THE OHIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION NEWSLETTER

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THEN & NOW pg 6 in a special section

HONORING ODOT’s VETERANS
AASHTO head addresses summit

Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

A merican Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials’ (AASHTO) Frederick “Bud” Wright recently addressed the 2014 ODOT Research Summit in Columbus. The biannual event is for all who assist ODOT’s research.

As AASHTO executive director, Wright commented that research is critical to the nation’s transportation infrastructure.

“We haven’t done a great job of portraying this to Congress or the general public,” he said. “We need to bring that innovation forward.”

Wright expressed concerns that the next federal reauthorization bill sponsored by Congress would not keep pace with the nation’s transportation needs.

“They must find a new revenue source for transportation,” said Wright. “We’ll be asking them to find a way to do it.”

Digital signage system gets an upgrade

Alexandra Buerger, Central Office

T he informational monitors hanging in ODOT facilities statewide recently received some major upgrades. Cisco, the manufacturer of the hardware used to send information to the monitors, found their devices failing repeatedly. Simply put, their product was not sophisticated enough to keep up with the digital signage system. In response, Cisco provided ODOT with new, updated devices.

Central Office and district IT and facilities staffs worked quickly to replace the devices, and the new system started fresh at the end of October. As with any new technology, the system will undergo tweaks and maintenance over the coming weeks. District communications staffs will work to add relevant and consistent up-to-date information, including weekly ODOT news and ODOT messenger emails for employees who otherwise might not have access.

The system will now also show regular safety tailgate talks and presentations on important maintenance research projects. Employees with suggestions for digital signage subjects are welcome to contact the communications staff in their district or Central Office.

To grandmother’s house we go

Nancy Burton, District 6

A nyone planning to travel Interstate 71 between Columbus and Cleveland this holiday season should know some good news: There will be three lanes open in each direction the whole way.

All but the last project—the stretch of road between State Route 61 and State Route 95—has the final surface course. “We will come back next year for final paving,” said Dave Johansen, District 6 project engineer. “What was important to us was to have all lanes open.”

Johansen has a unique perspective on the roadway: He worked on the very first I-71 widening project back in 2000. Now the construction engineer is the manager on the last section to be widened. “I’m not that old,” Johansen chuckled, “I’ve just been at ODOT a long time.”

ON THE COVER District 7 Permit Technician Russ Bertke served his country in both the Army and the Air Force, including a deployment in Kabul, Afghanistan.
ASK THE DIRECTOR

“I WISH THERE WAS A WAY TO INCREASE THE PAY OF EMPLOYEES WHO DO superior work. Perhaps reinstating a merit-based Step Seven for exempt employees is an option. This would be a “meaningful” way to recognize great job performance.”

A SYSTEM THAT ALLOWED for a merit-based step seven was implemented on a trial basis in 2000. After about a year, it was determined that the plan was not working as intended. In some areas, everyone was given the step seven. In other places, no one received step seven. In still other areas, the decision was tied to the performance evaluation, which is what was intended.

I believe I understand what you’re trying to accomplish with this idea, however, I don’t think that is our best approach. The first step is to improve the quality of our evaluations and become more proficient with the new E-Performance system. We could then link a component of annual pay with individual evaluation scores and our critical success metrics. The result would amount to an annual incentive program. As we strive to become a more professional organization we have coached our managers that everyone wants and deserves regular feedback, at a minimum an annual evaluation. The evaluation must mean something to both the employee and the manager. We’re not there yet, but as we improve out process and metrics, we can and will have a new discussion about linking pay and performance for exempt employees.”

— Director Jerry Wray

THE ODOT NEWS FAST FIVE

1 NEW FUEL SYSTEM ROLLS OUT
The new Fuel Management System has begun in certain districts, with plans to be available statewide by year’s end. The process will be automated, using a fuel management unit activated by an ID badge to record the amount of fuel taken for each vehicle.

2 PROVIDING SALT TO COMMUNITIES
ODOT purchased 171,600 tons of road salt from an Indiana company to restock facilities and help out local cities and towns. A lack of supply, or exorbitant bids from typical salt suppliers, made the out-of-state purchase necessary.

