your metrarail.com.



ON THE BI-LEVEL

Published by Metra's Media Relations Department. Send letters, questions or feedback to On the Bi-Level, Metra, 547 W. Jackson, Chicago IL, 60661-5717. Or e-mail onthebilevel@metrarr.com.

We can't guarantee all letters will be printed or answered. Please keep letters to less than 200 words and include your first name, hometown and what line you ride. (Names are not required but strongly encouraged.) We reserve the right to edit letters for length and grammar.

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SOUNDING BOARD

Got a question, we've got an answer

Strange train

A few weeks ago I saw a strange train pass through the Edison Park station. It was a single Union Pacific car that had large windows all around, was extremely quiet, and had no separate engine driving it – just one car. Was this UP's passenger train of the future? What's the scoop?

John

Union Pacific says it was probably their track inspection vehicle. The photo above right shows what it looks like.

Cheers to you

A few weeks ago, before boarding a Northwest Line midday weekend train at Barrington, I heard a pre-boarding station announcement that because of the Gospel Festival, there would be no alcoholic drinks allowed on the train. That really upset me because all those gospel-loving riders were going to deprive me of my right to knock down a Jack or two. Then, just before boarding a midday Northwest Line train at Arlington Park Saturday, July 25, another pre-boarding announcement was heard that those attending Venetian Nights were prohibited from bringing or consuming alcoholic beverages on the train. Since I wasn't attending that event, I was delighted to learn I could down all the alcohol I wanted.

Seriously, I got the intent of the messages, but somebody should check out the scripts for syntax before recording them. An announcement that "alcoholic beverage consumption on weekend Metra trains is prohibited" should be ade-



quate. For Cub fans, perhaps an illustrated handout with crayons would do the trick.

Gene

Northwest Line

our train wrap advertising. We're trying various ways to boost non-fare revenue. Every little bit helps.

She's sorry

(The following was written on a card sent to our headquarters.)

Dear Metra,

I do not know who will end up with this apology card but I hope that someone reads this. I am here to apologize for riding the Metra train for free (by hiding in the bathroom). I had no money and no other way to get home, but that does not mean what I did is justified. At first I was very angry when my mother made me go to the currency exchange and get a money order for 5 dollars and write this stupid card. But I now realize that this is the right thing to do. Now I can have a clear conscience. Please accept the enclosed money order as a token of a my appreciation.

C.

Apology gladly accepted, and thank you for your honesty. You may have been mad at your mom, but she taught you a good lesson and is obviously doing a great job. We'll put the \$5 to good use.

Ouch. You wouldn't happen to be a White Sox fan, would you? Just to be clear on our alcohol policy, we ban drinking during major events, whether you're attending the event or not.

Don't shorten OTBL

While I fully support Metra getting their advertising dollars, please don't shorten On The Bi-Level with advertising. I look forward to the next issue as your newsletter always manages to put a smile on my face no matter what kind of day I had. So please, if you must have advertising, please expand your page length – don't shortchange our lift of the day!

Gabi

MD North Line

We're just trying to help pay for the costs of printing OTBL. Adding pages would add to the cost and so it would be counterproductive. But we are limiting ourselves to a half-page of ads per issue, so we don't cut too far into the content.

You may have also noticed

SOUND OFF

“...the snarky, snotty observations by Metra’s customers about fellow commuters ... offer some of the best free entertainment around.” - SouthtownStar, March 13, 2009

Only 10 minutes?

Thank you for providing entertaining reading – it kills a good 10 minutes on a ride.

Although it may have been said before, it feels like being back in school when riding. All the same characters have grown – or rather just grown older.

Good thing you work behind the scenes. Trust me. You have it very good. Far be it from me to tell someone how to feel or act, but I would like to pass on something that may be helpful.

The next time you are fed up by someone else, think about it. Does what was said really matter? Should you let someone push your buttons? And if things are so impossible where you’re seated, get up and move. I mean if it’s just too much, wouldn’t you rather move your seat, or if necessary, stand up and move away? It works for me.

Thank you,
No name

Works for us, too. Thanks for the advice.

Noise v. noise

I was most puzzled by OTBL’s response to Rochelle, the passenger who used music to drown out unwanted conversations. Your answer overlooked two major factors: (1) in close quarters (such as waiting in a vestibule to detrain) virtually ANY sound coming from headphones is audible; and (2) train conversations can frequently be VERY loud, as loud as anything coming from those headphones. It would seem to be that, so long as the volumes were comparable, one



Coming soon to a train near you?

type of sound (music) should be no more or less “acceptable” than another type of sound (conversation). Yet it seems to be the curious position of OTBL that conversation is a sacrosanct, unalienable birthright of every Metra passenger, while other sounds of comparable volume are not. But I bow to the wisdom of OTBL, so here’s what I’ll do: instead of bringing my iPod on the train, I’ll bring a sock puppet, and instead of listening to music, my puppet friend and I will reenact the entire “Who’s on First?” routine for the benefit of our fellow passengers. After all, just like you said, you can’t expect people to remain mute for you. So if conversation is the OTBL-approved type of noise one is allowed to make, then that’s the noise I will make. I hope my fellow (loud) passengers will enjoy the timeless comedy of Abbott & Costello.

Thankfully,
Joe
UP Northwest Line

The letter that started this back-and-forth was not about headphones at a normal volume. It was about blast-the-

ears-and-gelatinize-the-brain sound levels. It’s certainly possible to use headphones to drown out other noise without annoying others.

