ODOT HOSTS FIRST-EVER CIVIL RIGHTS SYMPOSIUM

May 2017
I saw recently on the news that ODOT sponsored a Civil Rights event in Columbus. How does this fit into our mission as a transportation agency?

ASK THE DIRECTOR

The ODOT Division of Opportunity, Diversity, and Inclusion (ODI) co-sponsored a Civil Rights Symposium with the Columbus Chapter of Women’s Transportation Seminar (WTS) on April 11th and April 12th. WTS is an international organization dedicated to building the future of transportation through the global advancement of women.

ODI was created to promote diversity and provide equitable opportunities among ODOT employees and business partners—especially small and disadvantaged businesses. As the state’s largest provider of roadway construction work, ODOT is committed to diversity and equal opportunity for two primary reasons: it’s important for a healthy business environment in Ohio and, quite simply, it’s the right thing to do.

Featured speakers at the two-day event included Martin Luther King III; Congresswoman Joyce Beatty; Mary Peters, former United States Secretary of Transportation under President George W. Bush from 2006 to 2009; Deputy Secretary of the Virginia Department of Transportation; Grindly Johnson; attorney Larry James of Crabbe Brown James; Ohio Civil Rights Commission Executive Director G. Michael Payton; Executive Director of the Ohio Latino Affairs Commission Lilleana Cavanaugh; and Ohio Department of Administrative Service Deputy Director and State EEO Coordinator Gregory Williams.

Because ODOT is such a large organization, small businesses may be intimidated about doing business with our department. Part of the mission of this symposium is to teach small minority and women owned businesses how they can become part of our team. This symposium was the inaugural conference. We plan to continue it annually.

SOLUTION IN SIGHT

Barbara Corners was born blind. An ordinary day for her includes crossing West Broad Street at Old Village Road to her regular bus stop. She does this with traffic whizzing by, cyclists in the bike lane and COTA buses stopping and going. If it sounds terrifying, it is.

ODOT recently completed improvements to West Broad Street, including resurfacing, curb and gutters, new traffic signals and landscaping. This construction made it unsafe for Corners to cross the street as usual. Her only choice was getting on the bus going the opposite direction and riding until it circled around, adding 25 minutes to her commute.

Corners reached out to ODOT to request audible pedestrian signals so that she and other visually-impaired commuters could safely cross. Though audible signals weren’t originally in the plans, P&E worked with the construction team and Kraig Shrewsbury from District 6 Traffic to find a solution.

“The is a unique area for ODOT,” said Shrewsbury. “When you think ODOT, you typically think highways and rural areas, but this is as urban as it gets. We’ve had to change the way we think about signals.”

ODOT engineers met with Corners on site to test the new signals at the crosswalk, where they saw the importance of this addition firsthand. Currently up and running, Corners now relies on the audible signals and her service dog Maybelle to lead the way.

“Now that I can cross West Broad, it will save me so much time,” said Corners. “I would never cross the street without it… I’ve been tempted to a couple of times, but it’s just not safe.”

West Broad Street is one of the first ODOT intersections in Central Ohio to receive audible pedestrian signals.

“It’s such a tremendous difference for my comfort and freedom of movement,” said Corners. “This will make such a difference.”
NEW TO 2

Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

Patrick McColley joined District 2 as its new deputy director in late April. McColley had been with the Henry County Engineers office since 2008. He holds a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from The Ohio State University and is a registered professional engineer and surveyor intern in the state of Ohio. We spoke to him about his new position.

**His Previous Experience**

“I was the Henry County chief deputy engineer. I was also the executive director of our Henry County Transportation Improvement District. I managed four departments. One of the departments is our geographic information system (GIS) department. We have one of the best GIS systems in Northwest Ohio. That’s something I’m very proud of. I also work with all of the township officials. There’s 52 of them in Henry County. I worked with them very closely. I’m used to working with elected officials.”

**Dealing with the Political Aspects of his Job**

“That’s what I did with my position with the Henry County Engineers Office. I deal a lot with elected officials, both local officials and other county officials.”

**Defining Leadership**

“You have to lead by example. My style is that you have to be open to new ideas. The best ideas I get are from the garage. They’re from our mechanic, for example. He’s always coming up with new ways to do things that save us money and make us operate more efficiently. You have to be open to peoples’ feedback and sometimes criticism. But in the end you also have to be willing to make decisions. It’s about creating more ownership from the employees in their jobs. I’m more than willing to listen.”

**Being Hired from Outside of ODOT**

“I think that can be an advantage. There’s probably advantages to moving up from within as well. I may not be as familiar with the policies and procedures at ODOT. On the other hand, at the county, I was the human resource liaison, so I did a lot of the HR issues there. At ODOT there are people who will do that for me, but I understand those issues. I’ve done the engineering, and I’ve done the political part of it. I have a pretty broad spectrum of things that I’ve done. I’m not an expert in anything. I’m more a jack of all trades. That’s an advantage. A lot of the duties of a district deputy director are very similar to what I used to do at the county, but at a much greater scale.”

