

Transportation NEWS

July 1997 Volume 22 Number 11

Killer twister devastates Jarrell

TxDOT crews respond quickly to help with aftermath of tornadoes

John Hurt
Austin District

Shortly after this photo was taken, this killer twister joined two others to form one of the largest tornadoes in Texas history. Jarrell will never forget the term F5.

It was the kind of day where you could hear yourself sweat. One person described the feeling of walking out of an air-conditioned building into the oppressive heat and humidity like "walking into a brick wall." Tuesday, May 27, 1997, had begun as an ordinary spring day in the Austin District. The National Weather Service

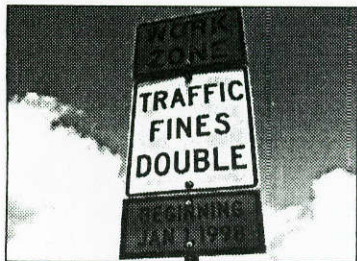
was predicting a 50 percent chance of afternoon thunderstorms, but other than that, there was nothing remarkable about the forecast. By early afternoon, ominous-looking clouds began boiling up in Bell County, just north of the Williamson County line. A cold front was sliding down from North Texas and hell was coming with it. Still, no one thought much about it since storms had been predicted earlier in the day. Shortly before 3 p.m., however, a tornado was spotted near

Salado and the situation quickly changed from what most observers thought was a normal spring storm into a living nightmare. In the small town of Jarrell, about 30 miles north of the Austin District headquarters, residents cast a wary eye at the approaching storm. This town had been badly damaged by a tornado in 1989, and residents here have a great deal of respect for the power of nature.

Please see Twister, page 12

Courtesy Scott Beckwith

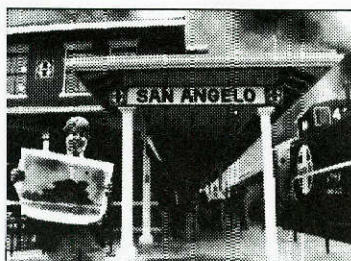
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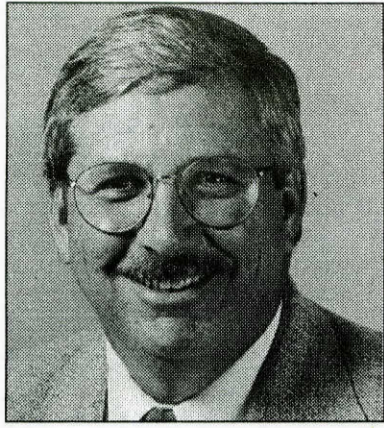


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Laredo District art contest winner Lupita Ramon's work greets travelers along Texas 359. **Page 11**

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Bill Burnett

Ask Bill

duct." TxDOT's Human Resources Manual states, "Employees shall not accept gifts, benefits or favors for themselves or others that could influence or reasonably appear to influence them in performing their duties." Gifts, benefits and favors include cash, loans, meals, lodging, transportation, tickets to entertainment and sporting events, hunting and fishing trips, etc.

Recently questions have been raised about the appropriateness of accepting meals and other favors offered to TxDOT employees. I would like to clarify the department's policy and state law in this regard.

The Government Code provides that state officers or employees may not "accept or solicit any gift, favor or service that might reasonably tend to influence the officer or employee in the discharge of official duties or that the officer or employee knows or should know is being offered with the intent to influence the officer's or employee's official conduct."

The department's policy does, however, grant approval for employees to visit dining or hospitality rooms if they are provided with no restriction on visitors, and are in conjunction with a conference, meeting, or other event sanctioned by the department. For example, attendance at a luncheon or buffet provided at a conference that is open to all participants and visitors to the conference is acceptable. Acceptance of meals at such an event that is limited to TxDOT employees is not acceptable.

The Texas Ethics Advisory Commission has offered the following advice, which I believe is an excellent standard for TxDOT employees: "State officers and employees should always ask themselves whether it is appropriate for a public servant to accept something from a person who wants, or may want, or may be seen to want, an official favor within the public servant's authority."★

Do you have a question for Bill? Send it to "Ask Bill" in care of the Public Information Office, Main Office or GroupWise it to MWHITTEN. Be sure to include your name and work phone number. Your name will be withheld at your request, but remember, Bill doesn't answer anonymous questions.

