

This is the official newsletter of **Utah Operation Lifesaver (Utah OL)**, a nonprofit public safety education and awareness organization dedicated to eliminating collisions, fatalities and injuries at highway-rail grade crossings and trespassing on railroad tracks.

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Executive Director's Message – Utah Operation Lifesaver 2024 & 2025 Awards

This quarterly message is about the people and safety partners that made 2024 and 2025 successful years. Utah OL was able to hold its Annual Appreciation and Awards Dinner once again to recognize our outstanding volunteers. The Annual Appreciation and Awards Dinner were held on Monday, June 22, 2026, at the Gathering Place at Gardner Village in West Jordan. I would also like to recognize and thank our wonderful safety partners. Without their financial and in-kind support, we would not have a rail safety education program in Utah. The following safety partners are recognized for their support during 2024 and 2025.

2024 and/or 2025 Utah Operation Lifesaver Safety Partners

Gold Spike Safety Partners (\$20,000 and above)

- Union Pacific Railroad
- Utah Department of Transportation
- Utah Highway Safety Office
- Utah Transit Authority

Silver Spike Safety Partners (\$10,000 to \$19,999)

- Utah State Board of Education

Iron Spike Safety Partners (\$1,000 to \$9,999)

- Genesee & Wyoming (Utah Railway and Salt Lake City Southern Railroad)
- Savage Services Corporation

Laurelwood Tie Safety Partners (\$100 to \$999)

- Hostlers Model Railroad Club
- Northern Division of the National Model Railroad Association
- Safety Awareness for Everyone (S.A.F.E.)
- Utah Trucking Association

The **Outstanding Media Award** is given to an individual or organization that has reported a story, either in print, radio, or television about safety at highway-rail grade crossings, or trespass prevention on railroad property, or about Utah Operation Lifesaver's mission.

The 2024 Outstanding Media Award went to **Rebecca Cressman, FM100.3 and 103.5FM**, for a story that aired during Utah Rail Safety Week September 23-29, 2024. The story featured an interview with Vern Keeslar, Utah Operation Lifesaver Executive Director, discussing rail safety during a 30-minute interview. Congratulations to Rebecca

Cressman for her story on rail safety in Utah! The podcast can be found at the following link: [Podcast Player - FM100.3 - Better Music Better Work Day](#)

The 2025 Outstanding Media Award went to **Rob Nielsen, Standard-Examiner**, for a story that was printed during Utah Rail Safety Week on Monday, September 15, 2025. The story featured an interview with UTA's Senior Public Information Officer Gavin Gustafson about rail safety in Utah. Congratulations to Rob Nielsen for his story on Utah Rail Safety Week! The story can be found at the following link: ['Every Sign Tells a Story': UTA and others celebrate Utah Rail Safety Week | News, Sports, Jobs - Standard-Examiner](#)



Photo: Vern Keeslar (left) with Rob Nielsen (right) with the Standard-Examiner, recipient of the Outstanding Media Award for 2025.

The following is a list of awards recognizing the great work of our safety partner presenters and volunteer presenters for Utah Operation Lifesaver during 2024 and 2025.

The **Safety Partner Presenter of the Year Awards** are given to presenters whose employers provide time for the presenters to participate in the Utah Operation Lifesaver program while on company time. Safety partner presenters demonstrate high activity in the program by the number of presentations given, booths worked, or other involvement with Utah Operation Lifesaver.

The 2024 Safety Partner Presenter of the Year was **Kent Muhlestein**, Utah Transit Authority. He gave 42 presentations to 1,101 people volunteering 74 hours.

The 2024 Safety Partner Presenter of the Year 1st Runner-up was **Travis Shingleton**, Utah Transit Authority. He gave 38 presentations to 1,511 people volunteering 72 hours.

The 2024 Safety Partner Presenter of the Year 2nd Runner-up was **Travis King**, Utah Transit Authority. He gave 26 presentations to 747 people volunteering 68 hours.

The 2025 Safety Partner Presenters of the Year were **Kent Muhlestein and Travis Shingleton**, Utah Transit Authority. They gave 49 presentations each to 3,144 people volunteering 169 hours.

The 2025 Safety Partner Presenter of the Year 1st Runner-up was **Travis King**, Utah Transit Authority. He gave 25 presentations to 677 people volunteering 58 hours.

The 2025 Safety Partner Presenter of the Year 2nd Runner-up was **Owen Thompson**, Utah Transit Authority. He gave 20 presentations to 509 people volunteering 44 hours.



