38 is Not Enough
Morgan Overbey, District 5

For Licking County Highway Technician Thomas Smith, 38 is a significant number in his life. It’s not the number of years he’s been at ODOT - it’s the number of grandchildren he has.

When Smith married his wife, who was a mother to five children already, fostering was not at the forefront of his mind. But in 1998, Smith and his wife began their fostering journey and ended up adopting eight more children. Thirteen children, and now 38 grandchildren ranging from one to 21-years-old, keeps Smith busy. The one thing that Smith is thankful for, other than the family he has been blessed with, is working at ODOT.

In spring of 2017, Smith was at the Indian Mound Mall in Licking County when he came upon a career fair. There, he met District 5 Personnel staff Shelby Williams and Cheryl Castle who talked to Smith about ODOT’s Apprentice Program. To their surprise, Smith was very familiar with ODOT because each day on his way to work, he would drive passed the District 5 Headquarters in Jacksontown.

“My boys always said, if anybody deserves it dad, it’s you,” Smith said. “They watched me as I worked different jobs, going through struggles, doing what I had to do for my family.”

Two years into the job, Smith is thankful for the opportunity he was given to be part of the Apprentice Program.

“Good things happen to good people,” Smith said. “I waited my turn and now it’s like a dream come true to be where I’m at today.”

Every time I drove past ODOT, I thought, ‘man, I wish I could work there one day,’” said Smith. “Little did I know just a few months later I would start in the apprentice program.” Smith did not have his Commercial Driver’s License, nor did he have any previous work experience in road maintenance, but in June 2017, Smith finally got the opportunity he had always wished for. The Apprentice Program allowed him to receive the appropriate training to help propel him into a career at ODOT. He became a winter seasonal employee in September 2017 and just two months later was hired on full time when a position became available in Licking County.

“Since I’ve been at ODOT, everything has been a learning experience,” Smith said. “If you don’t have a CDL or you’re looking to better yourself for your future, I think the Apprentice Program is a great thing.”

Some highlights from “Bring your child to work day” as observed in August at ODOT Central Office.
Our guys could be out fixing guardrail or potholes,” said Brian Cunningham, a public information officer with District 8,

“...But we have to deploy folks across the state to pick up other people’s junk.”

ODOT collected more than 44,700 bags of trash from Cuyahoga County in 2018. That same year, Hamilton County produced 28,167 bags, while 17,611 bags of trash were collected in Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana counties. It’s a never-ending cycle that repeats each year. It is an amazing array of what people will just leave on the side of the road: Tires. Bumpers. Couches. Refrigerators. Toilets.

Our transportation budget testimony, Director Marchbanks made a promise to Ohioans: ODOT would save $100 million dollars in operational efficiencies in the next four years (deadline of January 2023). The Director believes the people of ODOT, from HTs to management, and everyone in between, have the best ideas to save the department millions of dollars. The ideas should focus on both the operating and capital functions of the department, not reducing the operating budgets as we did in the past. We are looking for real, tangible and innovative ideas. We’ve asked taxpayers to dig deeper into their pocket to help ensure a safe, reliable transportation system, and we too need to ensure we are spending taxpayer dollars efficiently. Remember, this initiative is all about creating an innovation culture at ODOT.

Employees have several ways to submit an idea. Employees can submit their idea during brainstorming sessions with their manager, via the website or simply emailing OneRedLion@dot.ohio.gov; every idea will be reviewed and categorized. The ideas will then be further developed and presented to Governance to decide whether to move forward. A team made up of district and CO employees will then be assigned to investigate and eventually implement the ideas.
The Transformation of Transportation

ODOT’s display at the 2019 Ohio State Fair featured the growth and change brought about in Ohio transportation through progress over time. Visitors enjoyed contrasting aerial photographs showing how much an area of the state changed in the space of a few decades. Another photo display featured vehicles and equipment used by the department during some bygone eras. Those less interested in the past experienced the reality of working on a highway project near moving traffic through the use of a 360-degree presentation viewed through state-of-the-art VR goggles. Fair visitors also came in to view educational videos on ODOT programs, view live traffic feeds as provided by the department’s online OHGO site, and to pick-up the latest edition of the Ohio State Map.
One Busy Man

Lauren Borrell, District 11

When Michael Clark began his career at ODOT as a Transportation Tech Specialist in 2012, he hit the ground running. Through online schooling, he graduated from Mississippi State University with a Bachelor’s in Engineering. Clark continued with his education, online, at Louisiana State University and recently graduated with his Master’s in Construction Management. Clark received his degree in person at graduation ceremonies in Baton Rouge, Louisiana last May.

