2007 was a time of transition for Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (OLI), the national headquarters for the nonprofit safety education programs operating in each state as Operation Lifesaver (OL). My arrival as President in January began a year of whirlwind activity ... both the organization and the dedicated people who make it the world's premier highway-rail safety education program.

Today, the state of Operation Lifesaver remains strong. Our mission is simple, yet powerful: we exist to save lives and reduce injuries at highway-rail grade crossings and on or near railroad tracks. Our cadre of ... Our private and public partners in government, industry, and nonprofit agencies provide sustained support for OL's work.

Any organization in existence for 35 years must work to ensure that it remains relevant to changing realities. My vision for Operation Lifesaver, honed through my review of the organization in 2007, looks toward the challenges that lie ahead:

We will successfully find new ways to disseminate rail-related safety messages to a public already bombarded by information; communicate with younger audiences; improve our reach to non-English speaking audiences; and address the growing problem of trespass incidents without compromising our grade crossing initiatives.

A tragic death or injury at a highway-rail crossing has consequences that affect multiple communities. When policymakers in Washington, D.C. or in statehouses speak about traffic safety, Operation Lifesaver ... When community leaders meet to develop traffic safety improvements, Operation Lifesaver should have a seat at the table.

The activities and events of 2007 set the stage for a promising future for Operation Lifesaver. This year of transition will enable us to respond effectively to the challenges ahead.

Sincerely,

Helen M. Sramek,
President
A New Slate of Board Officers Steps Up

In November, 2007 Reilly McCaren, Co-CEO, Partners Rail Group, and Chairman, Arkansas & Missouri Railroad, became Chair of the OLI Board of Directors. Reilly, who had been Vice-Chair, represents the short line railroad community. The previous Chair, Otto Sonefeld, a former official of the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO), remains on the Board. Other new officers elected to the OLI Board include Vice-Chair, Clyde Hart, Jr., Senior Vice-President for Government Affairs, American Bus Association; and Secretary-Treasurer, Thomas D. Simpson, Executive Director, Railway Supply Institute – Washington, DC.

Regional Workshops Dominate the Calendar

2007 was regional workshop year on the OLI calendar. From July through September, six regional workshops were held around the country: Burlington, Vermont; Missoula, Montana; Salt Lake City, Utah; Asheville, North Carolina; Little Rock, Arkansas; and Duluth, Minnesota.

The turnout of Operation Lifesaver leaders, partners, presenters and volunteers confirmed the program’s strength. The workshops drew a total of 630 attendees, an increase of 11.5 percent from 2005 and the highest attendance since 2003.

Over 90 percent of OLI’s presenter-trainers received their re-certification training. More than 110 organizations including safety partners and other local companies contributed more than $60,000 in sponsorships and in-kind contributions to support the workshops.

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Increased Visibility with Influential Groups, Policymakers

Speaking engagements and other opportunities expanded OLI’s outreach to policymakers.

- Refocusing OLI’s trespass efforts to link safety and security was the theme of Helen Sramek’s speech at the National Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Training Conference in San Antonio.
- Operation Lifesaver representatives staffed exhibits at several national conferences in 2007, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Sheriff’s Association, the American Public Transportation Association, and the National Council of La Raza, the nation’s largest community-based Latino organization.
- Railroad safety legislation passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and pending in the Senate includes a pilot program that would enable OLI to conduct targeted, sustained community activities in areas where risk is greatest.

Use of the Mass Media Broadens

A concerted effort to raise public awareness of Operation Lifesaver’s safety messages through media outlets in conjunction with the Regional Workshops and other 2007 events resulted in:

- Print coverage of a Sramek speech in the Omaha World-Herald, and placement of OLI articles in dailies in Burlington, Vermont and Duluth, Minnesota during the Regional Workshops.
- The airing of new radio public service announcements in Oklahoma, and on Washington, DC public radio station WETA.
- Television coverage of media events in South Florida and Roanoke, Virginia in which Sramek took part.
- POSITIVE response to the distribution of informational flyers to college journalism and photojournalism programs, and of rail safety tips to newspapers throughout the U.S.