District 5 helps preserve a historic bridge for future generations in . . .
Profile

He just changed districts... again!
Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

You have to give him this: Al Biehl has had a unique career. In his 22 years with the department, Al’s worked at three districts and served as a private sector consultant for a fourth. He is also one of just a handful of people who have served as district deputy director at two different offices. He served four years as the DDO in District 3, and was named the new head of District 4 this past May. We asked him to talk about his experiences, his career, and why ODOT keeps calling him home.

Is it true that each district has a personality of its own?
“Absolutely. Each district has its own unique culture. Now that I have worked in three districts, I see that each is finding its own way to fulfill the common mission of the department.”

When you began in 1986 as an Engineer-In-Training, did you ever think that one day you would be a DDO in two different districts?
“No, not at all. [Laughs] Quite honestly, when you’re that young you don’t even know what you’re doing next week. You’re just happy to make money rather than spend money. To think back then that I would rise up to the leadership role I’m in now didn’t occur to me.”

You spent about seven years in the private sector. What are your opinions on the differences between the public and the private sectors?
“I’ve worked in the private sector twice. The first time I left I went to a large national engineering firm. My last job at ODOT District 12 was as the real estate administrator, which has nothing to do with engineering. When I left the second time I worked for a company that just did real estate. I was the only engineer on staff. I was on the road a lot, working in five states. The private sector is more demanding, but it can also be more rewarding, depending on what you’re looking for. There are pros and cons for both the public and private sectors. I get to spend much more time with my family with this job, which is important for us. That’s part of the reason I came back to ODOT.”

ON THE COVER: Muskingum County’s Reciprocity National Road Bridge, on U.S. Route 40, had become so overgrown with vines, trees, and shrubs that the plant’s root systems were damaging the masonry structure. Read how District 5 came to the historic structure’s rescue on page 6. Photo by Chris Yoder, District 5.
‘GOOD IDEAS START IN GARAGES’

Joel Hunt, Central Office

What University of Akron transportation researcher Dr. William Schneider IV says of many of the research projects he works on for ODOT.

"When ODOT needs my help solving a problem, I start by listening," he said. "They usually know the answer, they just need help putting it down on paper.

A little simplistic, yes, but according to Schneider these employees face new problems every day and they have to think on the fly. "I step in when they don’t have the time or manpower."

That’s how a two-year long research project to find the most effective snow plow blade was born.

Snow and ice is removed from roadways through the use of snow plows and snow plow blades, or cutting edges. Blades are bolted to snow plows and they are what makes contact with the roadway surface. It doesn’t take long for the friction of steel on asphalt and concrete to wear the blades down.

Doug Riffle, Fairfield County manager, said District 5 was changing worn out blades up to five times per year per truck, often resulting in injuries. "It would take three people to lift the several hundred pound blades. It’s not that specialty blades are lighter, they just last longer – up to nine times longer. The fewer times we have to change blades, the fewer injuries we have."

Brian Olson, District 4 area engineer, said there was anecdotal evidence in a lot of garages that specialty blades, although more expensive up front, last longer saving the department money over time.

"Vendors bring us new products all the time," said Olson. "We need to keep up with the advances in technology while asking ourselves if something is five times more expensive, is it five times better?"

Olson and Riffle contacted ODOT’s Office of Statewide Planning and Research in 2013 and asked them to rate the snow plow blades on the market. With the help of Schneider’s research team, five blades were selected for the study.

Snow plow operators in districts 3, 4, 5, 10, 11 and 12 tested the blades and took weekly measurements to determine how quickly or slowly the blades wore out.

Jill Martindale, ODOT district research coordinator, said video cameras were also mounted on the snow plows as part of the research project. "Dr. Schneider’s team reviewed more than 5,000 hours of video. There’s no way we could do that. We need people in all areas of ODOT to bring us ideas and we will do the rest."

"Several blades were selected for their durability," said Riffle. "I still have one on my truck from the study. This will be its third winter."

If you have an idea for a research project, contact Jill Martindale in the Office of Statewide Planning and Research at 614-644-8173 or email Jacquelin.Martindale@dot.ohio.gov.

“We need to keep... asking ourselves if something is five times more expensive, is it five times better?”

—Brian Olson
District 4 area engineer

PHOTO BY BRUCE HULL, CENTRAL OFFICE
By now, most people who have a Facebook or Twitter account are familiar with “Throwback Thursday,” or #TBT, a social media phenomenon in which people post old photos of themselves or events from their past on Thursdays. Even ODOT has gotten in on the fun, posting old pictures of equipment and vintage plowing operations. This summer, ODOT District 5 employees took the concept of “throwback” to a new level, helping revitalize eastern Ohio’s past and advancing ODOT’s mission to “take care of what we have.”

While ODOT is often featured in newspapers or on morning traffic reports, it’s not often that its actions are highlighted in an obituary. An old bridge on U.S. Route 40 in Muskingum County had become overgrown with vines and trees whose roots were growing into and damaging the stone masonry. The bridge, constructed in 1830, was in desperate need of repair. ODOT’s Muskingum County employees and environmental team took action, working with the Ohio National Road Association (ONRA), the FHWA, and the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office to clean up and rehabilitate the bridge. Not only were they presented with an award for their efforts, but one resident made sure it was even mentioned in her obituary, expressing how thrilled and grateful she was to have seen the bridge cleaned up before she passed.

Also in conjunction with the ONRA, District 5 employees rescued and restored a missing Muskingum County National Road mile marker. The monument was discovered in Delaware County, up for auction on a website. Employees recovered the mile marker and worked to repaint it and place it in its correct location. One happy citizen called in to comment on how she and her grandchildren would go for drives on U.S. Route 40 and had memorized the locations of each marker, and how happy they were to see this one returned. A ceremony was held October 22 with local community members and the ONRA to reveal the restored marker.

While neither of these events would headline the evening news, both made a difference in their communities and helped improve travel for Ohio drivers. As indicated by mention in an obituary, and in the fond memory of a grandma and her grandchildren, these historical monuments can be important parts of people’s lives. Thank you, District 5 employees, for playing an active role in preserving your community’s heritage and for making Ohio a better place.
The Anthony Wayne Bridge “will be serving millions and millions of people for decades to come,” said ODOT Director Jerry Wray at the bridge’s rededication ceremony. The Anthony Wayne Bridge opened to one lane of traffic in both directions October 15, following a 19-month closure. The $31.5 million project to rehabilitate the historic Toledo landmark preserves the last suspension bridge owned by the state of Ohio. Its restoration is another example of the department taking care of what Ohio has in its transportation system.

PHOTO BY THERESA POLLICK, DISTRICT 2