IT optimization plan requires changes to email system

Robin Traxler, Central Office

As part of the State’s IT Optimization Plan, ODOT’s email system will soon be moving to a new computer environment or domain. The department is still negotiating the dates for the first move of services; with the second move to the OIT cloud computing environment scheduled for the end of May.

In preparation for this move, ODOT employees are advised to make certain they know their usernames and passwords with the “myOhio.gov” and/or OAKS systems. These will be needed to access their emails under the new domain.

Local News

District 3 receives Chamber award

Christine Myers, District 3

The Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Member Award for Government and Safety Services was bestowed on District 3 in March. Hundreds of representatives from local businesses, civic organizations, retailers, and government agencies were present for the banquet at the Ashland University John C. Myers Convocation Center.

District Deputy Director Allen Biehl accepted the award on the behalf of District 3, taking the opportunity to thank district employees for their hard work in keeping area roads safe.

“We try and we strive to be the most efficient and the safest agency when it comes to snow and ice, and when it comes to improving our roadways,” he said.

“We know what we do is important to all of you. If we don’t do a good job, you don’t get your goods and services to your customers. We are so proud that we know we can be a part of your success. And that’s really what it’s all about, making sure we make you successful.”

Progress on the new U.S. Route 23 trench on Columbus’ north side is shown here, left, looking south towards Flint Road. When completed, the trench will carry two northbound lanes beneath surface streets, reducing backups by separating local and commuter traffic. The trench is expected to open in the fall of 2015.

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Local News continued on page 6
Transportation bill signed into law

The two-year, $7 billion Ohio Transportation Bill cleared the Ohio House of Representatives on a 78-13 vote after a unanimous vote by the Ohio Senate. Gov. John R. Kasich signed the bill into law April 1.

Work Zone Awareness Week

Central Ohio traffic reporters teamed up with ODOT for National Work Zone Awareness Week, March 23–27, to deliver an important message: Move Over for all roadside workers. Watch Director Wray deliver a work zone safety message at www.moveover.ohio.gov

Construction season begins

ODOT officially kicked off the 2015 construction season March 16 with media events in all 12 districts. The $2.4 billion construction program includes 990 projects, up 50 from last year.

Roadway collapses in Pleasantville

Fairfield County crews called out to repair a sinkhole in the village of Pleasantville learned it was a collapsed cistern—one so old it didn’t appear on local maps. Crews cleared and filled the vault with concrete.

New device makes pothole patching possible

District 2 filled potholes with hot mix asphalt using a new portable asphalt recycler. The recycler produces hot mix asphalt on the spot where repairs are needed.

“ODOT will never be ‘long term’ as long as we are a political entity that changes leadership every four years. The words ‘long term’ should be removed from the vision statement.”

A vision statement is an already-made decision that declares who we are, how we will behave and what we intend to accomplish. The nature of a vision statement connotes ‘long-term’ and the future. Our statement is intentionally aspirational, concise, and direct.

Leadership is about a lot more than just who is perceived to be in charge. It is about clarity, focus, and direction. I believe we should aspire to a future state that offers maximum professional continuity, in the best interest of the people of Ohio.

Our transportation system in Ohio has evolved over the past century. It is not what it was 50 years ago or even 10 years ago. It represents an enormous investment by the people of Ohio through the years. The organization responsible for protecting that investment should be an organization that is long-term, reliable, professional, and highly productive; an organization that strives for excellence.

Excellence has a way of being contagious. In order for any organization to be great, excellence must occur in all aspects of the way they do business. The culture is born and lives in how we treat each other and how we get things done, or ‘the way we do business.’

If the culture is strong enough, it is much more powerful than politics. The behavior and performance of the people of ODOT is what determines if it’s strong enough.”

— Director Jerry Wray
Trucks built to last
Rhonda Pees, District 1

The Chillicothe Correctional Institute (CCI) in Pike County currently holds about 3,000 inmates. The medium security prison was originally built during World War I as a training camp, then became a federal prison before becoming a state prison in 1966. Like most prison facilities, it offers inmates the opportunity to use or learn job skills. But a special relationship between CCI and ODOT offers inmates a chance to learn a skill while providing the department with its main tool to carry out its signature service.

For more than 40 years, the inmates at CCI have built dump trucks for ODOT, producing about 160 vehicles per year. The arrangement between the two state agencies is the only one of its kind in the nation.

