

## Celebrating the South Shore's Centennial with Norm Carlson

by Charles McKelvy

Veteran railroad consultant Norman Carlson had a timely message for the Michigan City Rotary Club at their April 24 meeting when he said of the South Shore we all ride: "An electric railroad is a green solution. You have a green solution here that others do not have."

Carlson, who is a retired Worldwide Managing Partner of the Transportation Industry Practice of Arthur Andersen & Co., predicted that ridership would increase on the South Shore as gas prices continue to climb, and he was bullish on the future of South Shore Freight.



Chicago South Shore & South Bend RR Contoller/Treasurer Lance E. Werner (right) invited Norman Carlson (left) to present a centennial history of the South Shore to the Michigan City Rotary Club in April. Carlson is editor of the quarterly magazine *First & Fastest*.

Noting that the South Shore will take delivery of 14 new bi-level passenger cars by the end of July, Carlson added that South Shore Freight "is having record years in car loadings."

That was just what the Rotarians wanted to hear, particularly the member who introduced Carlson as the day's speaker, Lance Werner. Lance is Controller/Treasurer for the Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad in Michigan City, and he had as his guests that day a number of his colleagues from South Shore Freight. And they were clearly pleased to hear Mr. Carlson emphatically state that "the railroad exists today because early management had the good sense to create a freight service. And it was that freight service that carried the railroad through the Depression."

So, yes, it might have been a case of Norman Carlson preaching to the choir on April 24, but he certainly did a grand job of it as he illustrated "100 Years of Enduring Tradition (on the) South Shore Line" with a powerful power point presentation that prompted a lively post-presentation discussion of the benefits of having an environmentally friendly railroad in our backyard.

As President of the South Line Interurban Historical Society and editor of the quarterly magazine



The Lake Shore had two freight locomotives which could handle up to 40 loaded cars each: one of them, the 505, is shown here on April 15, 1925, at the Shops in Michigan City. (Calvert's Studio photo, William Janssen Collection)

*First & Fastest*, Norman Carlson was well qualified to outline the history of a railroad that, he said, "traces its beginning to the Chicago & Indiana Air Line whose charter envisioned a railroad between East Chicago and South Bend.

"The line was incorporated on December 2, 1901 with Samuel Insull as one of the incorporators and opened for business as a 3.4-mile streetcar line connecting East Chicago with the industries of Indiana Harbor in September 1903."

Norman Carlson noted that "Air Line" was a term at that time for a railroad with straight track and slight grades for fast operation. He noted that the name of the company was changed to Chicago, Lake Shore & South Bend in 1904, and that a railroad was constructed between South Bend and the Illinois-Indiana state line at Hammond between 1906 and June 1908.

Employing iconic images of the South Shore, Carlson conducted his audience past the major mile markers of South Shore history including that seminal moment on June 30, 1908 when the first passenger train operated from South Bend to Michigan City. He showed a car with a number of people standing outside it and noted with a chuckle: "The curve was so tight that they had to grease the rails."



This six-car special Lake Shore train is loading passengers at Main and Colfax in downtown South Bend circa 1910. (M.D. McCarter Collection, negative number N5915)

Carlson said he traces his first recollections of the South Shore to 1947 when his father was the traffic manager for a coal mining company. "The mines were in Southern Illinois and Western Kentucky and most of the coal came north on the Illinois Central. If the coal was headed for eastern railroad, the South Shore would deliver the car within 24 hours. If the rail went through the Chicago Terminal, it would be days in getting to the eastern carrier. So if I wanted something from the South Shore like a ride on a freight train, or an employee timetable, I got it very quickly."

And Norman Carlson's audience was quick to share his appreciation for such defenders of the South Shore as Charley Jones, who as General Manager during the Great Depression, decided to forego complete abandonment of the railroad. "Charley Jones rallied the troops and started to build the freight service."

Way to go, Charley!



South Shore Freight Extra 2002 West waits at Bailly for a coal train to "shove" into Mittal Steel.

For, as Norman Carlson has stated: "Freight is the reason that the South Shore Line has survived. Over the decades the South Shore Line has become vital to the people and economy of that part of Northwest Indiana that is know as 'the Region.'"

Carlson noted that our region grew from sand ridges and swampland into an industrial center serving the nation with numerous steel-making facilities, a large refinery, electric generating stations, and many other significant industries.

And among the significant players in South Shore history were the three 273-ton, 89-foot long locomotives that the railroad purchased from General Electric in 1949. These "800 Series" locomotives were known on other lines as "Little Joes," because the engines were built for use by Josef Stalin's Russia when they were our allies during World War II. But then the Cold War started almost immediately after the German surrender in 1945, and the State Department banned the shipment, and the South Shore made good use of these behemoths by having

them haul lumber produced in the Pacific Northwest. "They handled trains like they were toys," Norman Carlson said.

He went on to describe the devastating effect the opening of the Indiana Toll Road had on the South Shore's ridership, and he explored in considerable detail how the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, or NICTD, fought to save passenger service on the South Shore.



Meeting an eastbound NICTD passenger train between Ogden Dunes and Miller on the South Shore Line.

"It is remarkable what NICTD has accomplished," Norman Carlson said.

He said so much more that a believer in green railroads really needs to spend some personal time with this consummate railroader. The best way to do that would be to accept his invitation and attend a three-day "South Shore Line Centennial Conference" sponsored by the Midwest Railroad Research Center of the Indiana Historical Society at the end of June.

Organized to celebrate the centennial of the historical Shore Shore Line, the conference will begin at 7 p.m. (EDT) on Friday, June 26 with a reception in the Atrium at the South Bend Regional Airport and the unveiling of a poster by Mitch Markowitz commemorating the centennial.

Activities continue all day Friday, June 27 at the South Bend Regional Airport Atrium with presentations on various aspects of South Shore history, and there will be a round-trip train ride between South Bend and Michigan City on Saturday, June 28 with a visit at the famous Shops.

Cost is \$45 per person and reservations can be made by calling: 800/477-1830, or by e-mail: [welcome@indianahistory.org](mailto:welcome@indianahistory.org).

Hope to see you there, and remember: Safety first!