The Whitehall Board of Education has named ODOT Technical Services Administrator Andrew “Drew” Williams as head basketball coach for Whitehall-Yearling High School. Williams has been an assistant basketball coach at nearby Columbus Brookhaven High School for nearly 20 years. A profile appeared in Transcript’s April/May 2013 edition.

“It was a tough decision,” Williams said, “I hated to leave Brookhaven. However, this will give me the opportunity to build a basketball program from the ground up. It will be challenging, but it will be worthwhile.”

The Whitehall-Yearling Rams have not had a season over .500 in nearly 20 years. However, his main goal, as it was at Brookhaven, is to make sure that every player graduates high school and goes on to college. To him, that goal is more important than the outcome of any basketball game.

“We need to put an academic foundation in place,” said Williams. “We have to change the culture to stress good grades and good character. Only after that can we focus on the fundamentals of basketball.”

The search for the perfect truck

Alexandra Buerger, Central Office

This summer, representatives from the Office of Equipment Management travelled to all 12 districts to meet with mechanics, auto technicians, and highway technicians regarding ODOT’s dump truck fleet. The hands-on employees were solicited for their insight on past practices and recommended improvements, and their first-hand knowledge will be used to plan for better truck procurement methods. Discussions ranged from ODOT’s partnership with Ohio Penal Industries, the agency that builds the trucks, to the truck replacement cycle ODOT currently uses to ensure each county is receiving new equipment on a regular basis. Employees were also asked to give their opinion on what the “perfect truck” would entail.

From here, select employees will participate in a focus group, using the information gathered in the meetings, to achieve statewide consensus on truck specification improvements for the future.
Two counties set asphalt paving record
Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

Two crews from the Muskingum and Licking county garages recently set a one-day asphalt paving record, laying 740 tons of asphalt along State Route 586 in a single day. The team covered 12 miles in about 11.5 hours in both counties.

Licking County Manager Jeff Hill and Muskingum County Manager Phil Valentine put together a project crew that included 35 ODOT employees. Twelve were from the Muskingum County Garage, 14 were from the Licking County Garage, the four members of the district paving crew, and five seasonal employees. A normal asphalt paving crew would number about 20 people and typically lay down between 200 to 300 tons of asphalt in a day.

“This was certainly an impressive effort,” says Assistant Director for Field Operations Mike Flynn. “Visible boundaries are disappearing. As the department gets leaner and as we focus on metrics that measure results over resources, we have to look at more efficient ways to get the job done.”

Local News

Environmental stewardship welcomed
By Joyce Miller, District 3

Following an unfortunate environmental violation last year, District 3 Deputy Director Al Biehl recognized the need for more training to eliminate future occurrences. The district is calling for environmental training at all levels within the highway maintenance workforce with a secondary level of training for the county management workforce.

The basic goal is to increase the awareness of workers on how their actions can potentially harm the environment. The one-hour training covers thinking about where to operate equipment correctly, where to dispose of excess materials and the need for permits. Environmental Specialist Mac Vance put together a presentation for each county staff, explaining the difference between a ditch, stream and a wetland. County and transportation managers also received a thorough review of the Highway Management Environmental Impact Assessment form.

“This isn’t the same ODOT as before,” said Vance. “We simply must be more vigilant in our efforts to protect the environment.”
Fore!
Mike Lopez, District 2

The Joe Fenton Memorial Golf League in District 2, made up of active and retired ODOT employees, has been pursuing the noble sport since 1971. I.T. Program Specialist Lori Middleborough has been a member since she was asked to join in 1999.

When asked what her favorite club was, Lori responded that it was her #7 Iron. Perhaps it’s because she once scored a hole in one with that club at a golf scramble. She also admits to a swing which ricocheted off a tree and hit her in the head!

Despite the threat of injury or mortal embarrassment, Lori continues to reach for her favorite iron in hopes for another hole in one. She works hard on her strength, timing, coordination and concentration. She does offer this advice to anyone wanting to improve their game:

“Keep your head down,” she said.

What would a trip to the Ohio State fairgrounds be without the usual heat, humidity and discomfort? Thanks to members of District 6 and others, a new and permanent attraction at the fairgrounds starts this year: an oasis of cooling relief. Located just north of 17th Avenue and west of Interstate 71, a row of newly planted trees now stand. In time, they will provide a welcomed escape for visitors. Roadway Services Engineer Dan Wise calls it “Operation Shade.”

“This is an urban landscape design project where multiple state agencies and contractors had to work together,” said Wise, including the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, ODOT, the Environmental Protection Agency and Ohio State Fairgrounds/Exposition Center.”

The involvement of different agencies is due, in part, to the fact that this was no routine tree planting. Operation Shade utilizes water permeable pavers around the selected mixture of northern red oak, hackberry and honey locusts. These pavers not only provide additional water for the plants, they also filter out any pollutants coming off the parking lot.

