Happy Holidays!
ASK THE DIRECTOR

Q: A lot of people really liked the poem you said at the end of your Annual Meeting speech. Do you know the title and who wrote it?

A: The name of the song is ‘Drinking From My Saucer’ and was written by John Paul Moore around 1970. Several artists have recorded it including Jimmy Dean, Michael Combs and Clive ‘Jabez’ Provost. Here are the lyrics. Enjoy.

I never made a fortune and it’s probably too late now
But I don’t worry about that much, I’m happy anyhow
And as I go along life’s journey, I’m reaping better than I sowed
I’m drinking from my saucer, cause my cup has overflowed.

I ain’t got a lot of riches, and sometimes the goings tough
but I’ve got kids who love me and that makes me rich enough
I just thank God for his blessings and the mercies he’s bestowed.
I’m drinking from my saucer, cause my cup has overflowed.

I remember times when things went wrong, and my faith got a little thin
but then all at once the dark clouds broke, and the sun peeked through again
so Lord help me not to gripe about the tough rows I hoed
I’m drinking from my saucer, cause my cup has overflowed.

And if God gives me strength and courage, when the way grows steep and rough
I’ll not ask for another blessing, I’m already blessed enough
And may I never be too busy to help another bear his load
I’ll keep drinking from my saucer, cause my cup has overflowed.

ODOT Dad is a Lifesaver

Ashley Rittenhouse, District 10

This time of year, we take stock in all the things for which we are thankful—our health, family, food on the table, clothes on our backs and a job to go to everyday. Perhaps one of the most thankful employees in District 10 is Vinton County Highway Technician Lucas Wells, who recently saved his own son’s life.

Kameryn Wells went trick-or-treating on October 27. That same night, while hanging out with friends at home, a piece of hard candy got caught in the 7-year-old’s throat.

“He came running and was pointing at his throat, and I asked if he was choking and he nodded,” said Wells. “I just reacted and gave him the Heimlich.”

It’s an experience he describes as “terrifying.” Thankfully, the procedure worked, and the candy was dislodged from Kameryn’s throat. It left them both shaken.

“He was crying. He was upset I just held him,” said Wells. “With his friends still in the bedroom, Kameryn was initially embarrassed about the whole thing. Wells is crediting ODOT and District 10 Safety Consultant Shannon Slavin for offering the First Aid/CPR course.

“I appreciate ODOT for giving us the opportunity to do it,” he said. “I truly believe if I hadn’t, it would’ve ended differently.”

Top Trainers

Victoria Beale, Central Office

Every state in the nation has a training and technical assistance center funded by FHWA, and each state’s DOT provides training to local public agencies (LPAs) responsible for maintaining roadways.

The Ohio Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) Center is located within ODOT’s Division of Planning, Office of Local Programs. Over 2300 LPAs in Ohio know and appreciate all LTAP does for them. In the last year, that recognition has extended beyond Ohio’s borders. In 2017, LTAP trained 14,896 participants via instructor-led courses, eLearning and webinars. This was accomplished through 425 separate training courses. Yet this is just a portion of what LTAP offers. The staff lead Roadway Safety Audits with LPAs; create job aids for answers to common questions; develop smart phone apps; and manage the Township Sign Grant Program.

Ohio’s LTAP isn’t going to let these recognitions go to its head – the program has plans to continue expanding training opportunities for their life-long learning community. Future plans include moving more courses to blended learning which includes an eLearning component, webinar series on popular topics and possibly a weekly podcast for LPAs.

“Learning doesn’t just occur in an instructor-led, classroom setting anymore,” said Victoria Beale, Ohio LTAP Center director. “Learning is now on-demand and very mobile. Ohio LTAP is committed to expanding resources in the way our customers want to learn. Our LTAP team is customer centric, making LTAP a valuable program for Ohio’s LPAs.”

Interested in learning more about Ohio LTAP? Visit their webpage at: transportation.ohio.gov/ltap.

Ohio LTAP recently received three recognitions:

• 2017 County Engineers Association of Ohio Friend of CEAO Award
• 2018 Outstanding Paper Award from the TRB Transportation Safety Management Standing Committee for documenting and sharing how the Township Sign Grant Program works in the paper Getting to Zero Deaths on Ohio’s Low-volume Roads
• 2018 National LTAP Association National Program Achievement Award

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While conducting a routine ecological check for a small transportation maintenance project back in 2017, ecologists from the Office of Environmental Services discovered one of several long-forgotten railroad tunnels. This find would lead to the preservation of one of the largest previously unknown bat hibernacula in Ohio.

During the Appalachian coal boom of the late 1800s, the railroads tunneled through the hills of southeast Ohio to get coal to outside markets. These tunnels were later bypassed in the mid 1900s, sealed with brick or dirt, and left in place. As the years passed, the dirt around the tunnel openings eroded away, allowing access for bats, providing them with warmth in the winter and their own water supply.

