Program gets the boot(s)

Ohio’s bicycle-friendly rating rises

Record-breaking construction season kicks off

Sallie Tablett

ODOT ‘Welcomer-In-Chief”
Making moves on ‘Move Over’
Paul Pegher, Central Office and District 5

Driver safety and awareness are universal themes in ODOT’s public messages. But this year, they’re amplified by the expanded “Move Over Law,” which requires motorists to slow down and, if possible, shift over one lane when approaching any work vehicle with flashing lights.

As the 2014 construction season approached, ODOT and OCSCEA joined forces to lead a Move Over public awareness campaign, enlisting support from the Ohio Turnpike, the Department of Public Safety, the Ohio Contractors Association, the American Transportation Services Safety Association, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the Towing and Recovery Association of Ohio, and AAA Ohio.

Together, they promoted awareness across Ohio through media events on Interstate 71 in Delaware County and at Turnpike headquarters in Berea, on bumper stickers and posters, on interstate digital message signs, social media, and radio spots airing this spring on nearly 200 stations statewide. ODOT anchors it all at the web site MoveOver.Ohio.gov.

The Move Over message will remain important as long as ODOT workers are on the road. ODOT and its partners will continue promote it, and all employees are encouraged to help by spreading the word among friends and family.

ODOT’s environmental efforts awarded
Alexandra Buerger, Central Office

Four ODOT projects from around the state were recognized this spring by the non-profit organization Scenic Ohio. The group, which is dedicated to improving roadway environments and aesthetics in communities across Ohio, annually honors select communities and entities that have made efforts to protect and enhance Ohio’s scenic resources.

This year, District 10 brought home two awards for the relocation of State Route 664 in Hocking County as well as an emergency project in Meigs County on State Route 124. The SR 664 project rerouted a section of the roadway to improve safe entry into Old Man’s Cave in Hocking Hills State Park and moved the roadway further from the natural features of the park. On SR 124, slope instability and landslide problems in the southeastern Ohio district were threatening the preservation of a section of the Ohio River Scenic Byway. The solution to relocate the stretch out of the Ohio River floodplain earned District 10 its second award.

District 6 was recognized for the Delaware County rest area they helped create and maintain; the area features landscaping of native plants and grasses and pays tribute to the armed forces through its Blue Star Memorial Highway designation.

Central Office’s Environmental Services section earned ODOT’s fourth award by developing a streamlined environmental process for highway maintenance personnel. The guidelines and checklist involved in the process help managers in the field plan work around potential environmental impacts, leading to better compliance and performance.
Ohio rises in rank among bicycle-friendly states

Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

Ohio took a big leap upward on the annual list of the League of American Bicyclists’ 2014 Bicycle Friendly States. Ohio moved from 32nd in the nation in 2013, to 16th this year.

“ODOT partnered with several communities, agencies, businesses, and bike advocacy groups, including the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Ohio Department of Health, the Ohio Bicycle Federation, and numerous Metropolitan Planning Organizations around the state, to enhance and encourage bicycle friendly education, investment, and policy in the past year,” said Julie Wallace, ODOT’s Bicycle Pedestrian and Safe Routes to School program manager.

The League’s Bicycle Friendly Report noted Ohio’s statewide bicycle advocacy group, and ODOT’s inclusion of the issue of bicycle safety in its Strategic Highway Safety Plan. Ohio has more than 4,200 miles of bike-ways and 13 bikeway trails of national significance.

Boot program begins pilot

Alexandra Buerger, Central Office

ODOT employees in certain classifications now have the opportunity to receive new safety boots at the department’s expense. A statewide program was implemented this month under the administration of the Office of Employee Health and Safety in Central Office.

Leadership has emphasized the importance of the health and safety of the ODOT work force, even establishing Critical Success Factors that report the frequency of workers’ accidents and injuries. “We encourage people on a daily basis to find ways to perform their work not only efficiently but also safely,” said Director Jerry Wray. “Quality boots are an important factor in safety.”