3 HIGHWAYS MADE SAFER
The State Farm Safety Patrol fleet recently made its debut on a cross-state caravan. The trucks offer roadside assistance to motorists and are made possible through a sponsorship agreement between ODOT and State Farm.

4 GRADUATION DAY
ODOT’s County Management Training Program produced its fifth class after six months of training. The program develops managerial skills specific to maintenance, as well as leadership fundamentals.

5 MIGRATION PUT ON HOLD
The department’s planned move to a Microsoft Office 365’s cloud has been postponed until the migration process has been improved. The move is part of the State of Ohio IT Optimization effort, and will impact the way ODOT employees log into Outlook.
More money, more projects

Brent Kovacs, District 4

The sale of bonds based on Ohio Turnpike earnings has led to a new project opportunity in District 4. The widening of Interstate 271 in northern Summit County began this construction season, underwritten by revenues generated from bonds sold against future Ohio Turnpike tolls.

The roadway is a major north-south connector in the northern part of the county, leading into the east side of Cleveland.

The project, to widen I-271 to six lanes from the Cuyahoga County line to just north of State Route 8, was sold to Great Lake Construction Company in May. The design-build specifications also includes the widening of four bridges, the widening of State Route 82, and installing a new entrance ramp from SR 82 to I-271. Work began on the three-year, $50 million project in early September.

Once completed, the project will reduce congestion and improve overall system connectivity. This project will provided easier movement of people and goods from place to place on Ohio’s roadways. As of 2013, 70,000 vehicles travel the I-271 corridor daily in northern Summit County.

Creating safety and history

Mandi Dillon, District 7

The intersection of State Route 235 and State Route 41 in Clark County had seen far too many severe and fatal crashes in recent years. Engineers with ODOT studied the location and implemented several safety improvements, including a traffic signal, but crashes were still an issue.

Then District 7 made a decision to create a roundabout at the intersection, which opened in September. It is one of the first roundabouts in the state to intersect two state highways with 55 mph-approach speeds. The roundabout helps slow traffic by requiring drivers to yield and reduce their speed on approach. The design also reduces serious injury and fatal crashes by eliminating head-on and right-angle collisions.

The $1.1 million dollar project was completed in four months.

District 12 to pilot new DBE participant program

Amanda McFarland, District 12

ODOT is actively seeking to recruit and utilize minority-owned small businesses on construction projects in northeast Ohio. This past September, Director Jerry Wray announced the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) had agreed to allow ODOT to pilot a new small disadvantaged business participant program that will divide the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) goals based on ethnic populations.

The department is working to make the DBE program better and more inclusive. The department is encouraging minority-owned businesses to become more successful as they help Ohio continue to be a thriving place to live, work and raise a family.

The $267 million Opportunity Corridor Project in Cleveland will be the first ODOT project where the new subdivided goals continued on page 9
It’s difficult to say exactly how many ODOT employees are also U.S. military veterans. State agencies only began tracking that information in the past decade, and even then, only among employees who identify themselves as veterans.

It’s safe to say, however, that just about every one of us knows a veteran co-worker—someone who serves our state in much the same way they served the country—minus the risks associated with war.

As an organization, ODOT respects the contributions of our veteran employees—both at home and abroad—and values the diversity of roles that they play. Over the last two years, ODOT has stepped up efforts to hire even more veterans (see our story on page eight).

But first, this issue of Transcript honors all of ODOT’s military veterans through the stories of just a few...
Veterans, then and now
Nancy Burton, District 6

District 12 Highway

Technicians Tony Lewis (pictured right) and Ken Roe (below) do not know each other. But they do have things in common aside from working at ODOT. For example, both graduated from Delaware Hayes High School, although during different decades.

They also both enlisted in the U.S. Army. Both became engineering specialists. Ken Roe was a combat engineer and heavy equipment operator. Tony Lewis worked with aircraft—primarily helicopters. Between the two, they spent more than a decade serving in Texas, Georgia and Germany.