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**After the Fire**

Mandi Dillon, District 7

The crash happened just before 5 p.m. on the final day of April. A driver traveling the wrong way on Interstate 75 south slammed head-on into a fuel tanker truck. The tanker caught on fire, sliding down the interstate to rest near the median wall. The car driver was killed in the crash; the driver of the tanker truck ran to safety. Minutes later, the tanker exploded, sending a giant cloud of flames and black smoke above the Dayton skyline.

District 7 crews jumped into action, shutting down both sides of I-75 for five hours. Crews were able to get the northbound lanes of the reopened around 10 p.m. They worked through the night to shift southbound traffic to the outside portion of the interstate and opened two more lanes before Monday morning rush hour.

District 7 worked with a contractor to repair the severely damaged inside lanes, removing and replacing three inches of pavement. They then shifted traffic to repair the damage on the outside portion of the interstate. Traffic was back in its normal configuration by Thursday morning of the same week, with one southbound lane still closed for repairs.

Pictures of the fireball captured by ODOT highway cameras accompanied reports of the story across the state and the country. But it was the explosion those pictures did not capture—the one of human will and effort by determined and dedicated District 7 workers—that will be felt the longest.
You’ve worked at ODOT twice and at some private-sector places. Tell us your background.

“I started my career at the Trumbull County Engineer’s Office as an intern, then got hired full time. I worked there for a few years and then went to ODOT for a few years, then went back to the Trumbull County Engineer’s Office, served as a bridge engineer, a project manager, and then as the chief deputy engineer. I came back to ODOT in 2011. I started as a project manager and worked my way up to the Planning and Engineering administrator. Now I’m going to serve as a district deputy director.”

What was your first job at ODOT?

“My first job at ODOT back in the early 2000s I was a design engineer in the in-house design section. I worked on culverts, roadway resurfacing projects, things like that.”

Did you ever think you’d become a district deputy director back then?

“I did not.”

So what do you think about it?

“It’s very humbling. I think that ODOT is a great place to work for, particularly in District 4. We have a lot of great people. That’s why when the opportunity arose I didn’t even think twice about it. I think the director has created a great culture and my predecessor did a great job. He’s left the district in a better place than when he started.”

What is your philosophy of leadership?

“I’ve taken some leadership classes over the last several years. The one thing that has really stuck with me is that I am not nor should I be the solution to every problem. It’s really important to make people closest to the work to make the decisions. There’s a lot of good decisions that come from those closest to the work.”

Everybody that becomes a district deputy director makes changes. What is your expectation of how you are going to do it?

“I think the one thing I want to focus on is getting everyone from top to bottom completely engaged in the work. I think it’s important that people want to get up, go to work, enjoy their work and be more productive. That helps us get to our mission of getting people and goods from place to place in a safe manner.”

The office of Asset Inventory and Systems Integration is working on developing digital applications (Apps) to be used by ODOT districts across the state.

One of these apps will be used for flat sheet sign inventory. It will store data about the location of signs, and their conditions. Documentation such as photos can also be added through the app.

The Ohio Revised Code requires biweekly inspections of ODOT’s roadways. Currently, transportation managers are taking handwritten notes during these inspections. An electronic process is in the works that will replace this notetaking.

“A couple of years ago at ODOT, we were looking at the paper notetaking system and we recognized that there was something that we needed to solve to improve this process,” said Clifford Ursich, Flexible Pavements’ president and executive director at the annual meeting. “During that tenure he oversaw the materials testing and acceptance of 183,573,537 tons of asphalt, to be exact. That’s the equivalent of 10.2 million truckloads of hot mix.”

Powders said he felt honored to receive the award. “I was very thankful to be recognized by the asphalt industry with the Bill Baker Award,” he said. “What we do here at ODOT affects the public and our industry peers. It’s nice to work together to accomplish good things.”

Flexible Pavements of Ohio bestowed the William W. “Bill” Baker Award on David Powders of the Office of Materials Management. The Baker Award is esteemed highest among all the awards the association presents at their annual meeting.

“Dave has lead ODOT’s Central Laboratory Asphalt Materials Section since 1988,” said Clifford Ursich, Flexible Pavements’ president and executive director at the annual meeting. “During that tenure he oversaw the materials testing and acceptance of 183,573,537 tons of asphalt, to be exact. That’s the equivalent of 10.2 million truckloads of hot mix.”

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“In my opinion, the work that you do and the people you work with are what makes a work place great.”
— Jody Seger
District 7
Roadway Services

“I get paid to do a job that I like, I have good benefits/insurance, I get vacation time to spend with my family and I don’t dread coming to work every day.”
— Jon Brandewie
District 7 Planning & Engineering

“Benefits, pay, flexibility.”
— Ron Burns
District 7 Planning & Engineering

“ODOT is a great place to work because we have an experienced and knowledgeable workforce, working as a team, to build, maintain and repair Ohio’s highways.”
— Ron Leffel
District 7, Auglaize County

“Having a job where you have a sense of purpose, a place that will invest in you, a place you look forward to going to each day, working for someone who is smarter than you and challenges you to be the best you can be.”
— Denise Heitkamp
District 7 DDD’s Office

— Jane Meier
District 7 Personnel

“ODOT is great because you feel like a part of a team which is bigger and farther reaching than yourself.”
— John Quinlisk
District 7 Planning & Engineering

“Being able to do something different every day.”
— Todd Denlinger
District 7 Facilities