District 4’s Steve Jones goes on-air to extol traditional outdoor activities

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A message from ODOT Director Jerry Wray

2015 was an outstanding and productive year for the Ohio Department of Transportation. For starters, our people accomplished more work by force account than in any previous year in ODOT history.

WE also had record capital construction programs of about $2.4 billion in each of the last two years. That represents almost 2,000 projects, and a very significant investment in Ohio’s transportation system and economy.

Construction began on ODOT’s first public-private partnership project last year, the $435 million dollar Southern Ohio Veterans Memorial Highway in Scioto County. The project had been promised to the people of southern Ohio for decades and is the largest single construction project in the department’s history.

Other projects include the 38-mile-lane addition on Interstate 75 in northwest Ohio, the Martin Luther King Drive/ Interstate 71 interchange in Cincinnati, the Interstate 270/U.S. Route 23 trench in Columbus, and the Opportunity Corridor in Cleveland. Also in Cleveland, work continues on the George Voinovich Innerbelt Bridge. I’m hoping the second bridge will be completed late this summer so Ohioans can use it to watch the Indians in the World Series next fall.

A new five-year, $300-billion-dollar highway bill was recently signed by the President. While still not completely clear, funding levels included in the bill are slightly higher than their current level.

Another great ODOT bridge story is the job we did on the interchange at I-720 and I-70 on Columbus’ west side this year, just days before the Fourth of July holiday. An overturned ethanol tanker burst into flames and scorched the eastbound I-70 bridge over the Outerbelt, closing the bridge to traffic. More than 100,000 vehicles use that section of I-70 every day. We hired contractors immediately, building incentives into the contract requiring the job be done within 30 days. ODOT, working 24/7 with the contractors, was able to get that interchange open in just 18 days. It was an amazing project and demonstrated the ingenuity and tremendous ability of ODOT people.

Making the outdoors in

Brent Kovacs, District 4

DISTRICT 4’S STEVE JONES HAS BEEN IN radio for the past 35 years. In his off time, the utility coordinator started producing a country show on WKNT in northeast Ohio, then became the morning show DJ a couple years later. Jones started at ODOT in 1986 while still pursuing his love of broadcasting. Always the outdoors enthusiast, he started an outdoors radio show on WKNT in 1992 that quickly became a TV show.

Things changed in 1999, when he decided to step back from the show to spend more time with his four sons. But just three years ago, Jones decided to get back into radio with a new show called Destination Outdoors. The show talks about all things related to fishing, boating, camping, hunting, hiking and archery.

“The show’s main goal is to instill the traditions with families and to get kids outdoors,” Jones said. “I enjoy meeting new people and helping others enjoy the outdoors as much as I do.”

He also works closely with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to sponsor fishing derbies for kids and bring awareness to hunting laws and regulations. The show entains Jones and his co-host talking about outdoors topics and taking calls from listeners. In early 2016, Destination Outdoors will be broadcast on radio stations in Ashland and Lima airing the show.

Destination Outdoors currently airs on Fox Sports 1350 in NE Ohio with a live recording on Monday nights from 5 to 7 p.m. and is then re-aired on Saturday mornings from 6 to 8 a.m. Jones can be heard worldwide with the use of the iHeart media app and by searching for Fox Sports 1350.
You can see ODOT trucks everywhere on the roadway, along with the drivers and crews who depend on them. What you don’t see is an army of automotive mechanics and technicians—about 260 strong in the department—who work to keep these vehicles running. Their jobs are not just about wielding a mean monkey wrench. Automotive maintenance has gone digital, and trucks now come loaded with technology. The modern ODOT mechanic or tech must have the knowledge to diagnose and repair these systems. “Cyber wrenching” on computer-based systems is now as much a part of the job as the use of traditional tools.

Matt Riley, mechanics training officer for ODOT, conducts training for employees throughout the state on these systems, and works in conjunction with computer programmers to develop the software that controls the technology on the department’s truck fleet.

“We work to create standardized templates for the trucks,” said Riley. “We physically program the trucks to make all the cab and body electrical systems work.”

The templates are essentially a package of computer programs that operate the various systems of a truck, such as the wing plow strobes or salt wetting application systems. Riley works with Jeremiah Williams in Central Office to build and apply the templates. All will be in place before the trucks reach their designated districts. Of course, the systems have to be attended to and serviced. The technology is a challenge for those maintaining the fleet. Riley provides training and new laptop packages to help diagnose issues. Riley even makes himself available to provide needed updates and corrections remotely through his PC. Even if it means getting calls at 2 a.m. in the morning to program a truck.

