Women in Hard Hats

Crystal Neelon, District 3

District 3 was happy to welcome the North Central Alliance Workforce to host their “Women in Hard Hats” event at the district garage on Monday, March 26. It was a great opportunity for female students from local high schools to learn about nontraditional career opportunities. The students heard presentations by women who work in jobs like carpentry, iron work, truck driving, concrete work, welding and other traditionally male-dominated fields. Although each presentation was different, the message was the same: You can do anything you set your mind to!

ABOVE: Jodi Burbke-Fukacz and Casey Weltlin from the Sisters of the Brotherhood Carpenter’s Union.
LEFT: District 3 Safety-Health Inspector Pam Hunt and Ashland County HT Jessica Lower.
PHOTOS BY CRYSTAL NEELON, DISTRICT 3

ASK THE DIRECTOR

Q: We’ve had record construction programs in the past few years, how many projects will we advance in 2018?

A: Though it seems winter will never end, here we are in April kicking off the 2018 construction season – another near record-breaking investment of $2.35 billion. The 959 projects we’re advancing this year is vital to the state’s prosperity. This investment means people will get to their jobs, schools, hospitals and family safer, easier and sooner. This investment creates opportunity for economic investment and better jobs for Ohioans. With the fourth largest interstate system and fifth highest vehicle miles traveled volume in the nation, it means we are fulfilling our mission of providing easy movement of people and goods from place to place.

After all these years, our job remains the same, to maintain Ohio’s most valuable man-made resource – our transportation network. Since 2011, we will have invested over $16 billion into nearly 8,000 projects.

With 90 percent of the money going into taking care of what we have, this equates to nearly $15 billion injected into maintaining existing roads and bridges. The impact of these construction dollars is seen in our Critical Success Factors, specifically with our pavement condition and bridge condition ratings – both exceed the established goal.

Without our planning and design teams, we would not be able to get these projects awarded on time. Again we are exceeding our goal. No matter your specific role, we should all be proud of this essential service we provide to the people of Ohio. I for one am proud of all you do.”

To prepare for an upcoming widening project along Interstate 76, in the eastern section of Barberton, District 4 Special Projects had to destroy 21 buildings. By removing these structures in-house, the department sees significant savings, as opposed to contracting the work out. Once Real Estate confirms Special Projects that ODOT owns the property, the crew consisting of Bill Hoffman, Brian Revak, Rick Hoffner and Josh Salaski began removing the buildings using a Kobelco excavator with a claw and a loader.

Once the buildings were gone, the lot is back filled with dirt and then graded and rolled using a remote controlled sheep’s foot roller. Then the property is seeded and will be maintained by Summit County until the project begins in early 2019.

“This was a huge accomplishment for Special Projects and the entire district,” said Special Projects Manager Al Brown.

Prior to demolition, ODOT allowed local agencies to perform some training operations in the vacant properties. The Summit County Sheriff’s SWAT Team performed their building-entry training where they practice forcibly entering a house during a raid operation. “It was a very intense training,” Brown added. “They used flash bangs which were very disorienting.”

Barberton Fire Department also used the vacant properties for CPR training. They trained on how to enter through broken windows and the roof and also used fog machines to simulate no visibility training. The building demolition process was truly a team effort as Planning & Engineering communicated with Special Projects to let them know when they could access the buildings. Facilities assisted with the project by removing Freon from the air conditioners. Four more buildings still need to be demolished, once owned by ODOT. The last four will be removed in the early spring/summer of 2018.

“This was a huge accomplishment for Special Projects and the entire district.”

PHOTO BY BRENT KOVACS, DISTRICT 4
PHOTO BY AL BROWN, DISTRICT 4
On April 9, motorists approaching the I-70 westbound rest area in Belmont County witnessed a sobering visual reminder of the dangers of traffic crashes in work zones. For there in the rest area stood 19 construction cones draped with safety vests and topped with hard hats. A message board stood in the background, reading: “Last year, 19 deaths in Ohio Work Zones. Slow Down Move Over.”

This Fallen Worker Memorial marked the District 11 kicked off of National Work Zone Awareness Week (NWZAW). It was created to highlight safety awareness for motorists; to serve as a poignant reminder to be aware and alert while driving through work zones. The goal was to make people feel the emotional impact that their decisions and actions behind the wheel can have on the lives of others.

As part NWZAW, District 11 employees also wore black ribbons throughout the week as a tribute to the recent loss of John Pasko with Mahoning County, and the other 162 ODOT workers killed in the line of duty.

