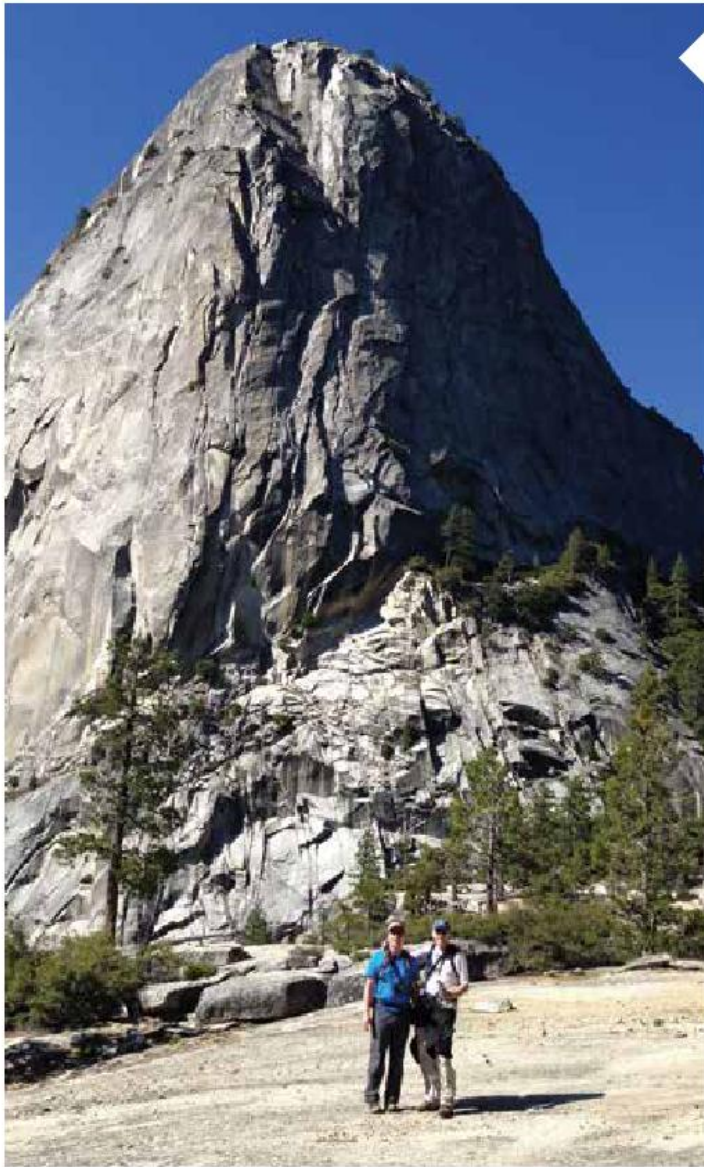


A Life of Trains, Coal and Energy



BOB NEFF





Bob hiking with his son Rob at Yosemite National Park.



As NCTA President from 2008-10, Bob (Top-L) led several of the Board's Washington DC visits.



Bob was born in St. Louis on November 26, 1952, the second child of Robert and Millicent Neff. He attended Bayless School District near the family's home in south St. Louis County. Bayless was a unique school where elementary, junior high and high school buildings all shared the same campus at one location. It was here where the most important event in Bob's life occurred, meeting his future wife Linda. Although Bob and Linda started in kindergarten at Bayless the same year, they did not meet each other until 7th grade, and then only due to a misbehaving student.

In most of the Bayless junior high classes, the teacher assigned the students seats at desks in alphabetical order. Such was the case in 7th grade English, Bob and Linda's first class together at Bayless. Linda Boll was in the first row on the left near the back and Bob Neff was at the front of the middle row. However, in the desk behind Linda was one of the school troublemakers who was constantly acting up in class. In frustration one day, the teacher told the troublemaker to switch

desks with Neff so she could keep a better eye on him. Then sitting right behind Linda, Bob and Linda became friends from talking before and after class.

However it was sophomore year in high school before they had additional classes together. They started dating in their junior year, and got married six years later after graduating from college. In 2015, they celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary.