Photo: Travis King (left) and Travis Shingleton (right), both of Utah Transit Authority are Safety Partner Presenters of the Year recipients.

The **Volunteer Presenters of the Year Awards** are given to presenters who are true volunteers, not being compensated for their time, and have demonstrated high activity in the Utah Operation Lifesaver program. This high activity is demonstrated through one's activity in the number of presentations given, booths worked, or other involvement with the Utah Operation Lifesaver.

The 2024 Volunteer Presenter of the Year was **Kent Holbrook**. He gave 58 presentations to 1,610 people volunteering 122 hours.

The 2024 Volunteer Presenter of the Year 1st Runner-up was **Sheldon Shaw**. He gave 24 presentations to 1,031 people volunteering 67 hours.

The 2024 Volunteer Presenter of the Year 2nd Runner-up was **Martin Cocker**. He gave 10 presentations to 282 people volunteering 15 hours.

The 2025 Volunteer Presenter of the Year was **Kent Holbrook**. He gave 57 presentations to 1,550 people volunteering 126 hours.

The 2025 Volunteer Presenter of the Year 1st Runner-up was **Sheldon Shaw**. He gave 18 presentations to 758 people volunteering 53.

The 2025 Volunteer Presenter of the Year 2nd Runner-up was **Kathy Bessinger**. She gave 10

presentations to 486 people volunteering 22 hours.



Photo: From left to right, Kent Holbrook, Martin Cocker, Kathy Bessinger, and Sheldon Shaw. They are all recipients of the Volunteer Presenter of the Year Awards for 2024 and 2025.

The **Executive Director's Award of Excellence** is given to an individual or an organization that has demonstrated excellence in participating in or supporting the Utah Operation Lifesaver program through activity, in-kind support, and/or financial contributions.

The 2024 Executive Director's Award of Excellence was awarded to the **Utah Trucking Association**. The Utah Trucking Association has served on the Utah Operation Lifesaver Board of Directors since 2006, which is the longest continuing organization on the Board. They have provided training and meeting rooms free of charge to Utah Operation Lifesaver in their old location since 2006 and their new location since 2013. They have provided booth spaces at their annual conference to share the message of rail safety education annually. The organization has introduced us to many trucking companies that have utilized Utah Operation Lifesaver free presentations to their companies. Thanks to the Utah Trucking Association for your participation in Utah Operation Lifesaver, and your dedication to rail safety education in Utah!

The 2025 Executive Director's Award of Excellence was awarded to **Kent Holbrook**. Kent started volunteering with Utah Operation Lifesaver in 2011. He has given 306 presentations to 3,383 people, mostly driver education students. He has volunteered 618 hours just doing presentations

and has worked the Utah Operation Lifesaver booth at many model train shows and other community events. He has given presentations to the following high schools: Ben Lomond, Bonneville, Davis, Fremont, Layton, Mountain, Soldier Hollow, and West Field. Thanks, Kent, for your dedication to rail safety education in Utah!



Photo: Kent Holbrook (left) and Vern Keeslar (right). Kent was the recipient of the Executive Director's Award of Excellence for 2025.

Utah OL Celebrates 50 Years of Utah Rail Safety Education

Utah Operation Lifesaver celebrates 50 years of rail safety education during its Annual Appreciation and Awards Dinner, which was held on Monday, June 22, 2026, at the Gathering Place at Gardner Village in West Jordan. Former Chairs of the Board of Directors, along with its current chair, were recognized. We appreciate

their leadership and all they did and still do for rail safety education in Utah. They included the following:

Chairs of the Board

Jerry Hardesty, 1996-2006
David Beach, 2006-2014
Dave Goeres, 2014-2020
Sheldon Shaw, 2020-2024
Jim Golden, 2024-current



Photo: Chairs of the Board for Utah Operation Lifesaver. From left to right, David Beach, Sheldon Shaw, Jerry Hardesty, Jim Golden, and Dave Goeres.

Utah Operation Lifesaver also recognized State Coordinators/Executive Directors as well as Assistant State Coordinators/Assistant Directors. They included the following:

State Coordinators/Executive Directors

Lillian Witkowski, 1976-1996
Bret Barney, 1996-2004
Vern Keeslar, 2004-current

Assistant State Coordinators/Assistant Directors

Paul Hawker, 1996-2001
Vern Keeslar, 2001-2004
Walt Webster, 2012-current



Photo: State Coordinators/Executive Directors as well as Assistant State Coordinators/Assistant Directors from left to right, Vern Keeslar, Bret Barney, Paul Hawker, and Walt Webster.