District employees from across the state hosted Bring Your Child to Work Day events, giving their children a fun insight into their jobs while they are away from home.
I've been hearing a lot about TCORE (Transportation Committee on Operational Resource Efficiency) lately. What is the mission and purpose of the committee?

Creating a professional, reliable and efficient ODOT begins with our people and the valuable work that they perform. Keeping people and goods moving safely and freely throughout the state is our mission. We’re always looking to improve and to be our best. But first, we must re-examine what we do and how we do it. That’s why executive leadership put together a team to study and research our maintenance operations.

Developed in April 2018, the TCORE committee’s mission is define the core functions of highway maintenance operations to ensure resource efficiency while maintaining the integrity of the state’s highway infrastructure. For ODOT, it’s about seeking continuous improvement in the level of services performed with the resources afforded. To complete this mission, TCORE will define the “What, Why and How” of the work performed throughout the department.

This does not mean you will lose your job. It does not mean we will stop performing certain work. What it means is the committee will work with county administrators, transportation managers and district senior leadership to research and analyze the work we perform. Such as, snow and ice removal, pavement repairs, bridge work, safety, vegetation, etc. to determine best practices. We will identify the most efficient and cost effective ways of completing our maintenance responsibilities. To help with this, a detailed survey recently went out to the counties. This is a very important first step in ensuring the research is accurate and understanding better how each county and district operates. As we go through the process of gathering data, I hope you will participate and provide meaningful feedback. Without your input, we cannot get better.

In the next few months TCORE will sift through a plethora of data to identify best practices and a list of the core functions of highway operations. The committee will then make recommendations for further improvements to operational efficiencies that impact highway maintenance activities.

Who You Gonna Call? GOATBUSTERS!

Breanna Badanes, District 6

Farm animal rescue isn’t a typical job duty for highway technicians, but when two Fayette County HTs saw a small goat wandering along Interstate 71, they knew they had to help. Mike Trent and Darrell Pitslick spotted the little guy while mowing along the interstate and worked together to rescue him.

“Mike chased him around the truck and I was able to catch him,” said Pitslick.

“The goat – named Winston – got a brief tour of ODOT’s facility before the Fayette Regional Humane Society came to pick him up. Sharing Winston’s photo on social media resulted in his return to his family.”

ODOT does it all - no “kidding” around!

Born to Train

Kelsie Hoagland, District 2

Nate Foos is District 2’s training officer. He is responsible for all training related to equipment operations, including Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) training. Equipment could include anything: back hoe, dozer, excavator, grater, skid loader, bucket truck, forklift, rollers, chainsaw/chipper, and the truck and loader training for the HT series.

“My favorite equipment to train on is anything that involves dirt work,” said Foos. “That’s probably from my love for farming.”

Foos also does all scheduling for employee training, making sure the location and equipment is available. He completes assessments of new hires to confirm they are ready to operate designated pieces of equipment when they come on board.

“Overall, my favorite thing about the job is the satisfaction of helping people reach their goals, whether it is getting a CDL or just being able to help people operate anything at all.”

“This job has also helped me come out of my shell.”

“I was a little more of an introvert before, not much of a people person. But in this role, the job is to be around people and talk to people, which is cool.”

When not at work, Foos lives on a farm and maintains over 700 acres. He and his family grow corn, beans, wheat, alfalfa, and raise beef cattle. He enjoys time with his wife and four children: three boys and a little girl who is 21 months old. Foos clearly enjoys his time both on and off work.
Accidents happen; that’s a fact of life. And some of those accidents can keep an employee off work, whether for a short or long period of time. The challenge to avoid these kinds of debilitating accidents is being met in Holmes County. On August 8 of this year, the Holmes County Garage hit a 10-year milestone of no lost time due to injury. Employees have not missed a single day of work due to injury in 57,280 work days -- a major accomplishment!

Since 2008, Holmes County has had nine minor injuries, five with medical treatment. In each case, the employee returned to work the next day. On January 23, 2012, a finger injury was reported. The employee returned to work the next day and worked overtime.

On July 9, 2018, an employee pinned their arm in a tailgate. Co-workers performed medical aid in the breakroom. The employee finished their shift and returned to work the next day.

To celebrate this huge milestone, Holmes County Garage employees, current and retired, were recognized for this amazing accomplishment by receiving t-shirts and a plaque signed by the director. “Be Safe today, be here tomorrow” is a common motto throughout ODOT District 11. It’s a motto that is never taken lightly. Every day ODOT employees are not only working hard to maintain our roadways but working hard to be safe and stay safe while doing daily tasks.

A Convoy of Safety

Mike Lovins and Ron Poole, Central Office

Safer highway travel is on the horizon. In the near future, travelers sharing the roads with trucks will find the large semi’s filing into single lanes like train cars, controlled remotely by one lead vehicle. The arrangement will allow fast and efficient delivery of goods, while the dangers of truck accidents caused by human fatigue and bad judgments will be virtually eliminated. This is a goal of the future, and progress is being furthered by ODOT’s dedicated group, DriveOhio.