Lehigh Outfitters, an online store in contract with ODOT, has set up kiosks in Central Office, Aviation, and each District Office. Employees can order boots directly from the kiosks, and purchasing will be open through July 21.

Depending on the extent of wear and tear on footwear, different classifications will receive new boots either annually or biennially, and ordering will take place each spring. In addition, ODOT, DAS, and Lehigh Outfitters are working on offering a discount to non-eligible state of Ohio employees who purchase work boots on their own.

Local News

First ‘Crew Leader Academy’ kicks off

Joyce Miller, District 3

District 3 stepped in to unchartered territory this past month by holding a Crew Leader Academy for employees moving through the Highway Technician (HT) series. The academy is an effort to provide HT 3s with a solid foundation to become professional crew leaders in the field. The HT series currently offers only technical training. District 3 Highway Management Administrator Tim Farley and Roadway Services Manager Matt Blankenship worked closely to develop the Crew Leader academy:

“In all the conversations I have had with our HT work force,” said Farley, “it has been unanimous that they needed an opportunity to help them grow as a Crew Leader. ‘Many wanted the chance to further develop their leadership skills.”
Dismantling a giant
Jocelynn Clemings, District 12

In the winter of 2014, District 12 announced plans to demolish the now-closed Innerbelt Bridge, and progress is now well underway.

In mid-January, crews began demolition operations which included removing light poles, barrier wall and railings. Soon after, removal of the old concrete driving surface also began. Now crews are working to remove the structural steel components in four specific spans over the railroad, river and other sensitive areas.

The remaining five spans of the steel skeleton of the old bridge will be demolished using “controlled” demolition, which will take place this month.

“This demolition plan will protect the businesses that operate from the Flats as well as people living and working in the Tremont neighborhood,” said ODOT Construction Engineer Tom Hyland, P.E.

The Innerbelt project team is planning a public viewing area as interest in the demolition is expected to be high. A professional demolition company that has handled large-scale demolitions around the nation will perform the controlled demolition and a safety perimeter will be set.

ODOT is in the midst of replacing the 1950s-era Innerbelt Bridge with two new bridges: one each for westbound and eastbound traffic. The westbound bridge, the first of the pair, was opened in November. The pair of new bridges has been named in honor of statesman U.S. Senator George V. Voinovich. When both bridges are complete, ODOT will have invested more than half a billion dollars in the city of Cleveland over a six-year period.

Litter clean up
Mandi Dillon, District 7

District 7 is partnering with the Montgomery and Clark counties sheriffs’ offices to clean up the interstates. Agreements with these local law enforcement offices will allow inmate crews to pick up litter along U.S. and state routes within those counties. These crews are supervised by deputies and will work year round to keep litter off the roadides. An event held in April highlighted this partnership and its success so far.

“I think this is a great example of agencies working together; utilizing inmate crews for litter collection will allow our ODOT crews to focus on core highway maintenance functions,” said District 7 Deputy Director Randy Chevalley.

District 7 is currently working on a similar agreement with the Shelby County Sheriff’s Office.

The program course work spans three weeks, and the employees take both classes pertaining to leadership development and ODOT construction specification. The leadership portion is taught by an educator from the Ashland County West Holmes Career Center who emphasizes the importance of teamwork as well as conflict management. The District 3 staff also teaches ODOT specific knowledge with regard to safety in the workplace, construction specification book facts and the Critical Success Factors along with additional topics of related interest. Nearly 50 employees went through the Crew Leader Academy, including six sent from District 2.

“I personally enjoyed the leadership aspect of the training the most at the Crew Leader Academy,” said HT 3 Laureen Carpenter. “It was very helpful to learn about ways in which to communicate more effectively in a positive manner with your crew.”

Lorain County HT 3 Bill Wright agreed.

“The Leadership portion had tools we can all use to improve our people skills at work as well as our personal lives,” Wright said. “As for the Crew Leader portion, there was a lot of material covered on the new force account rules. It is great that Matt Blankenship, Tim Farley and the District leadership believe in their employees to give us this opportunity to improve our knowledge and our skills.”

