A Matter of Life...
Ashley Rittenhouse, District 10

It was 1:50 A.M. on September 30, 2017, when Linda Cook received a phone call from her husband’s boss saying he had been involved in an incident while working on the road. Her mind was racing during the two-and-a-half hour drive from her home in Bellaire to the hospital in Columbus: How bad was he hurt? Had he been paralyzed? Unfortunately, Steve Cook had been killed while testing asphalt along I-70 for The Shelly Company. “We were married almost four years,” Cook said. “It was a great life with him. He was a good man for me.”

Now, armed with handwritten notes like “be alert, be respectful while operating a vehicle,” and “when you see the orange cone, respect the work zone,” she takes every opportunity to draw attention to Ohio’s Move Over Law and the importance of work zone safety. One of those opportunities was on September 19 at the rest area on Interstate 77, near Marietta, in Washington County.

Several District 10 highway technicians and county managers were on hand to talk to motorists. They also handed out material related to work zone safety and the Move Over Law. Local media was also in attendance.

In addition to participating in events like this one, Cook has purchased multiple billboards bearing a photo of Steve and the phrase “slow down, save a life.” She is also trying to increase emphasis on the Move Over Law in drivers education courses.

“No one else should go through this,” she said. “They’re just out there doing their jobs.”

Sign, Sealed, Delivered
Crystal Heelon, District 3

On September 19, District 3’s Ashland County maintenance facility set out to work on a 6.9 mile stretch of State Route 511 that didn’t pass a skid resistance test. The D3 Planning, Construction and Maintenance departments got together and worked out a plan to correct the pavement deficiencies, looking to District 6’s chip seal crew for help.

Everything was lined up and ready to go the night before the project began. Three sets of traffic control signs, 14 dump trucks, three distributor trucks, two rollers, the chip box and a crew of more than 32 people were ready to go. But isn’t it classic Murphy’s Law that if something could go wrong, it would? And it did.

The morning they were set to begin, the stone box needed for the project wouldn’t go into gear. The D6 and Ashland County crews worked on the machine, but the problem turned out to be more than they could fix that morning. With all the equipment, vehicles, signs and a large crew ready to go, it would have been devastating to shut down the project that day. They called the District 1 chip seal crew in for help.

“When we were having issues with the stone box, I wasn’t sure we were ever going to get moving that morning,” said Brad Mayes, Ashland County transportation administrator. “But D1 jumped in quickly, without hesitation, and offered up their stone box. They even delivered it to Ashland County.” By later that afternoon, the whole project was back on track.

Then, before 5 a.m. the following morning, there was a crash on Interstate 71 in Ashland County that shut down the interstate. With the Ashland County crews busy, Mayes turned to Medina County to help with the traffic control for the crash. He was then able to shift his focus back to the SR 511 chip seal. They sealed the remaining portion of roadway and were able to complete the entire project in just two days.

“This project is a true testament to ODOT’s transparent boundaries,” Mayes said. “With so many unexpected contributions from many counties, districts and departments, it became a text-book example of what “One ODOT” resembles.”
October, November and December are the deadliest months for travelers on foot. From 2009-2018, 1,134 pedestrians were killed on Ohio roadways, with over 70 percent of those deaths happening at dawn, dusk or after dark. Also about 34 percent of these deaths in the Buckeye State all happened during the last three months of the year. The days get darker, earlier, reducing visibility for those operating vehicles. This makes it more important than ever for motorists to watch out for pedestrians during evening commutes.

“With the time-change impacting visibility for all road users, we ask drivers to slow down and pay extra attention for people walking and biking,” said Caitlin Harley, ODOT’s Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation manager.

Daylight is not the only influence on visibility. Speed impacts how serious a crash is, and also reduces a driver’s field of vision, impacting their ability to see and avoid a collision. It’s been shown that 9 out of 10 pedestrians will survive when hit by a vehicle traveling 20 mph. Past 25 mph fatality increases exponentially. At 40 mph, only 1 in 10 pedestrians will survive a collision. Other factors influencing visibility include distracted driving and alcohol or drug impairment. These issues disproportionately impact pedestrian and bicyclists, who are more likely to be killed in the case of a collision.

Overall, Ohio has seen increases in the total number of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities over the past decade. From 2009 to 2018, Ohio saw an increase in the number of pedestrian fatalities by 60 percent and bicycle-related fatalities by 22 percent.

“Since the recession, increases in distracted driving, vehicle size and vehicle miles traveled have proved deadly for vulnerable roadway users across the county and Ohio,” said Jordan Whisler, ODOT’s Local Safety and Active Transportation manager.