Roughly 200 inmates work in the truck facility, which includes welding, painting, machine and fabrication shops. Vehicle assembly is the final stop, where the hydraulics and plow hitches are mounted, electrical wiring is installed, and paint stripes are applied. The final inspection is completed here before the trucks leave.

A typical ODOT truck can be built within 90 days at a cost ranging from $150,000 to $210,000, depending on the features. There are a possible 163 combinations a truck can have, and a more complex design adds time. The inmates build truck beds, hoppers, brine systems and spreader gates as specified for each county. If needed, they relocate gear boxes and fabricate any other needed parts. The spreader gates used by ODOT were designed at the facility in the 1980s and are still built by hand.

“Anything we throw at them, they build,” said Doug Burke, transportation engineer with the equipment section of ODOT’s Office of Equipment Management. “Almost no [two] trucks are the same; One county to another is going to be different.”

Like any other job, inmates must complete an application, interview, and be selected for a position in the truck run facility. Any inmate is eligible to apply, so long as they possess the skills or the aptitude to learn them. Inmates earn $.60 cents per hour. According to Burke, the inmates display very few behavioral issues.

“They don’t want to screw up,” he said, “for fear they’ll be removed from the vehicle facility. These are highly sought-after jobs.”

Dave Scheckelhoff, District 1 fleet manager, points out that the vehicles produced by the inmates have served the department well.

“Very seldom do we have issues with quality,” said Scheckelhoff. “Things are clean when they arrive and are ready to go.” ☃
‘Who you gonna call?’
Signal electricians!

Amanda McFarland, District 12

IT WAS EARLY FEBRUARY and the city of East Cleveland had a problem: The traffic signal at Euclid Avenue and Forest Hills Drive had been out of service for more than two months. The electrical failure was posing a safety concern at the multi-lane intersection for cars and pedestrians.

This looks like a job for – a signal electrician! Signal electricians perform skilled electrical work on traffic signals and pole-mounted outdoor lighting, including installation, inspection and repairs to ensure their safe operation. But the city did not have such a person or the resources to do the job.

City officials reached out to District 12 for assistance, and signal electricians Dave Nimrichter, Joe Waltos, Vince Vartorella and Len Paige stepped up to the challenge.

The city did not have the manual for this particular traffic signal cabinet, which would have been helpful in diagnosing and fixing problems. Nimrichter, a signal electrician for 23 years, happened to have assembled a collection of cabinet manuals for just such an occasion.

After a full-day of inspection, it was determined that the entire cabinet unit would have to be replaced. The District 12 team reassembled working components in the new cabinet and restored the traffic signal at the busy intersection.

“We were able to take a cabinet the city had in storage and modify it for this intersection,” said Nimrichter.

On February 10, the traffic signal resumed its normal operations, much to the relief of East Cleveland residents.

Accompanied by an East Cleveland employee, District 12 Signal Electricians make repairs in a signal cabinet.

“It’s the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen.”

John Wooden
American basketball player and head coach at UCLA, 1948–1975
Fluctuating temperatures mean clearing more than snow from roadway

David Rose, District 10

THE RESIDENTS OF southeast Ohio have come to expect a predictable cycle triggered by severe winter weather: the temperatures rise, the snow melts, and the highways flood. This year, however, was a little different. Following the snow melt, the temperature quickly dropped to below freezing as the area received another snowstorm. Suddenly, flood water wasn’t the only thing residents had to worry about.

After the frigid waters receded on State Route 56 in Hocking County in early March, ODOT highway crews encountered large chunks of ice left on the roadway. These massive ice blocks had to be cleared to get this major east-west route open as fast as possible.

Hocking County Transportation Administrator Ron Neuhauser dispatched Bill Humphrey and Kenny James, one in a loader and the other in a plow, to clear the ice. It took nearly five hours to complete the task.

Athens, Vinton and Washington counties experienced similar situations on State routes 56, 328 and 26.

“State Route 26 was an absolute mess,” said Transportation Administrator Rick Venham. “It took us nearly 12 hours to safely clear ice, slush, trees and other debris along the thirteen mile stretch of closed highway. I’m very proud of our guys for getting the job done.”

Also in Washington County, nearly a dozen employees from the district office volunteered to assist in tree and debris removal on various state routes throughout the county.

Transportation Engineer Joe Schott was one of the volunteers that day. Schott plowed all night and upon returning to the office that morning was recruited by Roadway Services Engineer Bob Zwick to help the county crews.