They also share feelings about a soldier’s sacrifices. “It gets lonely,” Roe reflects, “because being away from your family for such a long time is difficult.”

Since leaving the service, the two veterans have been on different career paths at ODOT.

After 16 years, Lewis is an HT 4, currently working on the I-71 widening project in Delaware and Morrow counties. Roe has been an HT apprentice with Delaware County for the last three months. But both agree their Army values do impact their jobs every day, and the discipline they learned in the military applies daily to their transportation duties.

“If a job needs to get done, I will get it done, no questions asked,” said Lewis. “Like the Army, you have to be able to motivate yourself at ODOT and work with a team.”

Lewis and Roe have one more thing in common: they are both thankful for the appreciation they receive from ODOT for their military service.

Bagdad, where the temperature would reach up to 120 degrees in the shade during the day.

“When I re-enlisted with the Army, I knew that our nation was at war,” said McIntire. “I felt a sense of duty and I wanted to be on the ground where the action was.”

That same year, McIntire received the Purple Heart Medal for injuries sustained in the line of duty. After returning home, he enrolled in the University of Akron’s construction engineering
Technology program.

Mandi Dillon, District 7

Needing an internship to graduate, he landed a position on District 4’s construction administration team. After completing his internship, he applied for and received the office’s Engineer in Training position. He graduated summa cum laude in 2013.

“I enjoyed working in the field, seeing a project from concept to completion,” he said. “Some similarities between my time in the Army and at ODOT is the importance of working as a team. Also, being a public servant in the Army, I was able to serve my country; now I ensure that projects are built properly so that the motoring public can safely get from point to point. I have a great sense of pride in the work that I do every day.”

McIntire retired from the Army in May 2014 and became a transportation engineer 1 with ODOT the following month. He is currently overseeing his first project—a bridge replacement on Akron-Cleveland Road in Summit County.

McIntire and his wife have two daughters and currently reside in Stow. He enjoys spending time with his family, visiting Northeast Ohio zoos, hunting, fishing, and rooting for the Cleveland Browns.

Every work day a great one for this veteran

Mandi Dillon, District 7

More than 20 veterans are employed in ODOT District 7. They come in on time, do the best job they are able for the people of Ohio, and then go home to husbands, wives and families. That they also served their countries with discipline and dedication is not immediately apparent. Maybe that is why it so important to remember that service every November.

District 7 Permit Tech Russ Bertke served in the military, Army and Air Force, for 21 years. He started at age 17 because he wanted to see the world. His last major deployment was in Kabul, Afghanistan, where he spent seven months as a public affairs officer for ISAF Joint Command. Returning to civilian life was made much easier, thanks to the support of his ODOT coworkers.

“Every day I come to work it is a great day,” said Bertke, “because I could be back in Afghanistan, and this is heaven compared to that.”

Bertke has worked for ODOT for nine years, and says being in the service is all about sacrifice for your country and its mission to stay free. Veterans Day can be difficult for Bertke, due to difficult memories and the time missed with his family. He hopes the holiday is used to thank not just veterans, but all of the people who support vets during their service. To Bertke and to all soldiers, a military career is more than a paycheck:

“You don’t have a time clock,” he reflects. “I once worked more than 12 hours a day for seven months in a row without a day off. You just do what has to be done. That’s why it’s called serving your country, and not a job.”
From country girl to airborne soldier

Paul Pegher, Central Office and District 5

As a girl growing up in rural Athens County, Rebecca Starlin was awe-struck by her grandpa, Ward Starlin, who was ODOT’s Athens County superintendent (as managers were called then) and who would bring his dump truck home from work (as was permitted then). “I just thought it was the coolest thing and that I’d like to work for ODOT someday, too,” recalls Starlin, now the District 5 safety consultant.

Upon graduating from high school, Starlin wasn’t sure what she should do. She certainly didn’t think she was military material. But a visit to a friend at the Fort Bragg army base changed that. Impressed by the duty-oriented way of life, she enlisted.

