With his back to traffic, ODOT HT Sam Townsend performs vital pavement repairs on U.S. Route 23 in Pickaway County. Sam’s wife and little boy thank you for Slowing Down and Moving Over when he and his crew are working on the road.

PHOTO BY BRUCE HULL, CENTRAL OFFICE
What’s the Pollinator Program and why is ODOT coordinating with district and county leadership to ensure wildflowers to reemerge. Central Office Operations is making a commitment to do the right thing and protect the wildlife and environment within its right of way. Pollinator habitats increase crop yield by 20 percent, and with agriculture being Ohio’s largest industry -- worth $105 billion annually -- pollinator habitats not only help secure our food supply, but our state’s economy.

Why should ODOT care? ODOT manages 19,000 miles of roadways comprising 260,000 acres of land. As the largest land owner of any public entity in Ohio, ODOT has a responsibility to do the right thing and protect the wildlife and environment within its right of way. Pollinator habitats increase crop yield by 20 percent, and with agriculture being Ohio’s largest industry -- worth $105 billion annually -- pollinator habitats not only help secure our food supply, but our state’s economy.

Mowing too often and mowing too short, can be detrimental to wildlife by killing insects and removing their food source. Beginning this spring, ODOT is reducing its mowing frequency beyond the clear zone to once per year, every other year, or every third year depending on the presence of woody vegetation. Reduced mowing will benefit pollinators while lowering roadside maintenance costs and improving aesthetics by allowing native wildflowers to remerge. Central Office Operations is coordinating with district and county leadership to ensure clear zones are maintained, noxious and invasive weeds are controlled, and the public and businesses understand the importance of naturalizing Ohio’s roadways.

Before the start of spring, Auto Mechanic Zan Vaughn was in the Middle East working on anything from a military all-terrain crane to a mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle (MRAP). By the end of March he was at the Hocking County Garage in Logan, hooking a mower to a tractor for the first time in about a year-and-a-half. “It’s like your first time, even though you’ve done it a thousand times,” he said. “You gotta get back in the routine.”

In addition to working as an auto mechanic 2 at ODOT, Vaughn is an E6 Staff Sergeant in the Kentucky National Guard. He has been deployed twice in 11 years, most recently from September of 2016 until March of 2018. He served in Kuwait, Afghanistan, Qatar, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates.

“We go to Kuwait, then they take you from there and they divide you up into maintenance support teams,” he explained. “I led a team to all those countries to repair equipment or recover downed vehicles. I did a lot in Afghanistan—that’s where I mostly stayed because of my experience.”

His previous deployment in 2012 took him to Africa and Afghanistan. He was hired at the Hocking County Garage after returning to the states the next year. His history working on vehicles dates back to his teenage years, when he helped a friend’s family build race cars. From there he helped his own dad build a custom Harley-Davidson chopper and worked for more than a decade as a Harley-Davidson Master Technician. He attended the Motorcycle Mechanics Institute in Phoenix.

One weekend a month he returns to Ashland, Kentucky training on natural disasters, including tornadoes and floods. He also travels there for two-week long annual trainings. While his job in the military and at ODOT have similarities, they are undeniably different.

“When you have a truck here, you order a part for it,” he said. “When lives or a mission are on the line you do what you gotta do—it’s a different set of rules. It’s like snow and ice to the most extreme you could ever get.”

While they may be two different worlds, he says he’s incredibly grateful that he has this world to come back to.

“It is the best job I’ve ever had as far as the military support ODOT gives—it’s unmatched,” he said. “I knew I could come back to ODOT and still have a job and in this day and age, that means the world.”

Originally from Tennessee, Vaughn currently lives in Athens with his wife Katie and 10-year-old daughter Jesse.
District 10 is set to get three new garages in Monroe, Vinton and Washington counties. Demolition has already started on the 50-year-old Washington County Garage, with the Monroe County Garage demolition set to begin soon after. Monroe and Washington employees are currently working out of temporary facilities, as the new garages will be built in the same location as the current garages. ODOT purchased land from the Vinton County Commissioners on which to build a new garage. This comes after a fire heavily damaged the current facility in December 2017.

PHOTOS BY ASHLEY RITTENHOUSE, DISTRICT 10

Diversity has become one of the many industry buzzwords in business and public administration. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition is in part: “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements. The inclusion of different types of people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization.” For all this attention, few really know what diversity is or why it is important. The key word in the dictionary definition is inclusion.

Optimally, the workplace should be a reflection of the community in which it serves or the workforce from which it draws. Depending on the area of the state, the cross-section of the employees should give an indication of the greater population. Yet many workforces don’t even demonstrate the appropriate representation of women, even though most locales have a close to 50 percent female population.

A Diverse Universe
Sonja R. Simpson, DBA, Central Office

Diversity in the workplace is greater than just reducing people to specific classifications. It is the inclusion of persons in the workforce which are a part of the greater human experience. People are an assemblage of many things: education, values, life experiences, and personal desires are some of the many factors that guide our thought processes and choices.

The choice to seek diversity is not about checking a box for the sake of promoting a certain ideology. Organizations are finding that diversity of the workforce can yield multiple benefits. Creativity in problem-solving, process improvements, and innovation are just some of the many benefits to diversifying the workforce.

Admittedly, there are some barriers, as some work sectors traditionally have not hired certain groups of people. Many sectors simply have not seen diversity in the applicant pool. That deficiency may be largely due a lack of interest of diverse applicants rather than discrimination. So, how do we fix that?

Our plan is to invest by planting seeds. Take opportunities to showcase the benefits of our agency at college job recruitment events, high school summer employment fairs, and junior high career talks. Partner with guidance counselors and job placement professionals to help spread the word and tell our story.