Crews cleaning up litter along I-70 in Clark County.
Mussel-bound
An environmental specialist helps deliver transportation projects and sustain ecosystems
Paul Pegher, District 5 and Central Office

LAST SUMMER, MEGAN Michael with ODOT’s Central Office made an extraordinary discovery while conducting a survey of the Olentangy River near Delaware. She was researching the results of the Panhandle Road Dam’s removal and the restoration of more than 4,000 feet of scenic waterway. ODOT had funded that work to balance out the impact of an Interstate 270 bridge project farther downstream. Her discovery that day fit easily into the palm of her hand: a fresh snuff box mussel shell. Though it seemed ordinary, that shell of an endangered species of mussel was the first of its kind to be seen in that river since the 1960s. It was also a possible sign that the hard work was paying off.

Michael is an environmental specialist and 12-year veteran in the Office of Environmental Services (OES). As required by state and federal law, Michael and her OES team members carefully study the natural environment of ODOT project areas—especially those involving streams, wetlands, or significant amounts of right of way. This work helps engineers make decisions to minimize a project’s environmental impact. After filing a 200-plus page application with the National Fish and Wildlife Service, Michael is currently one of only 15 people certified to survey, federally list and relocate mussels in Ohio. Her knowledge of this subject matter and her federal certification make Michael a vital asset in ODOT’s environmental planning process.

The work is just as important for streams and rivers as it is for mussel species. A healthy mussel population means a healthy river: Mussels feed on algae and other microorganisms that can otherwise become too numerous in a stream, they’re an important food source for other animals in the ecosystem, and their feet help stabilize stream beds. A typical mussel’s lifespan is 25 to 30 years.

The problem is, nearly 70 percent of the mussel species that once inhabited Ohio and the rest of the Midwest are extinct or endangered. That’s why Michael and her team must pay close attention to this year’s list of more than 60 ecological surveys tied to waterway projects, which require the well-trained eye to distinguish a mussel from a rock or one species from another.

Mussels are so important, in fact, that Michael and other certified biologists must sometimes relocate them from an area impacted by construction. The process is simple, but painstaking: Starting at the area’s downstream edge, they gently pull out every mussel they can find, working their way back and forth until they get to the upper edge. They then move their catch to a location upstream, well out of harm’s way.

Today that historic snuff box mussel shell Michael discovered bears her name among the largest collection of mussels in the world at The Ohio State University’s Museum of Biological Diversity. It is also a reminder that an environmental specialist can help deliver transportation projects and help sustain healthy ecosystems, too.
Starting this month, the Director will address the most repeated concerns expressed on the Quality of Work-Life Survey. These are the actual comments as written by ODOT employees.

“I BELIEVE THAT WORKER MORALE IS being stressed by the drive to become a leaner organization. I believe that the work in some units is suffering due to less people and am concerned about the down-sizing.”

“IT IS A DIFFICULT CHALLENGE with such a large, decentralized organization to get to the ideal, or optimal, state. However, we are making steady progress in that direction. I believe we are approximately right-sized now – in fact, we probably need to go up a little bit. If we do that, we will be very careful to select people with the proper skills and best attitudes to help us get better.

Our staffing levels vary from district to district, and even from county to county. In addition, it’s important that we clearly define the proper role and configuration of Central Office. There are a lot of variables and factors to consider, starting with out core mission and including seasonal weather conditions, road and bridge conditions, program size and major projects under development, revenue, equipment, snow and ice operations, and, of course, time. Our revenue is finite and there’s only so much time. The challenge is to achieve the right mix and balance that will allow us to maximize effectiveness and productivity.

The goal is to get the right people in the right positions where they can offer value to their coworkers and help us be the very professional, highly productive organization we can and ought to be. We’re getting there.”