Over the next six years, from North Carolina to Germany, the quiet, shy country girl became an outgoing, confident soldier in the Army’s Airborne Division. “Just when you think you can’t do something, you learn that you can when you don’t have a choice,” she says. She learned she could endure physical and mental challenges harder than she ever imagined, and hold her own in a male-dominated culture.

She also learned how to play a critical team role. As a signal systems support specialist, Starlin was responsible for maintaining the security codes for her company’s communications devices, which meant she was one of the first to act whenever her unit was put on alert. In some ways, Starlin said, it was very much like the role of an ODOT safety consultant. “You’re not a county manager or an engineer or administrator. You’re just kind of over here, but you have some say in what goes on in order for the unit to perform work correctly,” she says.

Starlin notes other likenesses between the Army and ODOT, such as a layered chain of command in a vast organization that performs many important functions. But perhaps one of the strongest similarities is her pride.

“I was always proud to say that I was in the Army—or that I’m an Army veteran. And I feel the same way about ODOT. No matter where I go, I’m proud to tell people I work here. I love what we do, and I’m proud of what we do and I’m proud of the people who do the work.”
The I-75 Modernization Project in Dayton reached a milestone when it flipped traffic onto the newly constructed southbound side of the interstate. Work crews can now begin the process of tearing down and rebuilding the current northbound side.

All of this construction is part of a major three-phase modernization project to renovate and rebuild I-75 in the Dayton area. Begun in 2007, the first two phases of the project are complete and have made noticeable improvements to the roadway. This third phase will increase traffic capacity, eliminate left-hand entrance and exit ramps, and create three continuous lanes on I-75 north and south between Third and Main streets.

The recent traffic shift took five days to complete, and moved all motorists to the southbound side with five lanes operating in that area; two northbound and three southbound. This traffic shift marks the halfway point for the final phase of construction on the $306 million project.

The transition was a great success, thanks in no small part to the efforts of ODOT engineers and construction workers. The use of social media, local news agencies and weekly advisories kept the public informed and helped motorists adjust smoothly to the new traffic pattern.

ODOT construction crews will continue to work throughout the winter months on demolition, pile driving, bridge foundations and drainage work. The project is scheduled for completion in September of 2017.

Ohio Governor John R. Kasich addressed a crowded Kenneth L. John Recreation Center in Cleveland with the new DBE Participant Program news.

The Opportunity Corridor Project is designed to improve the transportation system and support planned economic development in the areas between I-490/I-77 and University Circle in Cleveland. Aside from the transportation benefits it could bring to the east side of Cleveland, the effort opens the potential for new jobs and a new identity for the community. The first of this three section project is set to begin this fall.

“We are happy to see the participation of contractors on this project better mirror the population of the city of Cleveland,” said ODOT District 12 Deputy Director Myron Pakush.
The team’s top priority is to repair damaged guard rail, particularly the cable rail on Interstate 75, which traverses both Allen and Hancock counties. Because of the repairs they perform to cable rail, the unit has convincing proof of its effectiveness. According to Foster, the system is quite simply saving lives.

“It’s doing what it needs to do,” said Foster. “We see accidents occurring at locations we didn’t expect.”

The group is inventive, too. In partnership with the district garage, they developed a hydraulic cylinder to aid in the repair of the cable rail terminals. They found a way to fix the terminals while saving money. The camaraderie, cohesiveness and job satisfaction among them is apparent.

“I like going to the eight different counties and seeing the different workers,” said Ken Hermiller, who’s worked in the guard rail unit for over 13 years. “When you start doing something, the other guy already knows what you’re doing and he knows what he needs to do,” added Larry Kaufman, a four-year member of the crew.

Both the guard rail and bridge units are overseen by Foster. The two units working closely together means they can get a great deal accomplished. Both units are supported in their work by the traffic department, the county crews and the district garage.

Steve Harpster, with just under 20 years with ODOT and two in guard rail, agrees that traveling throughout the district to perform their work is enjoyable and allows them to experience the whole of ODOT.

“It’s easier to see the department’s mission,” said Harpster.
Highway research focuses on improvement

Becky Giauque, District 11

THANKS TO FUNDING from a federal program, the department is shepherding four projects that could have a big impact on the future. None of them would be possible without the proposals of District 11 maintenance managers.

