



## Amtrak passenger train derails

By Jason Frederic ifred@gpcom.net Benkelman Post

At about 3:30 a.m. Saturday
morning the blaring sound of a train horn cut through the dark
quiet of downtown Benkelman quiet of downtown Benkelman.
The train was the first to pas The train was the first to pass railed nearly 20 hours earlier. The accident marked the start of an unforgettable day for the train's passengers along with Dundy County
and many southwest Nebraska, northwest Kansas, and eastern Colorado residents. of 21 people were taken to three area hospitals for treatment. Relgene Zimbelman, Benkelman
Rural Fire Chief, said on Monday that all of the injured had been released from local hospitals.

The train, which was runnin The train, which was running
on Amtrak's California Zephyr
route from Emeryville Calif to Chicago, was reportedly running about eight hours behind schedule
when it derailed west of Benkelwhen it derailed west of Benkel-
man. The train was involved in an accident near Reno, Nev., last SUV that was left high centered Meanwhile, on Friday morning
Gerald Shatler, owner of G \& S Recycling, and two of his employdismantling the old Doane Elevator buildings located about five
miles west of Benkelman. The three were using a truck-mounted
crane that Shatler had contracted for the job.
One man
ating the crane. Shatler and the other man were in the bucket on the end of the crane. They were up
on the crane working on the side on the crane working on the side
of the elevator and needed to get However, the crane was too close to the building.
supported by four outriggers that were extended to the ground. To
get to the other side of the structure, they swngithe boom over ran parallel to the elevator. Durboom was outstretched over the tracks, the outriggers gave way
to the ground. The truck-mounted crane shifted and Shatler and the
worker fell out of the bucket to the ground. Shatler headed for his them of the trouble with the crane. However, while on his way to the
truck he heard a train whistle and it was too late.
A reliable source, wishing to
remain anonymous, confirmed the account of the accident.
At $7: 51$ a.m. the Dundy County
Emergency dispatcher received an emergency call from an Amtrak train. It was involved in an accident and derailed.


Post that the train was moving at
about 80 mph, but the conductor was able to slow it down to about 65 mph pened.

The train had struck and seved crane. The force of the impact ripped the crane's cab and boom from its mounting point on the
truck. Half of the boom severed and was tossed to the ground on the other side of the tracks and the oth.
train.
The t
motives motives completely derailed ond crashed to their sides. A baggage car also derailed and remained on about a 4 degree angle. A crew
members' dorm car, a sleeper car, and a lounge car derailed, but
stayed upright. The last three pas stayed upright. The last three pas-
senger coaches did not derail senger coaches did not der
The response

The response
were a total of There were a total of 192 peo-
ple (175 passengers and 17 crew members) on board the train.
Chief Zimbelman said when the emergency call came in, they were expecting the worst. He said Beneklman only had two ambu-
lances and there was no way that lances and there was no way that
was going to be enough to handle was going to be enough to handle
the injured. Zimbelman said they the injured. Zimbelman said they
put out the call for mutual aid. Mile markers delineate not only highways, but also railways. Dundy County authorities reported that when an Amtrack train official made the emergency call they
identified the location of the acidentified the location of the ac-
cident by the mile marker on the cident by
However, in relaying that information, the dispatcher did not
know that the Amtrak official was using railroad markers and equated the number to highway mile markers, which placed the
site of accident near Max and not Doane. The dispatcher was said to respond to the Amtrak official that he accident was at Max and the official responded....yes, Max.
The Benkeman Rural Fire Department headed east and reached Max before turning around.
The Haigler Ambulance crew
was the first on the scene, but the Benkelman Emergency units were not far behind.
Passengers started getting out
of the train before the first emergency crews arrived.
Rick Starks, Haigler Emergency Medical Service, said one of the
first things they did was to first things they did was to start
separating the injured from the non injured.
Pinjured.
Passengers and crew members
were freely walking around the accident site. Many had cameras and cell phones and were snapping photos and taking videos of As train.
As the
As the emergency crews ar through.
Chief Zimbelman served as the incident commander and coor-
dinated the efforts of the first re-
sponders.
It was $n$
It was no
of mutual aid emergency wave cal service, fire and police from
in. ${ }^{\text {d }}$.
"The response was overwhelming," said Zimbelman. "It was
wonderful and amazing. They came from three states. It was just tremendous."
Zimbelman said they have been involved in mock disaster drills that were focused on events that
involved large amounts involved large amounts of people.
There was no panic and the reThere was no panic and the re-
sponse to the incident went about as well as it could have.
"We prepare for the worst, and hope for the best," he said.
At least 15 communities responded with emergency units and personnel. Chief Zimbelman said there was likely around 250 emergency personnel at the site,
helping the 192 passengers and
$\qquad$
Those numbers do not account or the dozens of other local The Dundy County Stratton School system provided buses to take the non injured passengers
into town. The school opened the gym to the railroad refuges. The gym to the railroad refuges. The
air conditioned building at the Dundy County Fairgrounds was also opened for people. An uncounted number of area residents and businesses donated an amazing abundance of food and drinks
for the passengers Saying goodbye From the like school, some passengers, like the group of 12
from Japan, made their own arrangements to continue on their trip. Others waited for busses that
Amtrak provided for the Amtrak provided for the rest of their trip. The busses were loaded
and gone by mid afternoon. Hospitality Leaves A Lasting