Bob's work experience began early, as his father, grandfather and uncle ran a newspaper distribution business. At that time St. Louis had two newspapers, the morning *Globe Democrat* and the afternoon *Post Dispatch*. The family business distributed both, which meant getting up at 3 am to deliver the morning newspapers and then working again at 1 pm to get the afternoon papers out. Much like the mail and coal transportation, this activity had to occur regardless of wind, rain, sleet or snow!

Bob worked in the family business delivering newspapers throughout grade school and high school, which taught him a



Bob with his wife Linda and daughter Laura on their 40th wedding anniversary, January 18, 2015.

valuable work ethic. Working in the middle of the night in all types of weather, there were no holidays and very few excuses for missing work. It was a lesson that would prepare him for future jobs.

After high school, Bob attended mechanical engineering classes at Washington University in St. Louis. Bob had always been interested in railroads, and with encouragement from by two professors with railroad backgrounds, entered a co-op program at Missouri Pacific Railroad in St. Louis. Working alternating semesters with college, his first job was a Machinist Helper at a Missouri Pacific locomotive maintenance facility on Chouteau Avenue in 1971. This shop was located about 10 blocks from his future employer on Chouteau Avenue, Ameren. Being a union job, the pay was \$3.85 per hour, which seemed like a fortune at the time for a college student since many campus jobs were in the \$1.50 to \$2.00 per hour range. The workforce at the locomotive shop were almost all nearing retirement age, but were very tolerant of a young college kid with enthusiasm but no experience. They taught Bob how diesel engines and locomotives worked, and soon allowed Bob to do many of the jobs involved. It was the first of many jobs that Bob would have where people would share their knowledge willingly to help him, something for which he is forever grateful.

Subsequent semesters were spent in the Mechanical Engineering department at Missouri Pacific's office building on 13th Street in downtown St. Louis. Everyone in the Mechanical Engineering Department sat at a drafting table in an open room overseen by an office manager and a chief draftsman. Bob would periodically get assigned to make drawings for

modifications to freight cars and locomotives. While he had taken some drafting classes in school, Bob was not particularly fast at drafting. This prompted a daily visit from the chief draftsman, starting with the question "Are you going to retire before you finish this drawing?"

One of the more interesting assignments in the Mechanical Engineering Department introduced him to a future employer. In 1973, American Car and Foundry and Missouri Pacific ran a series of joint engineering tests on the stability of freight car trucks. Freight cars with different types of trucks and loading conditions were instrumented to determine dynamic performance while running at 70 mph down the long straight track south of Dupou, Illinois. Bob was assigned to oversee the tests for Missouri Pacific, which lasted for almost a semester.

After graduating with his mechanical engineering degree, Bob went to work full-time for Missouri Pacific. Railroad field jobs were high commitment positions in terms of time and dedication. His first job assignment was in North Little Rock, Arkansas, as an Assistant Roadmaster, a busy place with many track issues. Bob was then transferred to San Antonio as Assistant Trainmaster. A Trainmaster and Assistant Trainmaster managed 300 miles of operations and the San Antonio yard. With the Trainmaster working 7 am to 7 pm, Bob worked the 7 pm to 7 am shift with every other weekend off, provided there were no problems like derailments or train delays.

With the long hours, everyone on the railroad drank a lot of coffee, a drink which Bob never liked. Shortly after starting in San Antonio, the Division Superintendent stopped by for a

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Bob with his grandson Henry watching the trains on Bob's backyard model railroad.

visit and began pouring coffee for everyone. Bob told him no thanks and that he didn't drink coffee, but the Superintendent poured him a cup anyway. He then looked Bob in the eye and said "If you're working for this railroad, you have to drink coffee." When he left the room, Bob poured the coffee down the drinking fountain, and the subject was never brought up again. After a year in San Antonio, Bob saw an advertisement recruiting engineers for American Car and Foundry (ACF) near his hometown of St. Louis, and applied.

Bob became an engineer in the Research and Development Department at ACF in 1978. He spent four years at the company in various engineering positions including R&D, Tank Car Engineering and Product Marketing. While in the R&D department, he worked on designs of new freight car products including freight car trucks, tank car valves, steam heating systems, and tank car structures. Bob was awarded two U.S. patents while working at ACF for railcar components and completed requirements to become a licensed Professional Engineer in the State of Missouri. He also completed his MBA at Southern Illinois University.