District 11 Highway Management Administrator Tom Corey is leading the Vegetation Management Practices Project. The goal is to evaluate and determine what cost-effective management practices for plants along the highway will contribute to safer highway use and increased efficiency.

The Davey Resource Group concluded that ODOT should change its herbicide use, train staff to identify problems faster, and better utilize equipment for greater cost savings, efficiency and effectiveness.

Roadway Services Engineer Bobby Taylor is evaluating different types of pavement marking materials to ensure they are using the right materials to provide a lasting centerline, edge line, and lane line for the safety of drivers as economically as possible. The project has 13, two-mile sections of roadway throughout the district. The carefully selected sites will have different types of materials applied on half-mile sections, such as fast-dry water-based paint or spray thermoplastic. The University of Akron will conduct regular tests on the sections over the next year to measure reflectivity, thickness and overall durability.

“Once the research concludes in November 2016,” said Taylor, “we hope to have an established matrix which shows us what types of markings work best under a variety of circumstances.”

The University of Akron is also overseeing a research project on box culvert maintenance.

ODOT crews perform culvert cleaning on a yearly basis, and in many cases, dirt and debris buildup must be removed by hand. This act creates numerous safety concerns for employees.

Field data collection and evaluations gauging the overall cost-effectiveness of remote controlled devices over more labor intensive methods were concluded in September.

“Utilizing this method for box culvert cleanout could potentially improve efficiency and provide a cost savings,” said Columbiana County Transportation Administrator Darcy Stitt. “Other DOTs and municipalities across the country are doing it, so why not try it here?”

With increased truck traffic from the oil and gas industry in eastern Ohio, Carroll County Transportation Administrator Vince Carter submitted a request to try Portable Traffic Signals for Flagging Operations as a way to ensure the safety of his workforce. The goal of this research is to find cost-effective and safer methods for temporary traffic control on rural one-lane and two-way highways in maintenance zones. While ODOT has various such measures already in place, crashes and near-misses do still occur. The completion date for this study is May 2015.

“I have to believe that in certain situations, using portable traffic signals will create a safer work zone,” Carter said.
Crisi Warner is a transportation technician in District 11. She is 34 years old, married, rides roller coasters, jet skis, goes horseback riding, and enjoys going to shows, traveling, cooking and scrapbooking. She also has been a quadriplegic since she broke her neck as a child.

“I wasn’t born with four wheels,” she reminds people. “A quadriplegic can do anything a person without wheels can do. It is just more difficult, costs a lot more, and takes twice as long!”

A Georgia native, Warner moved to Ohio with her family when she was 11. While sledding in January 1992, her toboggan wrecked into a pole and she suffered a head and neck injury. The next few weeks were a roller-coaster of surgeries and illness until she was moved to the Shepherd Spinal Center for seven months. Inspired by her pastor-father and her faith, Warner came home determined to make her own way in the world.

She graduated summa cum laude from Kent State University Tuscarawas in 2003, earning degrees in computer science and computer-assisted design. She became an ODOT intern and was later hired full time, but quickly began losing her Medicaid benefits due to her larger paycheck.

“Way too many people waste their energy fighting over their right to do less,” she said. “I had to fight for the right to work full time.”

Warner lobbied the state’s legislature, and in 2008 became one of the first Ohioans to participate in the state’s Medicaid Buy-in program. She now continues to receive Medicaid benefits while working full-time by paying an income-based premium.

Warner’s life today includes many challenges, but she relishes her independence, such as the ability to drive her specially-adapted car.

“Most people would be excited to drive a $100,000 vehicle,” she observes, “but mine looks a lot like a Honda.”

Warner inspired many, including Director Jerry Wray, when she spoke to her fellow employees at the latest District 11 annual meeting. She talked about taking nothing for granted.

“Take the time to hug your children or your spouse today,” she advised. “Tell your coworkers you appreciate them; and if given the opportunity to sit it out or dance . . . always dance!”