In response, Your Move Ohio (YMO) is educating road users to think outside their car -- to look out for people walking and biking. YMO messaging focuses on behaviors that substantially impact the safety of our roadways most vulnerable users, such as:

- Slow Down, Watch for Pedestrians
- Give Three Feet, It’s the Law

“GIVE 3 FEET It’s the law.

YOUR MOVE

LOOK OUT for each other.

ODOT district offices may request a Your Move Ohio sample materials toolkit for any education or encouragement opportunities in their region. Items include tip cards, posters, bumper stickers, reflectors and bike lights. For questions on the toolkit, contact BikeOhio@dot.ohio.gov.

Details and free downloadable resources are available at YourMove.ohio.gov and on Facebook.com/YourMoveOhio. Share your active transportation story with the hashtag: #YourMoveOhio.
Smart City, Smarter Choice
Breanna Badanes, Central Office

It eases congestion on eastbound Interstate 670. The SmartLane is the left inside shoulder on the roadway and opens as an additional lane during peak times of traffic. Stretching along eight lane miles, from Interstate 71 to Interstate 270, the SmartLane uses technology to manage access and speed limit, as well as communicate with drivers on the route.

“This project represents a shift in the way we think about dealing with traffic congestion. Not only will the SmartLane get Central Ohioans home faster, this new technology will allow us to truly manage traffic, not just monitor it,” said Director Jack Marchbanks.

The route contains nine electronic overhead signs that help communicate to drivers when the SmartLane is open by displaying a green arrow over the shoulder. It also consists of 37 high-definition cameras that the department’s Traffic Management Center will consistently monitor.

“This is an example of how to deploy technology to improve the quality of life for Ohioans,” Lt. Governor Jon Husted said. “The new SmartLane will save commuters time and also save tax dollars by better using existing infrastructure.”

Change of Scenery
Ashley Rittenhouse, District 10

The Appalachian Byway was approved in September by ODOT’s Scenic Byways Advisory Committee. Ohio’s newest scenic byway routes start at State Route 78 in Monroe County through Noble, Morgan and Athens counties and end in Nelsonville; there is also a small portion north on State Route 284 to The Wilds in Muskingum County.

“There is so much culture and beauty in Appalachian Ohio,” said Thomas Barrett, Ohio Byways Program coordinator. “Our scenic byways offer unique experiences and a different view for travelers in our state. This byway invites visitors to southeast Ohio to enjoy the region’s natural and cultural heritage.”

The Ohio Scenic Byway Program is a grass-roots effort to heighten awareness of Ohio’s historical and intrinsic resources—cultural, historical, archaeological, recreational, natural and scenic—which collectively enhance the overall traveling experience. Program participation provides subsequent benefits to the community as well, such as resource preservation, enhancement and protection.

“Our scenic byways offer unique experiences and a different view for travelers in our state.”
Sara Morrisey recently became the first woman to hold the position of survey operations manager with District 1. In preparation for a significant survey project in Van Wert County, she compiled and interpreted an archive of historical plans. It was a daunting task, but Morrisey knew one cannot be a surveyor without also being a historian.

In plans dated 1920, Morrisey uncovered the survey of then Van Wert County Engineer Otto Witten of the Wayne Highway in the northern portion of the county. Today, this highway is known as a small section of U.S. 127, a north-south route between Chattanooga, Tennessee and Grayling, Michigan. Back then, Witten placed lead pipes in the roadbed to act as official markers for future reference, where some would be left uncovered for nearly 100 years.

Over the course of a century, multiple efforts have sought to widen right-of-way along a six-mile portion of the highway. But in order to be precise and accurate, the pipes had to be located to make a definitive determination of the highway’s centerline. Some errors in documentation obscured the locations of the markers, as did the removal of trees and structures used as landmarks.

“If something gets destroyed, you can recreate an intersection with the references,” Morrisey said. “But of the witnesses (at one of the locations), only the corner of the house was still there, which did help us.”

In mid-May, Morrisey’s survey crew uncovered two lead pipe markers that define the centerline of U.S. 127 and divides Union and Hoaglin townships. One of the found pipes also acts as a definitive reference point for the Van Wert-Paulding county line.

Surveyor Evan Anders worked through the pavement and earth to uncover the pipes, while still leaving them in place. The Van Wert County Engineer was called to place a hollow metal box — called a monument box — level with the highway’s surface. These can be opened to view the pipes and brass markers for surveying purposes.

“We ran across a brass marker about eight inches into the pavement. We took pictures and collected it with the GPS, then removed it,” Morrisey said. “Then we kept digging, and at about 15 inches, we found the lead pipe. People will use this monument box as gospel for years to come.”

