



American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association

50 F Street, NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20001
aslrra@aslrra.org
www.aslrra.org

Contact:
Amy Krouse
akrouse@aslrra.org
(Cell) 312-371-6947

ASLRRA Announces 2024 Short Line Hall of Fame Inductees Robert Grossman, Jake Jacobson, and Rick Webb to be Honored

WASHINGTON, January 9, 2024 – The American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association has selected Robert Grossman, Jake Jacobson (posthumously), and Rick Webb as 2024 inductees into the Short Line Railroad Industry Hall of Fame. Each of the honorees has made an indelible mark on the short line industry, from creating the industry role of advocate in government and regulatory affairs, to launching an industry-wide emphasis and recognition of safe operating performance, to growing a car repair shop with a single railroad into a multi-service entity operating in four countries by building a team focused on exceptional customer service. The 2024 class will be inducted at the ASLRRA Conference & Exhibition on March 25, 2024 in Kansas City, Missouri.

“The short line industry is one of the All-American success stories, built over more than 100 years by hard working visionaries. These men and women saw opportunity where others did not. The Short Line Industry Hall of Fame allows us an opportunity to recognize extraordinary achievement in the industry. This year’s inductees, Robert Grossman, Jake Jacobson, and Rick Webb represent attributes that continue today as part of the short line ethos – advocacy, safety and service,” said Chuck Baker, President of ASLRRA. “Their stories will be shared and their contributions recognized at our General Session at the Annual Conference in March.”

Created in 2020, the Short Line Hall of Fame recognizes short line railroad visionaries who through their dedication, commitment, and achievement best exemplify the qualities of innovation, entrepreneurialism, perseverance, and service that have advanced the short line railroad industry.

2024 Inductees

Robert Grossman – *From Short Line Founder to Industry Advocate*

Robert Grossman first made a name for himself in the railroad industry in 1971 as one of the founders of the short line holding company Emons Transportation Group (Emons). When Genesee & Wyoming Inc. (G&W) acquired Emons in 2002, Grossman joined G&W's executive team, shifting his career toward a focus on representing railroad interests and helping railroads become their own advocates.

Grossman served as chairman, president, and CEO of Emons Transportation Group. Later, upon joining G&W, company leadership recognized Grossman's acuity in government affairs and created for him the new role of executive vice president, government and industry affairs. Grossman retired from G&W in 2008.

In 1996, Grossman recognized the need for railroads to become advocates, working regionally to achieve legislative and economic goals. He helped start and served as the first president of the Keystone State Railroad Association in Pennsylvania while still leading Emons. Later, he worked to establish and served as president and board member of both Railroads of New York and the Oregon Rail Users League. In 2008 ORULE established the Robert Grossman Distinguished Service Award.

Grossman was an active member of ASLRRRA's Board of Directors from 1999 until 2008. He served on the Legislative Policy Committee and state associations/relations committee and was instrumental in strategizing and advocating for the short line tax credit, which has enabled the industry to invest more than \$5Billion in infrastructure to date.

In his retirement, Grossman served on the board of directors of Aaron's Acres, an organization providing recreational activities to children and young adults with disabilities. He is still a board member emeritus. He also served on the board of Prima Theatre, providing business advice and helping with fundraising.

Lowell "Jake" Jacobson – *Industry Veteran Focused on Safety*

Jake Jacobson was passionate about railroads, short lines and rail safety, and while he never set out to become a famous railroader, his unceasing dedication to the industry he loved made him a legend.

Jacobson worked for Union Pacific Railroad for 29 years. He joined Copper Basin Railway in 1987 as general superintendent, quickly being promoted to general manager and then becoming chief operating officer, serving as president and COO for more than 30 years before retiring in 2020.

In 1994 *Railway Age* magazine named Jacobson its Railroader of the Year, the first short line operator to be so honored. Five years later the magazine would dub Jacobson one of the Great Railroaders of the 20th Century.

Jacobson was the originator of what is today's ASLRRA Jake Safety Award program. When the Copper Basin Railway achieved a perfect safety record in 1993, Jacobson realized no award existed to recognize small railroads' safety records, so he started a program himself. In 1999, ASLRRA took over the safety award program and named it after Jacobson.

Jacobson's commitment to safety did not stop with his work with the Copper Basin; he served on the board of Arizona Operation Lifesaver. Jacobson was also active in his community, earning the Citizen of the Year award from the Copper Basin Chamber of Commerce in 1998.

Jacobson died in 2021 at the age of 80. Upon his passing Viking Navigation Principal Adam Nordstrom, who worked with Jacobson through ASLRRA, said, "He was a titan from the age of the short line renaissance who left his brand on our industry and on the hearts of those honored to work with him."

Rick Webb – *Second generation railroader builds company by focusing on employees and customers*

Rick Webb was working part time for Watco while going to college when Watco started in July 1983. From that humble beginning Watco grew from one operation to 190 locations operating in four countries today. For Webb, the main reason for Watco's and his success is an unrelenting emphasis on building the best team to serve customers in the best manner possible.

In 1987, Watco purchased its first short line, primarily to serve its own rail-car repair shop, and kept on growing. In 1998, Webb became Watco's CEO after taking the reins from his father, Dick Webb, who had to step down for health reasons. Guiding Watco's growth required a constant focus on listening to and learning from the customer and from the Watco team. Webb

always believed that if you want to learn how to grow the top line, listen to your customer and if you want to learn how to grow the bottom line, listen to your team.

Today, Watco operates and provides daily services to over 3,500 customers in three business units. Webb stepped down from his role as CEO in 2018 and is now the company's executive chair, handing off the leadership of Watco to the capable hands of Watco's current CEO, Dan Smith.

Because of the tremendous performance of the Watco team, Webb has received many accolades for his leadership of Watco. But Webb is most proud of Newsweek's designation of Watco as one of America's 100 Most Loved Workplaces and one of the Top 100 Global Most Loved Workplaces, awards based on the results of Watco team surveys.

Webb has supported organizations focused on improving customers' supply chain efficiency, including chairing the Railroad-Shipper Transportation Advisory Council (RSTAC), and as a member of the National Industrial Transportation League's Board of Directors.

A vigorous supporter of his community, Webb advocates for his alma mater, Pittsburg State University, and many local schools and community organizations. He is member of the Pittsburg State University Foundation Board of Trustees, Community National Bank's Advisory Board of Directors and U.S. Bank's Market Board of Directors.

For more information on each Short Line Hall of Fame 2024 inductee, click [here](#).

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 (Class II and III 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, particularly in rural and small-town America. Categorized as small businesses, short lines transport all commodities, with the agriculture, energy and manufacturing sectors being particularly reliant on short line service. www.aslrra.org