

RSSI shines in Omaha

For several years now, ever since the first such event in Kansas City, I've been commenting on the RSSI's revised exhibit format, always in a very positive way. Based on my informal research and polling, this year's gathering in Omaha, Neb., just before Memorial Day proved to be another success.

Again this year, AREMA staged a fine technical conference just before the RSSI exhibits began. Last year's initial event in Nashville, Tenn., ran two days, but the 2005 conference was shortened to just one.

And what a busy day it was, packed with top speakers offering valuable information on current issues in c&s, as well as a Best Practices session midday to give people a chance to see how their peers had solved problems they face every day. About 350 people signed up, many more than AREMA forecast. Naturally, with the Union Pacific headquartered a few minutes walk away from the site of the conference, UP folks were far and away the largest single group, numbering more than 80 attendees.



From what I heard, the panel of top c&s officers from virtually all the large railroads once again stole the show. So kudos to Chuck Emely, Shane Boyle and the other folks at AREMA for staging another top-notch technical conference.

Opening day of the exhibits was also very busy, with the aisles jammed with railroaders and people in the booths rushed almost off their feet trying to accommodate everyone. On the second day, the crowd thinned considerably, so exhibitors had more of a chance to catch a breather between visitors calling at their booths.

I talked to many exhibitors at the show and found them to be universally pleased with the RSSI efforts. Some commented on the rush the first day and the slowdown the next, saying they would prefer to have had the action spread out a little bit more. That doesn't mean that they were dissatisfied with the show overall.

Some suppliers told me that the traffic was a

little slow at their booths. But those who told me that also said they were pleased because they saw everyone they had hoped to see during the show.

And I talked to one fellow who was so happy with the show that he wanted it extended to a total of three days next year.

Yes, RSSI put in a tremendous effort (Thank you, Bucky, Sharon and company), but the real key to the success of the show was the presence of a large number of railroaders. BNSF and UP signed on as co-sponsors of the show with RSSI and their people turned out in force. As I mentioned earlier, with UP right there in Omaha and BNSF with a large presence just downstream on the Missouri in Kansas City, Mo., you'd expect large contingents from both those railroads. And you'd be correct. They both sent large numbers of people to the technical conference and the exhibits. But the Eastern railroads were also well represented, and you could find many people with badges showing their affiliation with shortlines and regionals and with transit agencies.

RSSI's format makes it extremely easy for railroaders to attend. There is no charge for railroaders to attend the trade show. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served right on the exhibit floor. With strategically located sites, you have a large number of railroaders close enough to the exhibit hall so that they can spend the day checking out the booths, then go home to their own beds at night. Let's see, free exhibits, free food and no hotel bill: That totals up to zero.

Railroads still have to schedule their people, still have to make sure the thousand-and-one complicated jobs carried out by c&s people every day get completed. With suppliers reaching out by picking up so much of the tab, railroads are responding well by not just permitting, but actively encouraging their employees to attend. And that's what makes meetings such as this one a success.

I attend many exhibits each year, and all of you who read my column know I'm a strong booster of trade shows and conferences. I'm happy to report that RSSI has come up with such a winning formula for its exhibits.

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