Searching for historic markers typically falls under the jurisdiction of county engineers’ offices, but the ODOT District 1 survey crew was able to collaborate on this effort because the markers were placed under the centerline of a federal highway and were needed for an ODOT project.

Finding Their Mark
Nick Buchanan, District 1
Moving a Mussel
Brent Kovacs, District 12

The Vrooman Road bridge construction project moved forward with the start of steel placement. The project will continue to work on the north side slope of the Grand River, including construction of a temporary crane platform pad. The Grand River is known as a habitat of the endangered snuff box mussel, so a survey and relocation needed to be performed.

“This is important because we need to be in compliance with the Endangered Species Act,” said Matt Raymond, with the Office of Environmental Services in Central Office. “We are required to conduct a biological assessment and receive a biological opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Since Snuff Box mussels were found here, they need to be relocated to minimize harm to the species.”

The Office of Environmental Services located and moved the mussels before the work on the north slope could continue. To relocate an endangered species, the team needed the mussels’ exact location to be catalogued. They then attached a radio tracking device and moved the mussels to a safe location upstream. Once the relocation process was completed, work continued on the bridge.

Pour it On
Mandi Dillon, District 7

Like many ODOT districts, District 7 is taking steps to increase the use of liquid deicers for the upcoming snow and ice season. This means retraining crews and making some major changes in equipment and storage.

This year’s theme for the district’s Operational Readiness events is “Improving Snow and Ice Efficiency.” Crews focused on proper liquid application, training on anti-icing and when to pretreat the roads. They were also reminded to use wetting systems at all times while applying salt. A big change this year will be the elimination of using beet-based and calcium chloride liquids in temperatures above 20 degrees. The district will instead favor less expensive, yet effective brine.

“We are conducting exercises for our liquid application equipment including trucks, semi-tankers, brine makers and truck fill stations,” says Highway Management Administrator Scott Kasler. “We are also bringing in the manufacturers of our brine makers to conduct training in the fall on proper system operation and maintenance.”

District 7 is increasing truck liquid capacity in nearly every garage, including building new tankers and increasing the size of existing tankers. The size of the single axle truck wetting tanks has been increased from 80 gallons to 180 gallons to encourage liquid use. District 7 has six 5,000 gallon semi-tankers in its fleet. Three of these semi-tankers will be used for flooding during storms in Montgomery County. The other three will be used for flooding in Miami, Shelby and Auglaize counties.

“District 7 has several years of experience with liquids in anti-icing applications,” said Kasler. “We have focused our liquid de-icing efforts on Montgomery County and have realized substantial salt savings along with excellent results for our customers. We intend to apply those same concepts in our other counties where we have opportunities.”

“We have focused our liquid de-icing efforts on Montgomery County and have realized substantial salt savings along with excellent results for our customers. We intend to apply those same concepts in our other counties where we have opportunities.”

HIGHWAY MANAGEMENT ADMINISTRATOR, SCOTT KASLER CONTRIBUTED TO THIS ARTICLE.
An Everyday Hero

Amanda McFarland, District 12

For Auto Technician Burke Engelhardt in District 12, working on cars has always seemed like a natural fit. But a career path that has taken him into the military, banking and teaching has not always given him time for that passion. Then an emergency situation reminded him of the importance of doing what you like in your life.

It was February 10, 2017, and Burke, then a Computer Applications teacher at John Adams High School, was headed home. Suddenly, he heard over his walkie-talkie that something was happening just outside the school. The same voice then said two chilling words over the device: “shots fired.”

Without thinking twice, Burke ran straight toward the incident. Someone had called 911, but the fire department next door was on another call. Burke, a former full-time soldier and a national guardsman, went into action.

“I saw two of my kids on the ground injured,” he said. “I used my military training and triaged the victims to determine who had the more serious injuries. One of the students had been shot in the ankle and the other in the thigh. The victim that had been shot in the thigh was bleeding pretty good.”

Burke applied direct pressure to help stop the bleeding of the thigh until EMS arrived. The bullet injured the femoral artery – the main arterial supply to the thigh and leg. Had Burke not rushed to aid the student, he would have lost more blood or even died.

In June 2019, Burke was presented the Ohio National Guard Commendation Medal for his act of heroism. Burke is still active in the Ohio National Guard, where he is a platoon sergeant who oversees range operations. The incident made Engelhardt appreciate life, and realize that though he has worn many hats in his lifetime, he feels most at home getting back to his roots: working on cars/trucks here at ODOT.