Peregrine falcons halted work on the Cleveland Innerbelt Bridge. Could birds and bridge coexist?

MISSION: PRESERVING PEREGRINES POSSIBLE
"Who can we contact about the messages on the road signs? It seems that motorists don’t know about the Move Over Law. The ‘Click it or Ticket’ message and traffic deaths seem to be really pushed out there. Is there any chance we can get the Move Over message on them? Maybe something about being on the phone also. I’m on the road constantly and very few people move over even when the other lanes are open.”

In 2013 I testified before the Ohio General Assembly to change the law to include ODOT highway workers, who frequently risk their lives to maintain and improve our highway system. Since we changed the law to include every stationary vehicle with flashing lights, including road construction, maintenance, and utility crews, we have done a lot to publicize the new rules. However, you are right that more needs to be done. We are planning to use our electronic traffic signs to tell the public about the changes to the Move Over Law. In addition, this year ODOT has partnered with local TV and radio stations to produce a web video for Work Zone Awareness Week.

We’ve launched an aggressive social media campaign in each district and in Central Office to conduct #MoveOverMondays and #WorkerWednesday this fall. We’ve also partnered with the Ohio Bureau of Workers Compensation to host successful media events in three counties. And we are collaborating with the Ohio Contractors Association to produce a high-quality video for paid sponsorships on social media.

Last year, we displayed state law announcements about the Move Over Law on all overhead freeway signs for an entire month. We also made Move Over the theme of ODOT’s booth at the Ohio State Fair. We put Move Over bumper stickers on every ODOT vehicle and placed Move Over posters at all of our rest areas. We held media events in Delaware County and at the Ohio Turnpike headquarters in Berea. We also released a public service announcement which aired more than 10,000 times on 178 stations that reached audiences in Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

Next year, ODOT will host the National Work Zone Awareness Week event in District 2. Worker safety and Ohio’s Move Over Law will be the central theme of the national conference. We’ve done a great deal to publicize the change to Ohio’s Move Over Law, and we will continue to educate the public about the importance of Move Over.”

I started as an Engineer-in-Training at District 8 in 1993. That first day, a secretary introduced all of the other young engineers, especially the other young women, to each other. I went to construction fairly soon for most of the summer, then in the winter I went to Central Office for six months.

At first, I didn’t dream I would one day be DOD. But as I had more interactions with the deputy director later, I started thinking that I would like to have the job.

I’m both proud and a little humble that I’m only the third woman to be named a district deputy director with the department. I’m a big advocate for women in engineering. It’s very satisfying, too. It shows that hard work pays off.

Going the extra mile has always been my attitude. Trying to figure out how to help somebody get what they need and making sure they got the right answer or met with the right people has always been my motto.

I think it’s been beneficial that my entire career has been spent at District 8. I do know the people and I do know who’s done what and who can help me in certain situations. It can also be a hindrance, because you know the good, bad, and the ugly about the district.

As you move up, you have to re-evaluate friendships versus working relationships. It’s difficult to do, but that’s part of growing as a person and as a leader. You have to know where that boundary is and keep the boundary where it should be.

We definitely hire based upon getting the best person for the job without having politics or nepotism involved. We are much more efficient in the way we do things. We try to make work better, easier, and faster. We’re trying to motivate our employees by getting better leaders and managers at ODOT.

I work hard. I enjoy my job, and I love working at ODOT.

Campbell was named District 8 Deputy Director in July.
To bee, or not to bee

David Rose, District 10 & Central Office

For the last three years, the old mixing shed at Noble County has hummed with electric energy. You could mistake the sound for the drone of machinery, but it is in fact a colony of honeybees. Bees that had become a problem because the shed was set to be demolished.

“The bees have been there for a few years,” said Noble County Transportation Administrator Dave Lawrence. “We knew we had to do something with them, but we didn’t want to kill them.”

The welfare of these bees is no small concern. Honeybees in the wild have been decimated because of weather and parasitic mites. And since more than 90 American crops depend on bees for pollination—and thus their continued growth—their decline could mean serious consequences for future food supplies.

Enter Don Crock, Noble County bee inspector. Crock put the word out for a bee keeper willing to safely relocate the colony. Thankfully, bee keeper Brad Stillions answered the call.

“This is my eighth bee rescue,” said Stillions. The entire colony was relocated to an Amish farm in Morgan County, where it will spend its days pollinating crops and making honey.

“With there being a shortage of bees, we need to do everything we can to ensure they continue to thrive,” said Stillions.

“Bee rescuer” Brad Stillions holds a large honeycomb of the cut out from the Noble County mixing shed.

PHOTO BY DAVE LAWRENCE, DISTRICT 10

District 6’s J.B. Jones discusses the Guardrail Work Order System developed to efficiently track guardrail repairs. The one-stop-shop electronic system allows work orders to be entered via tablet and creates a location and repair history.

Dave Stith of District 4’s Facilities office, left, offers event-goers a tutorial on “How to Build a Brine Pump.” Stith taught himself how to repair the pumps, saving the District about $700 a unit. Stith also wrote a manual other districts can use to repair their own brine pumps.

District 9’s Jill Jones discusses the Guardrail Work Order System developed to efficiently track guardrail repairs. The one-stop-shop electronic system allows work orders to be entered via tablet and creates a location and repair history.