A second aspect of the project is the creation of a structure underneath the trees called Silva Cells. A little like giant Legos, these cells were laid out and stacked around the target area and filled with loose soil before the trees were put in place. This allows the trees’ root systems plenty of access to water and air, allowing them to grow to maturity and live for decades.

In the future, fairground visitors will enjoy a 100-foot canopy of beauty and heat relief in the middle of the city. And Wise and his crew will be able to say they built this project from the ground up – literally.
The Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC) recently voted to approve Governor Kasich’s $3 billion Jobs and Transportation Plan unveiled in July. The plan is the result of the two-year Transportation Budget which allows the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission to sell $1.5 billion in revenue bonds backed by future revenues for construction projects. The other $1.5 billion will come from federal, state, and local sources.

The Jobs and Transportation Plan includes 41 major new capacity projects around the state that are designed to increase motorist safety, reduce congestion, add capacity, and improve Ohio’s economy. Examples include:

- Cleveland’s $324 million Opportunity Corridor that will link the city’s University Circle business district with Interstate 490.
- The second $340 million Innerbelt Bridge project on Interstate 90 over the Cuyahoga River in downtown Cleveland.
- Two projects to widen I-271 in Summit and Cuyahoga counties totaling nearly $200 million.
- Reconstructing parts of I-75 at I-280 and I-475 at more than $250 million.
- Reconstructing the I-71/I-70 interchange in Franklin County for $86 million.
- Construction of a new interchange on I-71 at MLK Boulevard in Hamilton County for $107 million.

ODOT Director Jerry Wray, who chairs the TRAC, applauded the unanimous vote for the plan, saying the projects will help make Ohio’s transportation system one of the finest in the world.

“Together, they will make our state a better place to do business and create jobs,” said Wray. “This is the largest investment in our transportation system Ohio has ever made. If not for the changes in how we do business outlined in the Transportation Budget, many of these projects would wait for decades to get built, or not get built at all.”

Q “ODOT’s vision statement includes the phrase “long-term.” What steps is the administration taking to promote that in a political environment that is ODOT?”

A “The structures you put on paper and the processes you follow are important, but they are not the key to making changes long-term. The real key is the culture: the way we do business and behave relative to our customers, both internal and external. If we change how business is done, we will change the culture for the better. If we improve the way we do business, a healthier culture will naturally follow.

What’s important is what we’re doing in terms of professionalizing the department. How we treat people, the metrics we use to measure our performance, and the results we produce with the resources we have are what counts. If we continue to do the right things in the right way, that is powerful and will have staying power. Consider, for example, the Transportation Review Advisory Council, the TRAC. Prior to the creation of the TRAC, ODOT really had no objective project selection process for major new capacity projects. We created and instituted the TRAC in the 1990s. It has continued under four administrations, it is law, and is respected as the way we do business.

If we are consistent, productive, and create a high performance workplace, it will carry weight into the future, particularly if we can document the quality of our performance with provable metrics. The key is to do things right, do the right things, and measure our performance and production, then institute and/or codify our results. Gradually, that becomes the very way we do business at the Ohio Department of Transportation. When that higher level of performance becomes normal and expected, the culture has changed for the better, and for the “long-term.”

— Director Jerry Wray
**A Day in the Life**

The bridge keeper

Lauren Holdsworth, District 5

As you are driving along on your morning commute have you ever stopped to think about how many bridges you safely crossed? Probably not - but District 5 Bridge Specialist Matt Beedy does think about them all the time.

To ensure the safety of the bridges for the motoring public, ODOT sends out its 42 bridge inspectors on a daily basis to inspect the bridges’ condition. Bridge Inspectors work through all seasons. The position involves assuming a lot of responsibility and requires the ability to deal with a variety of outdoor conditions. Inspectors have to be ready to climb ropes, work in confined spaces, wade through streams and rivers or share space with wildlife such as snakes and ticks. As some might say, this could qualify for Mike Rowe’s “Dirty Jobs.”

Beedy began his career with ODOT as a highway technician 23 years ago. He became a bridge inspector in 2004, and has spent many hours inspecting the 14,561 state bridges while based in District 6 and Central Office. Joining District 5 just a year ago, he is now responsible for inspecting half of the more than 1,000 state bridges overseen by the office.

“Every day on the job, my goal is to provide a safe commute for the citizens of Ohio,” said Beedy. “My favorite time of the year to work is winter: no vegetation, no heat, no bugs.”