None of this pays off immediately, but if we intend to increase diversity, then these strategies and others should be utilized. We are in the business of growing the next generation of ODOT employees, and have a unique opportunity and responsibility to do so with great care and planning. Inclusion is possible, and ODOT will surely benefit. But, remember, there will be no success with half-hearted execution.

EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNMENT
Responsibility and Rehabilitation

Bob Stephens, District 12

Among the many duties of District 12 safety and health program consultant Israel (Izzy) Ciptak, community outreach is one of the most gratifying. As part of ODOT’s partnership with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC), Ciptak visits the Northeast Reintegration Center (NERC) a pre-release facility for women in Cleveland, on a bi-monthly basis. He provides safety instruction to women offenders who volunteer for litter pickup details on area highways. On May 1, tagged along with Ciptak to the NERC.

NERC offers helpful programs, including “Cage Your Rage,” “Faith Based Reintegration,” “Money Smart,” “Responsible Family” and many others. Litter pickup is just one of the many opportunities that offenders have to grow and serve the community.

Pickup crews are sent daily year-around, weather permitting. In addition to ODRC inmates from NERC, crews also include Court Community Service (CCS) workers. These are people who are on community service imposed by the court. I later watched as 16 women offenders who volunteer for litter pickup attend Ciptak’s training session, which lasted about 90 minutes. He discussed the dangers of working alongside a highway, and advised the women to work as a team, stay off of the road and of working alongside a highway, and advised the women to work as a team, stay off of the road and be mindful of the surroundings.

They discussed the use of personal safety equipment, such as safety vests, work gloves and goggles. Ciptak also provided helpful informational handouts on ticks, poisonous plants, and litter pickup safety tips. Attendance to the safety seminar is mandatory for all offenders who wish to volunteer for litter pickup.

That’s a ‘WRAP’

WRAP Sponsorship Committee

From a technology perspective, taking care of what we have, such as equipment, materials and other assets, and tracking the process seems like an easy task. You enter the data in a system and magically it all seems to be there when you need to retrieve it again, run a series of reports, or simply share it with another user. But in the complex world of managing transportation assets, it seems as if magic isn’t enough.

Back in June 2014, ODOT implemented Enterprise Information Management System (EIMS) - a system to manage and track labor, equipment, materials, and other costs associated with the lifecycle of an asset. EIMS was to replace EMS/TMS and get the system off the mainframe, which is outdated and unsecure. However, after a few years of using the new system, the department completed a gap analysis of EIMS and it was evident that the system no longer meets the everchanging needs of the Department. Still, before a replacement is found and implemented, which could take up to three years or more, EIMS will continue to be the official Book of Record for Lands and Buildings, Fleet, Consumable Inventory and recording all work activity. Users are expected to continue following the Business Rules in place and record all Labor, Equipment, Materials and Other costs accurately, as the data collected in the current system will continue to be used in project and budget planning.

A new team, the Work, Resource, Asset and Plan Management System (WRAP) sponsor committee has been put into place to oversee the replacement of EIMS. This committee will be responsible for the development of a complete and thorough transition plan recommendation including tasks, milestones and set deliverables. The WRAP committee will work closely with the existing EIMS steering committee and the Asset Management Leadership Team throughout the complex project. The goal is to find a solution that is not only mobile-ready, allowing work crews to enter data from the field, but integrates with roadway network updates and ultimately allowing the department to manage an asset, from time of purchase or construction until the asset is retired. This is a major undertaking, but when completed, will allow the department to take better care of what we have.

Saddle Up

Nancy Burton, District 6

Partners in quality and safety was the theme of this year’s 31st Director’s Cup Roadeo at the Ohio Expo Center. There were 54 informational booths on display, along with dozens of pieces of equipment ODOT workers use to take care of Ohio roads and bridges. There were 17 TOP awards presented to individuals and teams for everything from outstanding customer service and leadership to diversity and innovation. Top honors for the best driver of the truck course went to John May of District 4, and the winning driver in the loader competition was District 8’s Steve Gacek.

Director Wray described the department as capable and talented and urged folks to make a difference beyond transportation.
“Sue,” as a proper noun, is a name popular among children’s book authors for its easy spelling and pronunciation. As a verb, it’s something that people do to each other in Judge Judy’s television courtroom. As an acronym, though, it’s a bit more complicated than three letters.

Subsurface Utility Exploration (SUE) is the determination of underground utility lines during a project’s planning process. It needs to be done before projects are constructed to determine the location and depth of affected utilities in the ground. Contractors who completed SUE work on comparable ODOT projects cost taxpayers upwards of $32,000.

District 1 piloted the state’s first in-house SUE process in 2014 while planning the resurfacing of State Route 65 in Allen County. That project has gone to construction this year. Doing the SUE process allows District 1 crews to locate utilities themselves on smaller projects for a smaller price tag.

“It’s really handy for smaller projects, like a culvert replacement, where they may have a gas line in the area,” said Duane Hackworth, District 1’s utility relocation technician. “We can usually get out there and find it pretty quickly.”

To orchestrate an in-house SUE operation, Hackworth must coordinate efforts between project engineers in design and construction, utility owners, the Ohio Utilities Protection Services (OUPS), surveying and highway management. Together, they must determine conflict points in a proposed project design and physically find the utility lines for confirmation. With information and utility markers provided by OUPS and utility owners, ODOT surveyors and highway technicians can collaborate to find and record the locations and depths of utility lines with a ramjetter truck, more commonly known as a “Vactor jet” truck.

“Vactor jets are capable of excavating a hole to find utilities with very little risk of breaking a utility line, because it’s spraying water to move dirt out of the way,” said Chris Hughes, District 1 capital programs administrator. “But when using construction equipment to dig for it, there’s a good chance you’ll have broken it when you find it.”