While at ACF, both of his children were born. His son Rob was born in 1979 and his daughter Laura was born in 1981. Life at home became very busy raising two kids.

In 1982, Bob heard through a friend that Union Electric had a position open for a railcar fleet management position. Union Electric had 400 coal cars and planned to increase its fleet size to handle longer moves. Bob applied for the job, and interviewed with Pat Harrington, Fuels Group Manager. Pat, a combustion engineer from Penn State, kept asking questions about coal, of which Bob knew very little. Pat finally asked, "What do you know about coal?" Bob replied that he knew that it was black and that it burned. Pat shook his head, and said "You have a lot to learn," but he hired Bob anyway. Bob started

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at Union Electric on June 1, 1982 at their office building on Chouteau Avenue, just down the street from the locomotive shop.

While Bob worked on the railcar fleet maintenance, he soon began to set up a computerized coal management system for the department. In 1978, Bob and his father bought one of the first PCs in kit form. Manufactured by Southwest Technical Products, the computer was built by soldering the circuit boards and wiring the power supply. With the BASIC programming language and floppy disk storage, they were able to computerize the billing on his father's paper distribution business. His father was generating 2200 bills a month by hand, consuming two weeks of evenings, and the computer reduced that time to about three evenings. Because Bob knew several programming languages and was familiar with personal computers, he began automating reports and data in the fuels department at Union Electric, becoming familiar with all



Bob Neff and Mike Mueller worked together at Ameren for 15 years.

aspects of fuel management. One of his first assignments was to evaluate a Mobil Coal computer program which predicted the burnability of coals in different boiler types, a challenging assignment for a railcar guy. As in previous jobs, once again Bob found that co-workers would share their knowledge willingly to help him.

In 1985, Bob was sitting in his cubicle and Pat Harrington paid him a visit. Pat said “What do you know about natural gas? FERC just passed Order 436 and the gas industry is being deregulated. Union Electric has about 100,000 gas customers and now has the ability to buy gas on the open market. I thought maybe you could find time to look into buying gas.” Bob told Pat that the only thing he knew about gas was that you couldn’t see it, and it had to be transported in a pipeline. Pat shook his head and said “You have a lot to learn.” Pat retired soon after, and Udo Heinze became the fuel department manager.

Unlike railroad deregulation under the Staggers Act in 1980, which was a partial deregulation aimed at strengthening railroads, FERC Orders 436 in 1985 and 636 in 1992 totally unbundled the gas distribution system. The amount of work involved in managing Union Electric’s gas networks grew from Bob working part-time to four full-time positions. The gas group was moved away from the coal group in 1993, and Bob worked only in the gas side of the business at Union Electric from 1993 to 1999. In 1993, under Bob’s guidance, Union Electric became one of the first U.S. utilities to use gas futures to hedge gas commodity costs. These were the days before strict controls brought on by Enron and Sarbanes Oxley, and the resulting corporate risk management committees. But the gas group worked with Union Electric’s Treasury Department to help set working controls that allowed the Treasurer to sleep at night, and the futures proved effective in reducing gas price risk.

In 2000, the coal and gas groups at the recently formed Ameren Corporation were reunited under long-time coal expert and NCTA member Mike Mueller. Bob returned to manage the coal group in 2000, and feels fortunate to have worked there with Mike for 15 of his 32 years at Union Electric/Ameren. With Ameren’s acquisitions of CIPS and CILCO generating facilities, and their subsequent conversion to PRB coal, Ameren’s coal use grew from approximately 10 million tons to 40 million tons, with their railcar fleet growing to 5000 cars.

Ameren’s goal for its coal supply became access to competing modes of transportation and expanding its ability to use competing coal basins. Ameren moved aggressively to increase its capability to handle more coal per train, expanding its fleet with aluminum 286,000 capable cars, enlarging unloading loops at power plants to handle 150 car trains, and increasing coal take-away capacity to speed unloading. Ameren incorporated three short lines to provide competitive railroad access, built out new spurs to competing railroads at three plants, and added barge facilities at three additional plants. While most plants were converted to PRB coal, the addition of scrubbers at three plants provided additional flexibility in burning Illinois coal.

