Gallia County Mechanic Tony Saunders looks over a plow truck during the county’s annual winter readiness events. Each of ODOT’s 1,629 trucks receives 150+ point inspection. This gives ODOT’s 273 mechanics a chance to identify any equipment issues and make necessary repairs before snow and ice season. Bring it on winter, we’ll be ready!
THANK YOU FROM THE DIRECTOR

The 72nd annual Ohio Transportation Engineering Conference (OTEC), held the beginning of October, was another huge success. The team of people responsible for managing the conference deserve a standing ovation. It could not have happened without all the ODOT volunteers. A big thank you to Lisa Hall, Wilma Haught-Sherred and their team for coordinating all facets of OTEC. With 80 sessions, 380 presenters and more than 3,700 attendees, OTEC is the biggest and best transportation engineering conference in the nation because of the outstanding efforts of ODOT people.

As I walked the tradeshow booths this year, I chatted with dozens of people. Some are old colleagues and friends, while others I’ve just met. But no matter who I talked to, vendors, local officials, consultants or contractors, there was one thing I kept hearing: the people of ODOT are the most professional people they work with anywhere. They told me how refreshing it is to work with people who are accessible, provide great customer service and are firm, yet fair, doing the right thing for Ohio and the department. I hear the same thing a lot, no matter where I go.

I’m extremely proud to be associated with all of you and hope you feel good about the important work you do. You have such a positive impact on this state. Thank you for all you do to make the Ohio Department of Transportation a reliable, professional and highly productive organization.

Bundles of Joy

Nancy Burton, District 6

The members of District 6 just became new parents! But don’t send them any diapers or booties; the new offspring left the nest after only 24 hours. These were the first captive-reared, newly tagged butterflies as part of the department’s pollinator program. The very first was a boy - AJ DOT 6 - named after Engineer Janice Gartner and Specialist Amy Turner, environmental team members.

“You can’t delay or confine the Monarch butterfly,” said Marci Liniger, the district environmental coordinator. “To preserve and grow the species, especially those reared in captivity, they must be set free pretty quickly.”

AJ came into this world because of the district’s new pollinator habitat. Starting last spring, Liniger, Gartner and Turner designed, re-planted, weeded and watered a nesting area. Packed with 150 milkweed stems and other nectar-filled flowers, the district environmental team is hoping AJ will make this his home and have dozens of offspring.

“I’m excited and worried at the same time,” said Liniger, who started the program six months ago. “Excited because it was a group effort to get to this moment. Worried because I want AJ to make it to Mexico where it’s warm year-round and he can hibernate with millions of other Monarch butterflies that are currently on the endangered species list.”

While aesthetically pleasing and functional, many of the district hope this homegrown Monarch butterfly habitat becomes a permanent fixture.
Distracted driving is becoming a more difficult problem to solve. Survey results reported in the Glendale News Press in 2017 revealed “that even though 98 percent of drivers acknowledge texting while driving is dangerous, 66 percent still admit to engaging in that reckless behavior.” And with growing evidence of the addictive qualities associated with using smartphones and similar devices, it is becoming clear that the urge to use them while driving is becoming harder and harder for people to control.

Earlier this year, ODOT partnered with the Ohio State Highway Patrol to establish the first Distracted Driving Awareness Corridor: a 17-mile stretch of Interstate 76 near Interstate 80 identified as a high crash zone for distracted drivers in Trumbull and Mahoning counties. Up to 60,000 vehicles pass through the largely flat and straight area every day, including a large amount of tractor trailers. The corridor has a series of signs reminding drivers nothing is worth taking their eyes off the road.

It’s still early, but there are already positive results: Total crashes in the corridor have dropped 38 percent compared with the same time from the previous year. Fatal and injury crashes are down 47 percent. But it is the personal responsibility of every driver that will make the difference:

“Distracted driving is a choice,” said District 4 Director John Picuri. “For the safety of all the employees at ODOT, I ask everybody to put down the distractions.”

Kelsie Hoagland, District 2

How do you show your gratitude to a cheerful co-worker? Someone you can depend on for encouragement? Someone who makes a difference? Someone who generally makes your work easier?

District 2 has found a way. They introduced the SMILE award to recognize such workers earlier this year. A peer-to-peer recognition program, anyone can nominate anyone, and recipients can win as many SMILES as they are nominated for. Here now are the first four recipients of the program’s awards.

