



## American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association

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### **ASLRRA Announces 2022 Safety Person and Safety Professional of the Year** *Individual Safety Awards Honor Career Dedication to Railroad Safety*

**ST. LOUIS, May 2, 2022** - The American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA) has announced its selection of two individuals for their decades-long dedication to railroad safety. ASLRRA is pleased to honor Nathaniel Mazo, General Manager, Ohio Division, OmniTRAX as the Safety Person of the Year, and Ross Grantham, Chief Operating Officer, Pioneer Lines as the Safety Professional of the Year. The awards were presented today at ASLRRA's Annual Conference & Exhibition in St. Louis, Missouri.

"The fact is that railroading can be a dangerous job. To enable every person to return home safely every day requires an unwavering commitment to a safe workplace, despite relentless competing priorities. These two awards recognize a career-long safety focus and honor leaders who hold their companies and their peers accountable to and for each other," said Chuck Baker, President of ASLRRA. "This year's honorees, Nathaniel Mazo of OmniTRAX and Ross Grantham of Pioneer Lines, illustrate that one person can make a significant difference across a company, ultimately delivering industry-leading safety performance results and managing world-class freight railroad operations."

**Safety Person of the Year** - Nathaniel Mazo, General Manager, OmniTRAX

As the General Manager of four OmniTRAX properties (Cleveland & Cuyahoga Railroad – CCRL, Cleveland Harbor Belt Railroad - CHB, Northern Ohio & Western Railroad - NOW, and the Newburg & South Shore Railroad – NSR), Nathaniel Mazo has exhibited a high degree of safety awareness, acknowledging that while safety compliance is of paramount importance, a strong safety culture driven from the top is imperative. He instituted regional safety programs designed to ensure that employees understand the safety goals of the company, including training employees on work rules compliance, defining and implementing new employee training, supporting locomotive engineer certification and training, and expanding operational testing for all employees.

“As General Manager, he has developed an operating philosophy of open and constant communications in the workplace including conducting daily safety meetings. One of the steps Nate took because of these meetings was to establish a Regional Safety Committee that focuses on maintaining safe operations and looking for ways to improve on an already very safe environment. He is a hands-on type of person who takes a personal interest in the well-being of the associates on his team, and leads by example,” said Dean Piacente, CEO, OmniTRAX.

As a result of Mazo’s leadership, in 2021, his railroads exceeded OmniTRAX’s key metrics in Operations, Safety, and Finance, while delivering exceptional safety results: NSR - 24 years injury free; NOW - 5 years injury free; CHB - 3 years injury free; and CCRL - 3 years injury free.

In Mazo’s nomination form, colleagues from many areas of OmniTRAX shared their experiences.

"In the three years I've spent working with Nate, he has always been a source of honesty and knowledge. He willingly helps where needed and is a vital member of our leadership team. He runs four railroads safely and efficiently and consistently exceeds key metrics. I am extremely proud to have Nate in the OmniTRAX family and am very happy to have developed a friendship along the way," said Bob Ellman, Regional Vice President of Operations for the North Region.

Ellman also notes that even as a General Manager, Mr. Mazo is proficient and current in almost all crafts.

Scott Remington, VP of Safety for OmniTRAX shared, "Nate takes complete ownership of safety in his region and demonstrates our most important core value of safety. What truly sets him apart from others in the industry is the level of engagement with his employees. He spends

countless hours in the field teaching and coaching his employees. His dedication has set the example with zero personal injuries, not an easy feat in the railroad industry."

Mr. Mazo is an active volunteer for The Hungry Network of Greater Cleveland, a consortium of 74 hunger centers strategically located throughout Cuyahoga County, feeding 40,000 people each month through a network of neighborhood-based food pantries and hot meal sites.

**Safety Professional of the Year** – Ross Grantham, Chief Operating Officer, Pioneer Lines

When Ross Grantham arrived at Pioneer Lines in 2019, he faced an injury frequency rate of 15.96 per 200,000 employee on-duty hours – an unacceptable statistic. Grantham got to work quickly to transform the safety culture. In the first year, Mr. Grantham led the Pioneer team with an emphasis on empowerment, communication, and accountability. He encouraged employees to recognize and report unsafe conditions, communicate quickly and transparently across the company, and commit to excellence in safety practices. He developed a Pioneer Safety Statement, stood up a Safety Department, and following safety audits on each railroad, implemented Safety Action Plans. In his first year as COO, Pioneer's reportable incidents decreased by 50% and there were zero reportable human factor incidents.

Mr. Grantham's servant-leader philosophy, and his unwavering focus on mentoring talent and putting the needs of employees first, empowered Pioneer managers to perform at their best.

General Managers on the Pioneer Lines team affirmed that Mr. Grantham's approach has made a tremendous difference.

"Ross didn't come on board and immediately command new rules and orders. He took time to listen to our needs, and then provided us with the tools necessary to do our jobs. He coached me through a number of tough conversations and helped me recognize these were driving us towards a better and safer workplace. He is a great leader, and he makes me do better," said Billy Chitwood, Southern Region General Manager.

Brent Lofton, Central Region General Manager shared, "He came in with a lot of energy and provided us with a structure around safety that hadn't existed before. He cleaned up the rule books, put a safety action plan in place, and provided the safety structure that led to accountability for the Pioneer Team. Ultimately, that resulted in more focus on safety and better performance."

In March 2022, Pioneer Lines achieved a significant milestone - twelve consecutive months without a single injury across the network, bringing Pioneer's injury frequency rate to zero, well below the industry average of 2.18 per 200,000 employee on-duty hours.

"This achievement would not have been possible without Ross," affirmed Alex Yeros, Pioneer Lines CEO and President. "When we acquired Pioneer in 2019, the company's injury rate was unacceptable. We immediately recognized safety would be our first priority and under Ross' leadership, we undertook several initiatives to build a strong safety culture and set an ambitious goal of no injuries across our entire network. To reach this milestone in such a short amount of time is truly a testament to Ross' ability to clearly communicate our goals, garner the necessary buy-in from the Pioneer team, and motivate everyone towards a safer and stronger business."

**About ASLRRRA** - The American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRRA) is a non-profit trade association representing the interests of the nation's 603 short line and regional railroads and railroad supply company members in legislative and regulatory matters. Short lines operate 47,500 miles of track in 49 states, or approximately 29% of the national railroad network, touching in origination or termination one out of every five cars moving on the national railroad system, serving customers who otherwise would be cut off from the national railroad network. [www.aslrra.org](http://www.aslrra.org)