Impression
The passengers of the Califor-
ia Zephyr No. 6 will never forge their trip of August 2011.
Accounts of the passengers will undoubtably include the accident
near Reno, NV when the train hit near Reno, NV when the train hit a
high-centered SUV vehicle along with the derailing of the train at the Doane Elevator
One of their most vivid and lasting memories of the trip will be the overwhelming hospitality and heart of the communities and people who came to their aid.
The following was a report The following was a report done
by the KPVI Television Station in Idaho falls, Idaho on Monday.
A local man says he is lucky to be alive after the train he was riding on derailed in Nebraska Fri-
day. ing on
day.
Shaw
see the
see the country was hoping to
perspective on his a different nearly ended in tragedy.
I've never travelled across the
country before and I was wanting the social experience of meeting other people," said Lowry.
With that Lowry decided to
head to his vacation in Maine by head to his vacation in Maine by
rail. But, before the train even left rail. But, before the train even left
the Salt Lake City station the trip the Salt Lake City station the
got off to an ominous start. "The train was delayed in S Lake City by five and a half hours because evidently, somewhere in Nevada or Utah some drunk peo-
ple had left an SUV on the tracks ple had left an SUV on the tracks
and the train hit it," Lowry said. and the train hit it," Lowry said.
Ats way to Chicago. In the morning Lowry was going through his rou-
tine when he felt a sudden jolt.
"I was brushing my teeth when it hit and I just kind of felt strange noises and a violent jerk and was kind of off balance for a minute, said Lowry. Lowry looked out to see the
wreckage of a crane and that's when he knew something was terribly wrong. Passengers then began to leave the cars and survey the damage. Lowry says they were all in a sense of shock.
"A lot of people were scared and confused," Lowry said. Two locomotives and three pasonly nine people were injured in the accident and none suffered life threatening injuries. The passengers were then taken to a high school in Benkelman, Nebraska and Lowry says he was amazed at the town's generosity.
brought us food and everything brought us food and everything
and anything we needed," said and anything we needed, saspitality",
Lowry says that even though his vacation has turned into a disaster he thinks he has an idea where he will go for another one.
"I kind of want to go back to Benkelman because I'm just so said Lowry. "I want to experience that again, their kindness and genrosity. It was just a really cool expewry did say that he will b sticking to planes and automobiles

Lowery also posted a message on the Beneklman Post's Face--
book page on Monday that read: "I was a passenger on Zephyr 6 and I just wanted to thank the amazing communities there for responding and assisting us after the accident. some of the most generous people I've ever encountered. Actually, I'd like to live there because I'm so
impressed by it. Thanks again." impressed by it. Thanks again.' to share their experience with the Benkeman Post. For those who
discussed the event, they were grateful to the first responders. Most were just getting started with their day when the derailment ocprised to have emergency services there so quickly. Many passengers
walked up to the responders and walked up to the responders and personally thanked them for their
service.
"Within Within 10 minutes of the acfour directions were arriving," stated John Maasch of Denver. "The people, especially the first responders were amazing. Not panicky or otherwise. They came
in and did their job and were courin and did their job and were cour-
teous. I'm glad they were here." teous. I'm glad they were here."
John Albee from Iowa, "We can't believe how helpful the citizens of Benkelman and surrounding communities have been. It is really fantastic!'
Sometimes the simplest of sen-
timents can say the most an timents can say the most. A group
of 12 people from Japan left a of 12 people from Japan left a
message behind for everyone that message behind for everyone that helped. The message was wrote
on a small piece of notebook pa-
per that was left in the high school per that was left in the high school
gym. The message was simple, "Thank You" signed, Motoke Tanaka from Japan and "Thank signed Fuko Maruta from Japan.