A Winning SMILE

MAY

Deb Aelker, Henry County Highway Technician

Aelker was nominated for her outstanding teamwork and leadership at an asphalt plant last fall. She helped several ODOT trucks maneuver into the proper loading positions, taking time to make sure trucks were loaded safely.

Special Note: Someone wrote a full letter expressing gratitude for Aelker’s actions.

JUNE

Paul Joseph, District Garage Auto Technician

Joseph was recognized for his overall positive demeanor in the workplace.

Special Note: The anonymous nominator wrote: “Paul is always willing to go the extra mile to help people out and get them going . . . he always has a way to find a laugh and to put a smile on your face!”

JULY

Dennis Rowe, Ottawa County Auto Technician

Rowe received two nominations for doing the work of two mechanics while they were out on vacation.

Special Note: He also cleaned the mechanics area of the garage thoroughly without being told.

AUGUST

Christine Clody, Human Capital Management, Senior Analyst

Clody was nominated for launching a fun and informative wellness program with employee activities such as walking lunches. She also established a website and a newsletter, plus a list of activities that they can participate in their communities.

Special Note: “I’m excited that we have a whole committee dedicated to motivating and encouraging wellness in District 2,” she said.
A Historical Past
Livia Schroeder, District 1

When construction crews began to mill away pavement on U.S. Route 68 in the village of Arlington as part of a reconstruction project, they uncovered a century’s worth of history. The crew found a brick road dating back to Sept. 8, 1915 underneath the existing pavement.

U.S. 68 was originally bricked because of the return of vets after World War I. Needing to create jobs for these returning citizens, the government created projects to build a system of brick roads to replace dirt roads. Indeed, the brick paving industry boomed in Ohio from the 1880s to the 1930s due to the clay beds found in Eastern Ohio. The original WWI veterans could place a quarter mile of bricks a day. Each of the 103-year-old bricks weighs ten pounds. Now these will have to be removed to have a good base for the road.

An archived issue of a newspaper called The Arlingtonian noted completion of the brick paving of U.S. 68 in 1915 and encouraged everyone from Hancock County to come out and celebrate the opening of Arlington’s newly-paved street.

Litter, Litter, Everywhere
Liz Lyons, District 8

The frustrating thing about highway litter is its persistence. It seems to return as soon as it is removed. Recognizing the frustration of communities, citizens, and other organizations across the state, ODOT Central Office recently brought together various stakeholders in a first ever litter summit. Representatives from solid waste districts, waste haulers, law enforcement, mass transit, plus ODOT county and district managers and other state agencies attended. The summit identified litter hot spots and resources available to develop a new statewide litter strategy that focuses on prevention and enforcement. Other summits were held in Cincinnati and Cleveland.

"Since 2008, ODOT crews, Adopt-A-Highway volunteers and inmates have collected nearly 4 million bags of trash along our highways," said Joel Hunt, administrator for ODOT’s Highway Beautification and Pollinator Habitat program. "We know litter abatement is not the solution to Ohio’s litter problem; we also know that no one person or organization is going to end littering by themselves. It’s going to take all of us."

The summit included sessions about community engagement, law enforcement and the ODOT adopt-a-highway program. Participants learned about national litter research, heard case studies, and learned about educational resources. A Cincinnati summit event was later held at the University of Cincinnati. There are also plans to take a litter roadshow to smaller communities around Ohio.
Driving Me Sane!
Crystal Neelon, District 3

Is your seat belt on? Did you check your mirrors? What did the sign say that you just passed? Did you check your blind spot?

With so many things to remember as a new driver, it’s hard to imagine adding anything more. But with laws and roadways constantly changing, it’s important to stay up-to-date with what we are teaching new drivers. Which is exactly why Traffic Engineer, Julie Cichello, volunteered to participate in the Ohio Driver Education Committee (ODEC). This committee, made up of various safety professionals, is working hard to make sure the Ohio Driver Training Program is up-to-date and relevant to today’s world.

Cichello, who has teenage drivers of her own, knows how important it is to teach them about new interchange and intersection designs, such as roundabouts and diverging diamonds, which are becoming more prevalent in Ohio. It’s important driving instructors are teaching the correct way to drive these new designs. “We’re seeing a lot more crashes at intersections and that’s because drivers don’t understand the yielding law,” said Cichello. “Our focus is to improve safety, especially at intersections.”

The ODEC has a public relations consultant to help spread the message to the public. The committee updates its program manual every five years. The updated guidelines for the most recent manual will take effect in 2019.

“Our focus is to improve safety, we’re seeing a lot more crashes at intersections and that’s because drivers don’t understand the yielding law.”