As ODOT began to investigate these tunnels, it was evident that nearby residents (in addition to the bats) accessed the tunnels as local hang outs. The tunnels showed evidence of graffiti, camp fires and human activity. The ecological investigation of the tunnels discovered flowing water throughout the tunnels and live bats in several places on the ceilings. Dead bats also littered the ground and were collected as it was expected to confirm white nose syndrome, a disease caused by a fungus that affects hibernating bats. Instead, ODOT’s wildlife biologists found tiny white pellets in the bodies of the bats. The bats had been shot off the ceiling by airsoft pellet guns meaning that people were posing a greater risk to the bats than the disease.

ODOT’s Senior Ecologist Chris Staron saw the opportunity to preserve the tunnels and developed a conceptual plan in partnership with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and Ohio University to build bat gates on the tunnels. ODNR has a team of staff who design and install bat gates on abandoned coal mine openings throughout southeastern Ohio and offered to assist with the design and installation of the gates. For ODOT the goal was simple: install bat gates to eliminate the risk to human safety and preserve bat hibernacula. Protecting hibernacula protects the most sensitive and perhaps most critical component of a bat’s life history.

As of now, ODOT is working to gate and protect at least five of the known tunnels as bat hibernacula. Historic mapping indicates there are as many as ten tunnels in existence. More tunnels may be on the landscape that could be harboring bats. Along with its partners, ODOT will continue working to gate and make adjustments on the other tunnels to make them successful for all bats.
Farm To Market
Mandi Dillon, District 7

ODOT is known for patching potholes, adding lanes, removing snow and fixing bridges, but did you know transportation plays a key role in agriculture?

Mercer County is the number one county in Ohio for agricultural products produced on the farm. It has more than 1,200 farms equaling 273,000 acres. These farms produce crops and livestock that are key to Ohio’s economy.

The farming industry is huge for Mercer County’s income and overall wealth. A recent study shows products produced on Mercer County farms total more than $596 million dollars in annual sales.

According to a 2017 study by The Ohio State University, the food processing industry in Mercer County adds $85 million in labor income to the county each year. Wholesale/Retail products from farming add $37 million to the county’s economy and $21 million in labor income.

Without transportation, these farms would not get the supplies they need to operate such as seed, fertilizers, tractors and other equipment. They also wouldn’t be able to transport their products for sale. All of this requires transportation. Products are transported from the farm to the market, processing center or retailer by truck and trailer over many ODOT maintained routes.

ODOT’s Changing Face
Nancy Burton, Central Office

You’ve heard at least once, if not several times; the director describe the organization as ‘not your grandpa’s ODOT.’ The numbers prove it.

As 2018 comes to an end, the data shows ODOT has hired more veterans, women and minorities in the last eight years than any other time in the history of the department.

Research shows a more diverse workforce yields a better, higher performing work place. Think of it as it you were creating a music band. You wouldn’t want all trumpet players; you would want diverse musicians that can play a variety of instruments for a better result.

ODOT hired the most veterans in 2014, because that’s the year ODOT began the Veteran’s Apprentice Program. In total, ODOT has hired more than 400 veterans since 2011, over 600 minorities, and more than 1200 women.

Business and Human Resources Administrator Brian Brown said that several factors contribute to the uptick. A conscious effort and aggressive outreach by Central Office and the districts to hire a diverse workforce.

We make a lot of decisions here at ODOT that involve millions and millions of dollars, but the most important decision we make is who to hire.
Lost and Found
Rhonda Pees and Nick Buchanan, District 1

While conducting a bridge inspection of the Interstate 75 structure over State Route 81 in Lima in mid-September, Mike Butler came across a black Vietnam War veteran’s hat. The hat was adorned with two pins denoting its owner was a member of the 1st Air Cavalry and a Purple Heart recipient.

“I thought I should at least try to find someone who can find the owner,” said Butler.

The public information office had the hat all over social media in no time. Within a few hours, the hat had been shared on major television networks across Ohio. The hat had been shared over 825 times on Twitter and Facebook, reaching nearly 50,000 people – including Mitch Furry, who was on Facebook at the time.

“It just happened to show up there, and I thought, ‘Why does that look familiar?’” said Furry, who thought it could belong to his uncle Paul Morris, a 72-year-old Vietnam War veteran who resides in McComb.

After a call to his uncle, who said he had lost his hat in Lima earlier that week, Furry contacted the district office to claim the hat. The next day, Morris and Furry pulled up to the district office to retrieve the hat in a lime green Slingshot, a three-wheeled, open-air sportscar. It was the beloved car, Morris said, that he was driving on Interstate 75 when a tractor-trailer passed him and blew his hat off.

“That wind, just, woosh. It blew it right up and over,” Morris said. “I wear it everywhere. If I go someplace and I don’t have it on, they say, ‘You’re out of uniform. Why? Where’s your hat?’ That’s why I’ve got one of these ones. I got one that says Vietnam, but it doesn’t have the Purple Heart on it.”

He earned his Purple Heart after being shot in the arm while rescuing his captain, who had been wounded in battle. He required nine surgeries to regain full functionality in his arm and couldn’t return to the war afterwards. Morris was one of just nine men from his squadron of 45 soldiers to return home.

Today, Morris is a grandpa to many, making display racks for his grandson’s karate belts and hearing all about his granddaughter’s dance recitals. But his hat – his daily uniform – is a constant reminder of what he sacrificed decades ago.