District 9 brought their auger boring machine (shown here in action on a District 5 project) used to replace culverts. The auger allows for culvert replacement with no lane closures and with a significantly smaller crew.

District 9 brings Coordinator Scott Thompson, right, acknowledges ODOT employees with military service during the Total ODOT Performance (TOP) Awards Ceremony. Thompson is a member of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves and inspired the crowd with three things he took away from his experience in the service: accountability, making the most of what you have, and embracing the diversity of all people.

Team Up 2015

The state fairgrounds were abuzz with the people of ODOT on September 16 at the 17th annual Team Up event. The gathering brings together employees from maintenance, planning, construction, engineering, human resources, and more each year from all districts and Central Office to show off the ways they’ve been contributing to ODOT excellence. The theme of this year’s event was “Innovation for the Future.”

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PHOTO BY BRUCE HULL, CENTRAL OFFICE

Photo by Daniel Furbee, District 5

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Photo S by bruce hull, central Office

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Two peregrine falcons named Newton and Bolt lived for years beneath one of two spans making up the old Cleveland Innerbelt Bridge. They stayed put even when the first of the twin structures was demolished and replaced by ODOT from 2010 to 2013. Their nest was discovered in early 2014 as workers were preparing that second span for demolition. As members of the federal endangered species list, the state had to stop work immediately and determine a way to save the falcon’s home when blowing up the bridge.

How to knock down a bridge without knocking off the longtime residents.

ODOT and members of ODNR and the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW) worked together to review the nesting location and determined it could remain while crews worked around it. Some parts of the old bridge were demolished by hand using machinery, and the team took careful consideration of the falcons every step of the way.

A young falcon hatched soon after the nest was found. Working again with ODNR and ODOW, work crews took extra care around the nesting site so as not to disturb the hatching. The falcon fledged in early July, just days before the scheduled use of explosives to take down the remainder of the bridge.

There is room for man and beast after all.

For the first time since the Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) program began 35 years ago, the state of Ohio met its 15 percent set-aside goal. And, in large part, it has ODOT to thank for it. MBE companies are at least 51 percent-owned or controlled by African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian-Americans or American Indians.

For the 2013 state fiscal year, 19.4 percent of the goods and services purchased by agencies, state boards, and commissions involved contracts with MBEs. That amounted to $228.5 million, $36.8 of which came from ODOT.

In SFY 2015, ODOT set its own goal of 20 percent set-aside, which it exceeded by 2 percent. “ODOT values diversity, both with its workforce and the companies it does business with,” said ODOT Director Jerry Wray. “This could not have happened without the support and effort put forth by ODOT’s purchasing agents.”

I got my start in metal repairs as a hobby . . . restoring old British motorcycles.”
— Brian Hiestand

From rusting to revitalized
By Brent Kovacs, District 4

Irish novelist and poet James Stephens once said “A sword, a spade, and a thought should never be allowed to rust.” District 4’s Brian Hiestand would probably add a plow truck to that list. The highway technician has been refurbishing rusting trucks at the Trumbull County Garage to extend their useful life span.

Rust is a persistent problem for the steel cab of a plow truck. Floors, rocker panels, doors, and cab corners can rot away to nothing. These problems would traditionally be fixed by a body shop, but Hiestand does the work in-house. He cuts out the deteriorated steel in the cabs, welds in patch panels and paints the repair. He also replaces doors, complete with installed windows and all the electrical systems wiring.

He learned how to perform these repairs from a long-time body shop worker, and estimates he has repaired 15 trucks in his seven years at ODOT.

“I got my start in metal repairs as a hobby,” Hiestand said. “I enjoy restoring old British motorcycles.”
A DAY IN THE LIFE...

Speaking from a concrete plant in Newcastle, Pennsylvania—one of his many homes away from home—Transportation Technician Tony Vcelka talks about being an ODOT concrete inspector and life on the road.

Living out of a suitcase

By Joel Hunt, Central Office

DESCRIBE YOUR JOB AT ODOT.

I travel to concrete plants in Ohio, seven other states and Canada. I inspect, approve and sometimes reject pre-stressed concrete I-beams, box beams, pipes and other products that will be used on ODOT projects.

HOW DO YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

I help make safer roads and bridges. I make sure beams are built correctly at the factory which saves time and money at the job site. When the products I’ve inspected are ready to be shipped to the project, I have inspected them to the best of my ability.

WHAT’S MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

My goal is to make sure everything we use is produced according to specifications. If I see something I don’t feel good about, I consult with ODOT engineers and get it fixed. I try to be at the plants to watch all phases of construction.

HOW DO YOU SURVIVE THE CONSTANT TRAVELING?

Life on the road has been interesting to say the least. You have to make the best of it. You find some of the best and worst restaurants and hotels. I work from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. If the plant starts early and quits late, I’m usually there with them.

WHEN YOU’RE ON VACATION DO YOU LIKE TO TRAVEL OR STAY AT HOME?

I do travel. Vacation is my time, time for me to enjoy either visiting family or just site seeing or relaxing at home. When I travel for work, it’s all business.

Vcelka has worked for ODOT since 1987 and has traveled all 28 years.