While Mike Mueller and Bob shared their interest in the coal and energy business, they enjoyed more sharing lunches at Taco Bell followed by custard at Ted Drewes, a St. Louis institution serving a rich soft serve ice cream made richer with the addition of honey and eggs. (photo)

In 2007, NCTA President Bryan Bashore asked Bob to fill a vacancy in the Vice President position of the NCTA. Bob told Bryan that he would be happy to help as long as Bryan didn’t have any plans to leave soon. However six months later, Bryan retired from Peabody, and Bob assumed the President position at NCTA. While Bob was concerned that he didn’t have enough experience with the governing process of the NCTA, he quickly found out that Tom and Pat were very capable and easy to work with, making his time at NCTA one

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of the best experiences of his career. Bob believes that “NCTA members share a common bond -their congeniality and enthusiasm for what they do along with being just plain good people makes the organization great.”

Bob was also fortunate to work with dedicated people who approached their jobs with enthusiasm at Ameren, particularly in the Coal Supply group. In 2013, Ameren sponsored a Relay for Life for the American Cancer Society. The Coal Delivery group, led by Bill Rogers, had seen an article about a barge company that painted a barge pink for Breast Cancer Awareness, and decided that Ameren should paint a railcar pink to show Ameren’s support. Kurt Stroer came up with a design for a pink railcar with a pink ribbon and the slogan “On Track for The Cure” painted on the side. Shortly after it was painted, the car was teamed up with Union Pacific’s pink

Bob retired from Ameren in March of 2015. While he misses seeing many of his coworkers and people in the industry on a regular basis, he and Linda have been able to travel and accomplish long-postponed projects. With a son in California, and a daughter/son-in-law/grandson in Kansas City, there is regular travel to those locations. Trips to California have allowed visits to nearby national parks, particularly Yosemite where their son Rob accompanied them on day hikes around the park. Trips to Kansas City are shorter and more frequent to get a Grandma and Grandpa fix with their grandson Henry. Bob and Linda have also been able to do some overseas travel since retiring, visiting England and France, China, as well as US locations including Boston and Florida. In November, Bob and Linda became members of the 50 state club by visiting Fargo, North Dakota.



A stick frame recumbent bike was a retirement gift for Bob from his son and daughter.



Bob with his solar yard lighting system which frequently requires coal backup.

ribbon locomotive hauling coal from the Powder River Basin to Labadie plant.

The following year, the railcar group teamed up with the Ameren Veterans organization to paint another hopper car in honor of the Ameren veterans and other veterans who served their country. (photo) This railcar was painted red, white and blue, and this car also is currently hauling coal from the Powder River Basin to Ameren plants. Both the pink car and the red, white and blue car were painted with labor donated by Metro East Industries using paint and materials donated from suppliers, making the cars a true industry effort.

One of the constants throughout Bob’s career has been change. Dealing in commodity markets, the only certainty is change, most of it unpredicted and many times totally unforeseen by the industry itself. From predictions of global cooling in the 1970s, natural gas shortages in the 1980s, peak oil and ever increasing coal demand in the 2000’s, changing to today’s situation of a world awash in cheap hydrocarbon fuels in a political climate that views carbon-based fuels as the cause for the coming end of civilization.

Both Bob and Linda are avid bicycle riders, having ridden many of the major bike trails in the country including the Katy Trail (MO), Creeper Trail (VA), Greenbrier Trail (WVA), John Wayne Trail (WA), Hiawatha Trail (ID), Burke Gilman Trail (WA), C&O Canal Trail (MD), Mickelson Trail (SD), Pinellas Trail (FL), Coeur d’Alene Trail (ID), Great Allegheny Passage (MD). For his retirement, Bob’s son and daughter gave him a recumbent bike (photo) to continue his riding.

Bob’s hobbies include photography, building model trains, playing bass guitar, and flying drones. He recently installed some solar panels in his backyard to power a landscape lighting system. The solar panels charge a battery which provides power to 12V LED lights through a photocell switch. Bob has found that the limitations on solar power are all too real. If the sun doesn’t shine for two days, the battery is depleted and the system doesn’t produce any light. In the St. Louis winter, it is not uncommon to have three or four days of clouds, so there are many days without lights. Fortunately, Bob put a two way switch on the input circuit, one way labeled S for solar power from the battery, the other labeled C for coal power from Ameren. ▲