

## Not the first time and it won't be the last

### Ohio derailment makes headlines, could it happen here?

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This is the first article of a three-part series regarding the recent train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, and the implications and risks railroad policies and procedures have on Lee County, an area that sees over one hundred trains every day.

On Feb. 3, a 150-car Norfolk Southern (NS) train

derailed near East Palestine, Ohio, a small town of 5,000 on the Pennsylvania-Ohio border. Thirty-eight train cars derailed — 11 of which were filled with hazardous cargo. The effect was a massive fireball, a forced evacuation of the community, lingering odors, and an ecological disaster that killed around 3,500 fish in the area.

According to several locals working for the railroads, derailments are more common now than ever due to shortcuts and procedures that increase the risk.

"All types of hazardous

SEE DERAILED, PAGE 3



CHRIS MILLS/MISSISSIPPI VALLEY PUBLISHING

Picture from the train derailment in Montrose in November 2021 when a BNSF collided with a barge that was on the main track. Six cars derailed, spilling coal and diesel fuel into the Mississippi River.

## Car club shuts down the engines

### Declining membership part of decision

JOE BENEDICT  
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A local car club is shutting down its engines after more than 20 years of car shows, cruises and, most important, service to the community.

The Mississippi Rat Pak car club had a post on Facebook on Tuesday morning saying the club was closing down as of that day.

Ken Lowman, who said he has been president of the club for 20 years said the core group of members has continued to get smaller in recent years, to the point that there were three or four members doing the bulk of the work for its events and charitable giving.

He said the group members decided to shut the club down while it's name still had respect.

"I personally hate it, because I've been president for 20 years," he said.

He said the club had a good group of members that were like family. One positive for the club members will



CHRIS MILLS/MISSISSIPPI VALLEY PUBLISHING

The Mississippi Rat Pak Cruise-in for June of 2022 had a lot of classics show up in the parking lot at Ace Hardware on Main Street. It has been announced that the car club is shutting down after 20 years.

be the opportunity to check out some other car cruises or shows that they have not been able to attend because they conflicted with the Rat Pak's car cruise or shows.

The club, during the warmer months, has had

a cruise-in, which used to be at the Walmart parking lot, but the last few seasons had switched to the Ace Hardware parking lot.

Lowman said he's sure everyone will still see the former club members cars

cruising around this summer.

Whether there will be an organized (or unorganized) cruise night is not known at the moment.

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## New scholarship comes with challenges to take

### KHS grad offering two \$1,500 awards

GOLDIE FRANKLIN  
Correspondent

There is a brand new scholarship this year that is open exclusively to the class of 2023 — all high school seniors. It's being sponsored by Keokuk Alumnus Dalton Jensen, who graduated KHS in 2012.

This new scholarship is called The Keokuk Entrepreneur's Scholarship. It's all about helping elevate the community and has the goal of bringing happiness and hope to the new generation.

"This scholarship came about because of my time in high school and because of my family. I always had that hustle spirit. I was always trying to find unique

ways to make money from doing odd jobs and selling anything that others would buy (ties and candy just to name a couple). The tipping point for me was when I was awarded 'Most Likely To Be a Con Artist' at the end of my senior year. Eventually I realized that I grew up in a community that didn't understand what selling was (the heart of any business)," Jensen said. "After I graduated high school, I served an ecclesiastical service mission and met some incredible entrepreneurs. I got a wild hair to knock on about 20 doors in an extremely wealthy part of the city and ask what people did for work. The answers were all the same; they either owned a business or they had sold a business. They all either didn't have any college degree OR they held a business degree (accounting, marketing, MBA, etc.). That

was all I needed to hear."

"I went into sales as my first job. I sold cars (Hondas, Nissans, and Mercedes Benz). I realized that I had a knack for persuading and influencing. I learned everything I could about how to empathize and influence others to make decisions. Since then I've been involved in a number of other ventures including e-commerce and service-based businesses. My current ventures are Aloha Views, an outsourced business development agency; Dirty Dough as the director of franchise development; and the host of The Thinking Project — an apple Top 50 podcast with over 1 million listeners."

"The question of any business is 'How do you connect with someone to have an



COURTESY PHOTO

Keokuk alumnus Dalton Jensen, who graduated in 2012, is sponsoring the Keokuk Entrepreneur's Scholarship.

SEE SCHOLARSHIP, PAGE 11



### THRESHERS

Western Illinois Threshers well into planning stage for August.

P13



### INTERESTING

A large group of birds find water tower.

### INSIDE TODAY

#### NOTABLE



In Clark County, High school students celebrated FFA week. Read about that and more on page 12 today.

### DEATHS

Carol M. Duncan, 75, Keokuk: Page 5  
Loren P. Schulz, 74, Carthage, Ill.: Page 5

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MLS



# DERAILED: Toxic Ohio derailment raises concerns

FROM PAGE 1

materials are carried through Fort Madison on the former Santa Fe tracks," Geri McEntee, a railroad engineer with 22 years of experience, said. "The most dangerous stuff is usually on the double-track mainline through Fort Madison. The same products on the derailment in Ohio travel through Fort Madison."

Several people interviewed currently work for railroad companies such as BNSF or Union Pacific and requested anonymity. Names and possibly genders have been changed to protect identities.

## What happened in Ohio

In a list written by NS released by the EPA on Feb. 12, five hazardous chemicals were released in the derailment: butyl acetate, vinyl chloride, ethylhexyl acrylate, isobutylene, and ethylene glycol monobutyl ether.

Worried that the butyl acetate and vinyl chloride, both combustible liquids, would cause an explosion, a massive evacuation was mandated. On Monday, Feb. 6, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine told East Palestine residents that leaving was "a matter of life and death."