Employees like Dana Dulin, an automotive technician and 17-year veteran at the Hardin County garage, greatly appreciate the assistance. “The service Riley provides is needed support to the local garages,” said Dulin. “Vehicles spend less time in the shop. It’s always changing, but now with Matt, it seems like we’re staying up with this.”
ODOT recently launched the Office of Outreach in the new Opportunity, Diversity, and Inclusion Division. Administrator Terry Bolden, who joined ODOT in December, says the office’s mission is to communicate, educate, and collaborate with minority-owned small and disadvantaged businesses. They will assist these firms in becoming certified as Minority Business Enterprises, Encouraging Diversity, Growth & Equities or Small and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises. Once they qualify under those designations, they will be free to do business with ODOT.

“It’s all about diversity and inclusion,” Bolden says.

Maria Davila and Lynn Stevens recently joined ODOT as the first two of four district regional outreach managers for the division. Davila spent over a decade working in the Hispanic community as an executive director of a Cleveland Community Development Corporation and on the Board of The Spanish American Committee for a Better Community. Stevens served as director of Minority Affairs with Governor Kasich’s Office, starting in January 2011.

What’s your style?

Joel Hunt, Central Office

Are you outgoing or reserved? Task-oriented or people-oriented? If you’re a manager, what behavioral styles are your employees?

The answers to those questions were important enough to Governor Kasich to require all state employees who manage at least two people – 875 at ODOT – to take eight courses on the foundations of supervision. The training is called Lead Ohio and it begins this spring.

“By knowing how managers and employees act, and by appreciating their differences, managers can flex their styles to meet employees where they are,” said Daveen Goodman, administrator of the Office of Employee Development and Lean.

The first course helps supervisors recognize four distinct behavioral styles: dominance, influence, steadiness, and compliance. The other seven courses will focus on labor relations, communications, coaching, goal setting, evaluations and leadership skills.

“We heard loud and clear in the Quality of Work Life Survey that managers need to do a better job of communicating,” Goodman said. “Lead Ohio is a step in the right direction to correcting that.”

The Department of Administrative Services created the course. It is the first-ever statewide manager training. ODOT is modifying the course by using ODOT-specific examples to make the materials more applicable.

Courses will be primarily held in the districts on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Two sessions of each course will be scheduled in all districts in 2016.

Employees from the Office of Employee Development and Lean are currently taking the courses to become certified instructors of Lead Ohio for ODOT.

BOGO, ODOT Style

Nancy Burton, District 6

The “Buy One, Get One” promotion, familiar to all, took on new meaning this holiday season. Shoppers at the Worthington Mall were invited to stop in at a display at the northwest section set up by the District 6 office. Visitors could request answers about all the construction on the north side of Columbus. Conveniently, they could also request Christmas presents from Santa, sitting right beside the ODOT display.

“We had a steady crowd of people coming by to see us,” said District Construction Administrator Brian Hupp.

Construction photos, before and after renderings and a project timeline were on display in an area that is usually home to a local Farmer’s Market on Saturday mornings. The display had one distinctive feature in particular.

The 14-and-a-half foot canvas banner that shows all the improvement to the corridor once construction is complete, was the big attraction,” said Ferzan Ahmed, District 6 deputy director. “People could really see how much better their commute will be simply by running their finger over the ramp or bridge on the banner.”

“When I first saw the project banner, I was so impressed,” said Susan Marsh, Continental Real Estate property manager. “That’s why I asked if we could keep the banner on display through the holidays, since a lot of our shoppers are very interested in all the construction.”

This was the first time ODOT District 6 held an outreach event in a shopping mall. From the response, it probably won’t be the last.
“I’ve fabricated a few things out here,” Seneca County Highway Technician Ron Wise said, humbly. “I’ve built a tandem chipper box for the tree crew, a brine trailer for Northwood Outpost, a catch basin form, a spinner cart to safely remove the salt spinner single-handedly, and a slot paver.”

Wise, who has more than 20 years of experience in fabrication, wasn’t hired for his expertise in that field. But he still applies his abilities and creativity in any area where he sees things that could be improved.

The catch basin form, for example, allows Seneca County to create their own catch basins for installation rather than having to purchase them from outside sources. This saves both money and about three weeks of wait time on delivery.

The slot paver enables Seneca County to perform pavement repairs faster and cheaper. “It’s easier to take an adjustable (18” to 48”) slot paver out for smaller jobs like centerline cracks or shoulder work,” he said. “It also has side mounts to easily reach along edges or curbs.”

The slot paver has been beneficial on Interstate 75, as well as the rural roads it was originally built for. “Last winter, when weather and traffic began to take a toll on the 32-mile, I-75 construction zone in Wood County,” said PIO Theresa Pollick, “ODOT and contractors were faced with a challenge: either shut down portions of the interstate or snarl traffic with single lane restrictions. Knowing the slot paver could be used in the narrow lanes of the work zone, we encouraged contractors to use ODOT equipment combined with their contracted workforce. Work was performed at night with little impact to traffic, and the result was no closures or traffic congestion.”

For his creations, Wise received the Individual Innovation Award at Team UP and was recognized at District 2’s annual meeting.

Watch a YouTube video of the slot paver being used on I-75.