Throughout his online schooling, Clark had the opportunity to work with engineers from multiple DOT’s including an area engineer from ODOT District 1, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Virginia Department of Transportation. Recently, Clark completed a research paper titled “An Observational Assessment on Cell Phone Distraction in Work Zones.” His research paper is dedicated to the memory of District 4 Highway Technician John Pasko. Clark was nearing completion on his research when Pasko was tragically killed by an alleged distracted driver.

In what spare time he does have, Clark enjoys remodeling his home and, as a public service, restoring and preserving 19th century era cemeteries. He has worked closely with Sugarcreek Township to restore and preserve local cemeteries by applying his engineering skills to formulate concrete bases to support aging headstones. In addition to his busy work schedule, online courses, and public service projects, Clark has served as Cub Master for Sugarcreek Pack #91 where he enjoys teaching valuable life skills to youth. He and his wife, Carrie, have two boys, Ruan, 10, and Remy, 7.

Plant Control

Brent Kovacs, District 4

With the record amounts of rain District 4 received this summer, the work crews in Stark County mowed the grass in the medians and ditches in a unique way: They used an offset hitch attached to a batwing mower. This articulates the mower into the ditch, while the tractor remains fully on the road. The operator mows areas where the tractor could normally get stuck in the wet ground.

This offset hitch also allowed mowing to be completed quicker because it could mow further in the ditch and go around objects, such as signs and mail boxes, while remaining stable on the road. This hitch could be utilized for both a 10 foot and a 15 foot batwing mower and could mow anywhere needed. It has been used in full rotation since May in Stark County, and they are seeing an increase in productivity from it. This piece of equipment allowed crews to continue to mow in areas that would have been impassable due to the wetness.

This operation was the first-of-its-kind in the state.

**Before**

**After**
In June, District 9 joined Ohio Representative Doug Green, public safety officials and area residents to unveil a first-of-its-kind safety improvement project at the intersection of U.S. Route 68 and State Route 123 in northern Brown County.

The Intersection Conflict Warning System (ICWS), provides real-time warning to drivers of the presence of a vehicle that may enter the intersection from an approaching cross street. This innovative project was initiated by District 9’s Traffic Studies Department, whose staff were looking for a way to improve safety at this intersection. This area has had a relatively small number of crashes, but a history of angle crashes.

An ICWS is a series of dynamic warning signs in which detectors activate flashing beacons on warning signs to alert drivers to the presence of another vehicle approaching the intersection. As part of the project, “Traffic Approaching When Flashing” signs and flashing beacon lights have been installed on S.R. 123 and “Entering Traffic When Flashing” signs with LED lights have been installed on U.S. Route 68. The signs’ lighting devices are activated by loop detectors as traffic approaches the intersection. The alerts on either route will remain active while vehicles are detected at the intersection.

While the ICWS is used to enhance safety and support motorists’ decision-making when approaching an intersection, it is not intended to deter motorists from complying with regulatory signs and exercising safe-driving practices. Motorists should understand and recognize that ICWS alerts are intended to provide supplemental warning information.

TeamUp & Roadeo

Transcript congratulates Justin Newkirk of District 8 for winning the truck competition and Kyle Hosier of District 7 for winning the loader competition at this year’s Roadeo/TOP event. A complete list of TOP award winners can be found at: http://portal.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/QualityHR/workforcediversity/TeamUP.

Travel Without Conflict

Kathleen Fuller, District 9

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Signs of Progress

Central Office

In August, crews began installing gigantic, 110,000 pound signs and gantries over the eastbound lanes of Interstate 670 from downtown Columbus to Interstate 270. Eight of these gantries, plus one sign on a cantilever, will be installed every 3/4th of a mile. This is another step in pursuit of the Interstate 670 SmartLane project in Columbus.

The SmartLane is the state’s first pilot for using the wide inside shoulder as a temporary additional lane of travel during peak travel times. The engineering term for this is hard shoulder running. When operators in the Traffic Management Center notice traffic volumes beginning to build on eastbound I-670, they’ll open the SmartLane and reduce the speed limit. This allows the extra traffic to get through the area more smoothly.

This concept has been successful in Europe and several other states like Virginia, Washington, Minnesota, and Michigan. The most expensive part of this $61 million project is the rebuilding of the interchange at I-670 and I-270. Everything is scheduled to open this fall.