After residents were evacuated, crews released toxic chemicals from five derailed cars into pits and set them on fire to prevent an explosion, which resulted in a large black plume of smoke.

Vinyl chloride, used to make polyvinyl chloride or PVC, is a carcinogen that evaporates at room temperature. Short-term exposure effects include dizziness, headaches, and drowsiness, while long-term exposure can lead to hospitalization and death. People who breathe the chemical over many years may also experience liver damage. According to an article published in Mother Jones, it has been linked to a rare form of liver cancer and other types of cancer like leukemia and lung cancer.

Butyl acetate is used in plastic production. Isobutylene can make people dizzy and drowsy. Ethylhexyl acrylate can cause headaches, nausea, and respiratory problems.

Another factor at play is the byproducts produced from burning these chemicals. For example, phosgene and hydrogen chloride are released when burning vinyl chloride. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, exposure to phosgene can cause "eye irritation, dry burning throat, and vomiting," while hydrogen chloride can "irritate the skin, nose, eyes, and throat."

On Feb. 8, the evacuation order was lifted. However, upon returning home, residents reported smells and ailments such as headaches and nausea.

The EPA and other authorities have

encouraged residents to do in-home air screenings, wipe down surfaces, and clean sheets, upholstery, and curtains that can contain these toxins for long periods.

Officials say that the chemicals released into the waterways in East Palestine are toxic to fish, but drinking water in the area has remained protected. However, some experts expressed concerns that the agency is not testing for other chemicals that could have been made through the burning of the toxic substances.

**Restitution**  
After the derailment, Norfolk Southern (NS) released an initial announcement saying they made a \$25,000 donation to the Red Cross for the community. However, the company's financial commitment has grown since.

In an interview with USA Today, NS media relations specialist Connor Spielmaker said the company started sending \$1,000 checks on Feb. 8 to residents of East Palestine who lived within a one-mile radius of the crash site.

On Feb. 13, NS said they donated \$220,000 to the East Palestine Fire Department to replace breathing apparatuses, \$25,000 to the Ohio Red Cross to support a shelter set up at East Palestine High School (unclear if this was the initial donation), and purchased more than 100 air purifiers for residents.

On Feb. 14, the company announced it established a \$1 million charitable fund for the community. In a follow-up press release on Feb. 15, the \$1,000 check recipients were expanded to include all residents living within the 44413 zip code.

Jeff Kurtz, a retired railroad engineer, union spokesperson, and Iowa politician, has been advocating for railroad worker rights and voicing the dangers of trains for years to state and federal governments.

According to Kurtz, the likelihood of something like what happened in East Palestine happening in Lee County is just as probable as it was for it to happen in Ohio.

Kurtz said that one upside to the situation is that the trains in Lee County travel through towns at lower speeds. "But sometimes that doesn't matter. There are still three-mile-long trains going around a curve, going up and down a hill, or doing both at the same time."

These topographical variations along the tracks are what cause differences in speed between the rear end and the head of the train, increasing the risk of separation and, in some cases, derailment.

In the last five years, there have been at least five derailments in Lee County, varying in severity.

In Feb. 2018, a Union Pacific derailment occurred in Montrose. The train was hauling truck trailers with no

hazardous materials on board. There were no reported injuries. "This happens," Sheriff Weber said during a KHQA interview. "We had one last year in Argyle. This just happens sometimes when they are hauling freight."

In March 2019, ten BNSF cars jumped the tracks and turned over, spilling loads of coal and destroying tracks and damaging the street in Victory Park in Keokuk.

In Aug. 2021, a BNSF train in Keokuk began pulling out of the train yard carrying four carloads of corn. Two of the cars struck six empty corn syrup cars on an adjacent track, causing them to tip and spill grain all over the tracks.

The worst was in Nov. of 2021 when a barge came onto the main track in Montrose. A 143-car train filled with coal collided with the barge a little before

midnight. "How those guys got out alive—I'm still not sure how that happened," Kurtz said. "By all rights, they should have been dead. You have a 15,000-ton coal train hitting a 20,000-ton barge at 30 miles an hour. Good things are not going to happen."

Six cars derailed, including two in the water and three partially in the water. As a result, tons of coal and hundreds of gallons of diesel fuel spilled into the Mississippi River.

Though nothing equal to the scale or severity in Ohio has happened in Lee County, the frequency and number of trains that pass through the area demand the attention and consideration of Lee County residents for future risk assessment.

## Derailments and Accidents

Geri McEntee has experienced several

low-speed derailments, one on a mainline and others on non-mainline tracks. In 2014, she experienced a high-speed derailment at 68 MPH.

During his career, Kurtz was involved in seven crossing accidents. One was eight months before his retirement with a large truck with snowblades. "I thought I was dead," Kurtz said. "This guy moved about 10 feet at the very last second, and we hit his rear end. I thought he was going to flip up in the cabin with those blades and just cut us to ribbons."

At the time, Kurtz was accompanied by a newly hired 24-year-old conductor. After the collision, Kurtz said he "went into autopilot," alerting officials, law enforcement, other trains, and the corporate office. Once finished, he looked over at the conductor. "He was terrified," Kurtz said. "He was

slack-jawed; his eyes were wide open, and he had a death grip on the door."

Kurtz talked to the young man and comforted him. "I told him, 'I understand. I've been where you are, but now I need you. You've got to go down there and talk to law enforcement. You've got to separate this train from the crossing. And I have to stay up here because I have to make sure I'm close to the radio if they need me to move or do something else.'" He snapped out of it, but I'm sure he has PTSD."

From this and other experiences, Kurtz advocates for the mental health of railroaders. "Like those guys that hit that barge, I'm sure they have crippling PTSD. I mean, I've got a small dose of PTSD, and most of us that have worked out there do because of some of the horrific accidents we've seen."



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