“Don’t drive distracted, slow down, and move over: that’s the message we are trying to make clear to the traveling public” said District 11 Deputy Director Roxanne Kane.

According to the National Safety Council, motor vehicle fatalities are up 6 percent from 2015, with more than 40,000 people killed on U.S. highways last year.

“Distracted driving crashes are preventable crashes,” said ODOT Director Jerry Wray. “While many people realize the dangers of being distracted behind the wheel, too many Ohioans continue to take their focus away from driving.”

GO ORANGE DAY! FOR NATIONAL WORKZONE AWARENESS WEEK April 9 - April 13
Sonja Simpson’s recent appointment as assistant director of operations with Jerry Wray’s staff is just another one of many accomplishments in this busy woman’s life. The native of Pennsylvania sat down to talk with Transcript. ODOT is lucky to have her.

**A SECOND CONGRATULATIONS IS IN ORDER ASIDE FROM YOUR PROMOTION HERE AT ODOT – CORRECT?** I just earned my applied doctorate in business administration with an emphasis on public administration from Northcentral University this past September.

**YOUR BACKGROUND BEFORE YOU JOINED ODOT?** After graduating from California University of Pennsylvania with a master’s in geography and regional planning, I moved with my husband to central Ohio for a job with the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission. That job led to community planning position with the village of Obetz. Then we moved to Illinois where I worked as an assistant city manager in a one-stoplight town. We moved back here, and I took a job with the city of Columbus. In 2011, the opportunity to work with Jerry Wray as a deputy director for Operations came up and I had to take it.

**YOU WERE LATER NAMED AS A DISTRICT DEPUTY DIRECTOR – WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE LIKE?** I went to District 5 in 2016, and the difference between running a division and running a district office taught me how to manage different facets of what we do here at ODOT. Because I’ve had both experiences, I think I’m uniquely qualified to bridge those two environments and support Director Wray’s “One ODOT” vision.

**WHAT NEW DUTIES WILL YOU BE ASSUMING?** I am overseeing and managing the divisions of Operations and Facilities & Equipment Management in Central Office, and all 12 districts. I want to be the person who facilitates cooperation.

**WHAT ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO AS YOU ASSUME YOUR NEW ROLE?** Mentoring staff and continuing the relationships I’ve already started here at ODOT. I am so excited to be working with peers who share my ideals. We are silently effective in taking care of people behind the scenes.

**WHAT DO YOU DO IN YOUR SPARE TIME?** I have three active kids: a 16-year-old son, a 10-year-old daughter and a 7-year old son. I come to school activities, I bring the snacks, and I’m the Mom taxi. I’ve also learned to decorate cakes, earned a Life Coach certification, and received a motorcycle license in recent years.
Every Rose

Nick Buchanan, District 1

Nestled between the District 1 headquarters and sets of railroad tracks is a field of small white crosses along Bible Road. The crosses mark the graves of unclaimed mental patients who died at the Lima State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Constructed in the early 1900s, the hospital was infamous for the cruel use of electric shock therapy, beatings and years-long periods of isolating patients. The hospital was later converted into a prison in 1982, then closed in 2004. Today, The Oakwood Correctional Institution remains open on the former Lima State Hospital campus.

The cemetery has one infamous occupant: Celia “Ceely” Rose. Born in 1873 to parents David and Rebecca, Ceely stuttered and was mentally disabled. Ceely, it was said, “sure had a thing for boys.” At age 23, she had developed a crush on a kind, younger neighbor. Her parents forbade her from seeing him. Ceely, however, decided to eliminate all who stood in the way of her love. She sprinkled “Rough on Rats” poison – essentially pure arsenic – into a dish of cottage cheese and served it to her family for breakfast in June 1896. Her father died first, and her brother shortly thereafter. Her mother became ill but began to recover, prompting Ceely to dump a larger amount of rat poison into her mother’s bread and milk.

She confided her deeds to a friend, leading to her arrest. In October 1896, Ceely was found not guilty by reason of insanity and was sentenced to a psychiatric hospital in Toledo, later transferred to the Lima State Hospital. She died there in 1934 and is buried near a tree behind the District 1 office.

Many say she haunts the cemetery; some say she ventures back to the home where she committed her crime, which still stands in the Malabar Farm State Park. Others say she ventures wherever she needs to find her true love once again. The good news is that she means no harm – unless you get between her and her love.

Cemetery beside District 1

PHOTO BY NICK BUCHANAN, DISTRICT 1