The idea is to use automated technology to form platoons of trucks from several commercial vehicles into a single file, compact group under automated control. The vehicles in a platoon safely travel together at posted speed limits. This formation relies on connectivity, technology and automated driving support systems. Each vehicle communicates with the others, with a lead vehicle controlling the speed and direction. The close distance between the vehicles reduces wind resistance, and improves aerodynamics and fuel efficiency. The automated systems simultaneously apply brakes to all trucks in the platoon when sensors detect danger.

The technology to make platooning possible is being tested through multiple projects by ODOT’s DriveOhio, including the U.S. Route 33 Smart Mobility Corridor. The test highway is being upgraded with 27 traffic signals and equipping them with Dedicated Short Range Communication radios. These units will broadcast different kinds of data and safety messages to connected vehicles.

DriveOhio hopes to take this experimentation further with actual roadway tests of truck platooning later this year. These roadway tests may take place along a section of the Ohio Turnpike already prepared with fiber-optic cable to connect vehicles to the roadway, to information centers and to each other. DriveOhio’s Cynthia Jones is enthusiastic about the department’s next step:

“To put platooning into practice, she said, “we need to work with companies that have equipped their fleets with on-board technology. Since connected vehicle standards are still being developed we cannot assume every commercial vehicle will be wired the same. We will have to work toward plug and play consistency in the future.”

[Truck platooning] will allow fast and efficient delivery of goods, while the dangers of truck accidents caused by human fatigue and bad judgments will be virtually eliminated.
A Moving Message
Ashley Rittenhouse, District 10

The state’s fair season presents the perfect opportunity to promote Ohio’s Move Over Law to the traveling public. Attendees of the Vinton, Gallia, Athens, Meigs, Monroe, Noble, Washington and Morgan County fairs in District 10 were asked to sign their names on a poster, promising to move over or slow down for all roadside workers. Members of OOPS partnered with District 10 in interacting with the public and raising awareness of the law.

Ohio’s Move Over Law requires motorists to cautiously shift over one lane—or slow down if it is not possible to change lanes—when driving by any vehicle with flashing lights on the side of the road. Its purpose is to protect everyone who works on our roads and everyone who travels on them.

Going Quackers
Ron Poole, Central Office

It could happen to anyone at any time in Central Office. A typical employee arrives at work, only to find new cube mates, inflatable ducks!

Though done for a good cause – Operation Feed – these dark deeds were the work of Transportation Engineer Caraline Griffith and LTAP head Victoria Beale. From May through late June, the two arranged for flocks of plastic fowls to appear in workstations in exchange for charity donations. In all, some 32 employees were visited by the ducks, resulting in $578 generated for charity. Though, mind you, the ladies did not do the actual legwork: “We had interns do it,” laughed Griffith.
Around 1 a.m., Hancock County Transportation Administrator Jim Heacock received an urgent phone call from the Ohio State Highway Patrol. An explosive crash just happened on Interstate 75 south of Findlay. Four commercial trucks were involved in a chain reaction collision, engulfing two of the trucks in flames and killing one of the drivers. Both sides of the highway were eventually shut down.

Heacock immediately dispatched highway technicians Jason Beard and Bob Krout to manage traffic control, placing a message board alerting motorists of the incident. With traffic control in place, the main concern was clearing the semis and determining the damage to the pavement. Having a major interstate shutdown during morning rush hour is not something the traveling public enjoys. And neither does ODOT.

Heacock quickly went into incident response mode, mobilizing people, equipment and resources to be on site for when the highway was clear. Fortunately, the district’s paving equipment was stationed in Putnam County that morning and several county work units were already scheduled to help there that day. “I just called Paul (Lehman) and we shifted all our people to Hancock,” he said. Allen, Paulding, Putnam, Van Wert and roadway services were on their way to assist with paving operations.

However, the crews hit a roadblock, literally. Crews couldn’t get any of their equipment to the scene as stranded vehicles were parked in the lanes and along the shoulder as drivers slept, blocking the team’s path.

The paving team finally arrived nearly an hour after the debris was clear and began grinding operations. Within hours, crews were able to get one lane of northbound traffic open while waiting for asphalt to be delivered. When the asphalt arrived, it took crews less than three hours to perform pavement repairs and open all lanes by evening rush hour.

“We did a great job,” said Heacock. “When we get the call, our guys are dedicated and geared up to do this kind of stuff. It’s all a team effort from ODOT.”

“When a crisis like this happens, everybody knows what their job duties are, and they don’t quit until it’s done. It’s all a team effort from ODOT.”

Whatever It Takes

Rhonda Pees, District 1