But we understand we were too harsh with Rochelle, who wrote us back to complain that she was talking about overly loud conversations. Our apologies to her. Yes, conversations can also be discourteously loud, too. So the bottom line is this: let’s all be reasonable with our conversations and our headphones.

We make no claims about being wiser than anyone else. HOWEVER, we think most people would agree that conversations at a polite volume are a more acceptable type of noise than music, even if the volumes are the same. It seems reasonable to expect people to use headphones at a proper level. But it doesn’t seem reasonable to expect people to not talk on the train. And it’s definitely not reasonable to put on a sock puppet show, even if you’re a fan of Abbott & Costello.

More loud voices

I ride the Milwaukee District West Line from

Roselle to Chicago during the work week. Every morning the same women board the last train car at the Medinah stop and proceed to stand near the stairs as opposed to taking a seat. I wouldn’t have a problem with this if they didn’t cackle like school girls and make such a racket at 6:00 in the morning. Ladies, if you feel the need to make so much noise in the morning, please be considerate of the other riders and take your conversation to the area between the doors to the train cars. I can speak for all in saying that none of us want to hear your voices that early in the morning. Thanks!

JP

Like we said, can we all be reasonable with our conversations? At least you’re not suggesting the sock-puppet solution.

Finally, a thank-you

I order three 10-rides a month through my employer’s Wageworks program. Recently, the 30th of the month arrived and I still hadn’t received my tickets in the mail. It turns out that my envelope had gotten stuck to the back of someone else’s Wageworks envelope. Fortunately, the woman who ended up with my tickets mailed them to me. So, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for your honesty, ma’am!

Patrick
Union Pacific West

After a dose of riders griping about other rides, it’s nice to see a letter about the silent majority of our polite and considerate passengers.

Winners of Metra's safety poster and safety essay contests

First-place winners:

- Yanira Martinez - K/1st Grade, Pulaski Fine Arts Academy, Chicago
 - Kevin Sju - K/1st Grade, Currier Elementary School, West Chicago
 - Ethan Chen - 2nd Grade, Copeland Manor School, Libertyville
 - Giovanni Alexis Rodriguez - 3rd Grade, Avondale Elementary School, Chicago
 - William Burne - 4th Grade, Prairieview Elementary School, Downers Grove
 - Victoria Tu - 5th Grade, Shabonee School, Northbrook
 - Matthew Zdun - 6th Grade, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin School, Orland Hills
 - George Finn - 7th Grade, The Art School in Glenview, Glenview
 - Danny Caplice - 8th Grade, McClure Junior High School, Western Springs
 - Austin Thielen - 9th Grade, Grayslake Central High School, Grayslake
 - Allie Stage - 10th Grade, Cary-Grove High School, Cary
 - Emily Hardesty - 11th Grade, Beecher High School, Beecher
 - Luke Lally - 12th Grade, Oak Lawn Community High School, Oak Lawn
- ## Second-place winners:
- Yasmeen Obeid - 1st Grade, Elizabeth Ide Elementary School, Darien
 - Raymond Arroyo - 2nd Grade, Pulaski Fine Arts

- Academy, Chicago
 - Nicholas Brown - 2nd Grade, Oak Glen Elementary School, Lansing
 - Alejandra Montoya - 3rd Grade, Currier Elementary School, West Chicago
 - Anna Lipkind - 4th Grade, The Art School in Glenview, Glenview
 - Cameron Chen - 5th Grade, Copeland Manor School, Libertyville
 - Luzhelena Mucino - 6th Grade, Carlos Fuentes Charter School, Chicago
 - Reynaldo Rodriguez - 7th Grade, Logandale Middle School, Chicago
 - Dominique Bloink - 8th Grade, Northbrook
 - Miller Wesselhoff - 9th Grade, Deerfield High School, Deerfield
 - Jillian Pignataro - 10th Grade, Bartlett High School, Bartlett
 - Steven Cooper - 11th Grade, Beecher High School, Beecher
 - Ian Dalton - 12th Grade, Cary-Grove High School, Cary
- ## Third-place winners:
- Carol Boyd - Kindergarten, Taft Elementary School, Harvey
 - Shannon Simpson - 1st Grade, Elizabeth Ide Elementary School, Darien
 - Imani Barnes - 2nd Grade, Homewood Community Academy, Homewood
 - Creighton Seibert - 3rd Grade, Chelsea Intermediate School, Frankfort

- Doria Lee - 4th Grade, Jacob Beidler Elementary School, Chicago
 - Ryan Barrett - 5th Grade, Ludwig Elementary School, Lockport
 - Stephanie Mullings - 6th Grade, Kate Kellogg Elementary School, Lockport
 - Harrison Swanson - 7th Grade, The Art School in Glenview, Glenview
 - Kristina Tomasic - 8th Grade, The Art School in Glenview, Glenview
 - Alexis Dee - 9th Grade, Bremen High School, Midlothian
 - Lizz Zonno - 10th Grade, Bartlett High School, Bartlett
 - Teresa Gajewski - 11th Grade, Cary-Grove High School, Cary
 - Alejandro Zarate - 12th Grade, Joliet Central High School, Joliet
- ## "People's Choice Award" winner:
- Reynaldo Rodriguez - 6th Grade, Logandale Middle School, Chicago
- ## School submitting the most entries:
- John Gordon Elementary School, Posen
- ## Safety Essay first-place winners:
- Julia Deferville - 4th Grade, Prince of Peace School, Lake Villa
 - Fefe Ho - 6th Grade, Westfield Junior High School, Bloomingdale
 - Kayla Barry - 11th Grade, Alan B. Shepard High School, Palos Heights

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