“When Bob asked me if I could help, I immediately said ‘yes,’” explained Schott. “I am willing to do whatever it takes to help out the guys in the garages. They’re the ones who put in the long hours and sacrifice time away from family to keep the roads safe.”

To many, this all may seem to be an extraordinary effort in response to the elements. But this story simply exemplifies the typical dedication and selfless character of ODOT employees when it comes to getting the job done every day.
Say what you will, but more than 2,000 tons of rock on a highway makes an impression—in more ways than one!

Shortly before 2:30 a.m. on Friday, April 10, a landslide occurred on U.S. Route 52 near the Ashland, Ky. bridges at Coal Grove in Lawrence County. Nearly 2,350 tons of rock and debris landed on the roadway, including a gigantic boulder—roughly the size of a two-story house—that came to rest in the middle of the westbound lanes. The boulder’s weight alone was estimated to be 1,500 tons. Fortunately, the landslide happened during the overnight hours, and traffic was light. No one was injured when the giant rock shut down the four-lane highway.

The event made local and national news. But for ODOT District 9, this spectacular obstacle was just another day at the office. Work crews were able to clear the eastbound lanes and open them to traffic by 9:30 a.m. that day. ODOT issued an emergency declaration to extend an existing contract with DGM, Inc. to help remove the giant stone. With additional equipment, their crews worked with ODOT maintenance forces to continuously cut, clear and haul the massive boulder—measuring about 20 feet high, 20 feet wide, and 50 feet tall—from the site. After 65 hours of work, including five spent repairing damage to the roadway, U.S. Route 52 westbound was reopened to traffic on April 12.

“This was a tremendous undertaking and one of great teamwork between our forces and our contractors, DGM,” said ODOT District 9 Deputy Director Vaughn Wilson. “Both teams did an outstanding job to expedite operations and clear the highway efficiently and effectively, and I couldn’t be more proud of their efforts.”
Finding harmony in math and music
Brittany Holland, District 1

District 1 Assistant Auditor Debb Herr’s job may be all about numbers, but her passion outside of work is music. She began playing piano in kindergarten, then transitioned into the French horn when she was old enough for a concert band. But all that changed when her school’s music program gave her a chance to learn the cello:

“When I heard a Pablo Casals cello solo, I fell in love with the tone and the music. That’s where it began,” said Herr.

After becoming a mother, Herr walked away from the cello for about six years, until she decided to audition for the Lima Symphony. Herr stayed with the symphony for 11 seasons. While on a leave of absence, she found yet another calling when a persistent friend asked her over and over again to teach him the instrument.

“I told him, ‘I don’t teach,’ but he refused to listen,” Herr recalled. “He kept asking... and eventually I gave in and I loved it.”

Herr volunteers at Bluffton High School two afternoons a week to help with their cello and bass sections, and teaches cello lessons to students. The school is preparing for the Ohio Music Education Association State Orchestra competition. But, her favorite part of the program is that it teaches students to give back.

“It’s about the heart,” said Herr. “It’s about watching someone else play and seeing them enjoy themselves. It’s knowing that I helped fuel their passion.”

Herr has been involved in a string quartet for the last 21 years, entertaining guests at all kinds of events. With her job, her grandchildren and her cello, Herr feels truly blessed. And she has some advice for anyone who thinks it’s too late to pick up an instrument: “If you want to do something, do it,” she says. “Music soothes the savage beast in all of us.”

Debb Herr (middle, far left) poses with members of the Bluffton High School Orchestra back in 2013. She serves as the assistant director for the group.

A look back at the landscape
Ron Poole, Central Office

We don’t think about it much, but the physical boundaries of the state of Ohio are due to the dedicated work of land surveyors. Ohio was the original “wild west” when Congress adopted Thomas Jefferson's plan for a Public Land Survey System in May 1785. As the frontier of the new rectangular survey system, Ohio’s internal boundaries were laid out, and a new state was born.

The recent observance of National Surveyor’s Week in mid-March reminds every one of the role this discipline still plays here at ODOT. Today’s Ohio surveyors must complete a four-year degree and put in four years of experience before they can receive a license. ODOT’s current survey teams use state-of-the-art technology such as GPS, and 3D scanners – nothing like the field tools George Washington and Thomas Jefferson once relied on in a new frontier. But the value of their craft, to set boundaries and assist infrastructure planning, remains as critical to the state now as it was then.