For Beedy, moving around a work site can involve a bit of effort. He may use ropes to either repel down a bridge or climb up the structure. When places on a bridge are unreachable by these means, he may have to call in a snooper truck. With a platform attached to a long mechanical arm, the snooper can lift an inspector to a position up to 100 vertical and/or horizontal feet in the air. Bridge inspections may take anywhere from an hour to 3-4 days, depending on the size. Federal regulations require bridges to be inspected on a bi-annual basis, but Ohio inspects all state bridges every year.

A bridge’s rating is based solely on the eyes and hands of a trained and experienced inspector. If something would fail on the structure, that inspector’s name is attached to the report that is sent to the district bridge engineer.

“Inspecting bridges is much like being a doctor,” said Beedy. “You look at its history to familiarize yourself with it before you visit, then go through a check up to see what kind of condition it is in. You then decide if it is in good shape until next year, or if you need to write up a work order and it gets fixed.”

Beedy said that the most interesting bridges he has inspected have been the Cleveland Innerbelt Bridge and the Jeremiah Morrow Bridge.

Beedy resides in Grove City with his wife and two cats; Noodle and Doodle. He spends his time off the bridge working on his 140-year-old historical home. He very much enjoys his role at ODOT.

“I take a lot of pride in my job,” he said. Knowing people get to and from destinations safely because I ensured the soundness of a bridge structure brings me enjoyment.”
County Managers Get Results
Alexandra Buerger, Central Office

The County Manager “Chat with the Director” Task Force, comprised of representatives from each district, has devoted time over the past two years to tackling work issues most maintenance personnel deal with on a daily basis. Consider this timeline:

- **September 2011** “Chat with the Director” sessions held with all 88 county managers. Overall, 63 separate issues are identified.
- **March 2012** Assistant Director Mike Flynn invites 12 selected county managers to Columbus for the first meeting of what will become the Task Force, assigning each person one or more of the target issues for research.
- **March–April 2012** The “champions” partner with Central Office policy makers to discuss what ODOT can do to eliminate the issues.
- **May 2012–June 2013** Task force meets quarterly to review champions’ documented progress. Champions continue to meet with policy makers to discuss solutions.
- **October 2012** Nearly half the original issues are labeled “resolved.”
- **January 2013** Champions attend a retreat with all 12 district highway management administrators to collaborate and provide insight from research.
- **July 2013** At a final meeting, 75 percent of the issues are resolved.

Many members were shocked at the differences between districts, and issues ranged from the department’s inherited culture to the limits counties face when purchasing. Things were further complicated when ODOT’s contract with OCSEA was extended, affecting what could be done about issues within the Highway Technician series.

But great strides, such as persuading Finance to raise the $1000 cap on non-contract credit card items to $2500, were made. And members discovered the willingness of many senior leaders to help solve problems. All that has happened has been most rewarding for members:

“County Managers from other districts have come to me and told me that things have greatly improved for them because of our group,” said Lee Anderson, District 2’s representative from Williams County. “We just may have made a difference.”

Front Row: Ed Lightle, District 9; Lee Anderson, District 2; Tony Brown, District 7; Mark Parsley, District 8
Back Row: Brad Mayes, District 3; Shawn Rostorfer, District 6; James Boyle, District 12; Vince Carter, District 11; John Burdette, District 10; Sandy Knott, District 1
Not Pictured: Greg Solarz, District 4; Phil Valentine, District 5
A coach for life
Allison Evans, District 1

COACHES OF ANY sport have an important job in their community, but their job descriptions don’t include providing mentorship, driving athletes to special camps, helping them earn scholarships, providing financial support or teaching life skills.

Greg “Radar” Williamson, transportation technician with District 1, does all of this on a volunteer basis for the Tier 1 Sports youth basketball program. Now in his 20th year of coaching, Williamson and others founded the program in 1993 to combat drug and gang violence in the Lima area.

Williamson inspired fellow Transportation Technician Todd Grapner to also volunteer his time as a coach.

“There are no words that can really express how much Greg has done for these kids. There is no number that can fully represent how much time and money he has given, and there are no units of measure for the impact he’s had on their lives,” said Grapner.

Through coaching and mentoring, Williamson doesn’t just teach basketball, but instills life skills such as the risks of drugs and other substances, money management, the importance of grades and the idea of preparation for the next step in life.

“We want to teach them how to be professionals, whether it is in basketball or other areas. We have guys who play overseas in leagues, guys that have gone on to be doctors, officers in the military, police officers…the list is endless,” Williamson said. “We really stress the importance of earning scholarships to pay for a college education.”

Williamson has been known to take his young charges as far as Las Vegas to introduce them to colleges and camps for possible recruitment. And Williamson continues to work with athletes every week, always ensuring they are on track.

“The success of our program,” said Williamson, “is directly related to the support we as coaches receive from our spouses and children who had to deal with us being gone countless hours, and the sharing of our homes with young men and women from all over the country.”

PHOTO BY ALLISON EVANS, DISTRICT 1

Greg Williamson