— Director Jerry Wray

**ASK THE DIRECTOR | QUALITY OF WORK-LIFE**

**COMMENT**
ODOT’s record-breaking construction season kicks off
Joel Hunt, Central Office

The department’s 2014 construction season is officially underway, and the ODOT work force responsible for highway construction and maintenance will have to be at their best. This year’s program includes 936 different projects throughout the state, totaling $2.5 billion.

The Ohio Turnpike is partially or entirely funding multiple phases of five different projects that will begin or continue this year, including construction of Cleveland’s eastbound George V. Voinovich Bridge in Cleveland, Interstate 75 highway reconstruction program through Wood and Hancock counties, reconstruction of State Route 57 in Lorain County, widening of Interstate 271 in northern Summit County and construction of Cleveland’s Opportunity Corridor.

“Thanks to funds generated from the Ohio Turnpike, we were able to push forward eight projects totaling more than $500 million that were sitting on the shelf,” said Tim McDonald, administrator of the Office of Program Management.

Gov. John R. Kasich’s Jobs and Transportation Plan is fueling the $2.5 billion state construction season—the largest ever.

Just a few years ago, transportation officials were forced to push back—sometimes by decades—many of the transportation projects communities need in order to improve motorist safety and local economic vitality. In response, Gov. Kasich unlocked the value of the Ohio Turnpike to bond $1.5 billion to help fill the gap. That money, combined with federal, state and local investments over six years, will allow for $3 billion in new infrastructure spending—and much of that work begins this year.

“Ohio is leading the Midwest in job creation over the past three years and our highways are critical to our ability to keep our job creation momentum,” said Kasich. “By thinking creatively, we were able to develop a solution that will allow us to move ahead sooner with some key projects across the state and as a result, the future of our roadways is much better than it was a few years ago.”

Motorists will see work either begin or continue on a number of transportation projects including the I-75 pavement rehabilitation project in downtown Toledo, the I-475/U.S. Route 23 interchange safety upgrade and the McCord Road underpass project.

Other projects of significance around the state include District 4’s $68 million I-90 pavement replacement, District 6’s $71 million North Side Fix (U.S. 23 north of I-270), District 8’s $90 million I-71/Martin Luther King interchange and District 11’s $73 million State Route 7 slide/slope repairs.

Quick Facts

- $1.5 billion in roadway resurfacing projects
- 84 interstate safety upgrades
- Largest project contract awarded this year is the Portsmouth Bypass project worth $370 million
- 30 bridges repaired or replaced as part of the new County Bridge Program worth $14 million
A mother to many
Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

Sallie Tablett is kind of like the “front door” to ODOT’s Central Office Headquarters in the Columbus Hilltop neighborhood on West Broad Street. As a customer service assistant for the Office of Facilities Operations, her job is to greet all non-ODOT employees who come to Central Office. She routinely checks their IDs, issues them visitor badges and answers the questions they may have. She has done this for nearly five years, always with a smile and a welcome.

“I love my job. I’m a people person and my job places me in the thick of things. I get to meet a lot of people on a regular basis,” she says.

In addition to serving as ODOT’s official “Welcomer-in-Chief,” Sallie and her husband Jim also host a variety of foster children to their Columbus home. They have been licensed by Franklin County Children Services as foster parents for the past four years.

“We’ve had 23 children,” she said. “Sometimes they stay for a day or two; sometimes they may stay up to a year. We were alone and we wanted to make a difference. Both of us have lots of love to give.”

Sallie says that while each foster child is different, most of them also share some things in common.

“Typically, they are between the ages of 6 and 15. They tend to be defiant. They have attachment issues. Most of them have come from a bad situation,” said Sallie.

She and Jim offer the children the chance to accompany them to the Reformation Lutheran Church that they’ve attended for 26 years. Sallie is a lay minister at the church.

“We only take them if they want to go,” said Sallie. “Most of them have never been to a church before. They soak it all in. The pastor’s service always begins with how God loves everybody no matter who they are. It gives them hope that one day things will get better.”

Sallie Tablett helps Montgomery Dagley check out a motor pool vehicle. PHOTO BY BRUCE HULL, CENTRAL OFFICE