Department celebrates 80 years of service

Statewide events highlight eight decades of transportation efforts in Texas

The department celebrates its 80th anniversary this year. After eight decades, however, one day is not enough to recognize all of the department's accomplishments. So, the anniversary celebration will be a year-long event.

Districts statewide will hold open houses, where the public can learn about past contributions and become more familiar with present operations.

In October, transportation industry officials will gather for the annual Transportation Conference, which this year has the theme "80 Years of Service the TxDOT Way."

Transportation News is running an eight-part series written by former Travel and Information Division writer Hilton Hagan that provides a detailed history of the department. Also, the October issue of *Transportation News* will be a special collector's issue, reflecting on the agency's past, and how that will shape our future.

In recognition of the department's accomplishments and its employees efforts over the past 80 years, the 75th Texas Legislature passed the following resolution during the recent legislative session:

Senate Concurrent Resolution

WHEREAS, On April 4, 1917, the 35th Legislature passed an act to create the first Texas Highway Department; and

WHEREAS, Today the Texas Department of Transportation continues the agency's 80-year history of service to the citizens of Texas by building and maintaining the state's vast transportation network that is considered the best system in the nation; and the Texas Highway Department and the Public Transportation Commission merged into the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation in 1975, and in 1991 the Department of Aviation and the Motor Vehicle Commission joined the agency to form the Texas Department of Transportation; and

WHEREAS, The state's primary transportation agency has been responsible for construction and maintenance of a 41,000-mile system of farm-to-market roads that "got the farmer out of the mud" in the 1930s and 1940s; built the 3,200-mile interstate system in the 1950s and 1960s and today oversees a total of 77,000 miles of highways; provides for development of a public transportation system that served more than 200 million passengers in 1995; registered more than 14 million motor vehicles in 1996; and facilitates development of more than 300 aircraft landing facilities serving the state's growing general aviation industry; and

WHEREAS, The Texas Department of Transportation is the state sponsor of the 423-mile Gulf Intracoastal Waterway which carries an average of more than 75 million tons of cargo annually and oversees more than 1.3 million acres of state right-of-way; and

WHEREAS, The Texas Department of Transportation employs more than 14,000 dedicated men and women whose presence in every community throughout the state ensures personal service, an enhanced quality of life, and an integrated transportation system second to none; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the 75th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby recognize the exceptional accomplishments of all employees, past and present, of the Texas Highway Department and Department of Transportation; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the 75th Legislature of the State of Texas recognize the existence of the Texas Department of Transportation as the state's transportation agency and an integral part of Texas state government for the last eight decades; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be prepared for the department as an expression of the high regard of the Texas Legislature.★



"80 Years of Service the TxDOT Way"

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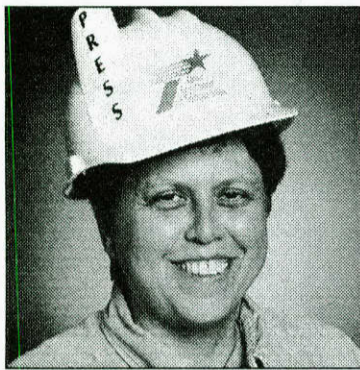
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Manns' can-do attitude shines at Help Desk

Supervisor uses open ears, synergy to assist RTS customers around the state



Eloise Lundgren

A Day in the Life

I still can't believe he's real.

"I feel lucky that I have usually been judged by my character and merits and not because of the color of my skin," he said quietly. "I have worked hard to develop and maintain a strong sense of purpose, and I owe a lot of that to my job.

"People who say to me, 'I wouldn't have your job,' don't know what they're missing," Manns said. "My job is like Christmas because I feel like I'm always opening a present. Every day is challenging, invigorating and full of new developments and new experiences."

For those of you who may have forgotten, RTS, or Registration and Title System, is the Vehicle, Titles and Registration Division's (VTR's) automated process of issuing vehicle registrations and titles. Where it previously took eight to 10 weeks for a title to reach a customer, it now takes five days or less from the date TxDOT receives the application.

The folks directly affected by this are the tax assessor-collectors in the 254 counties throughout the state who oversee vehicle registration and title transactions and collect fees. At the time of this interview, all but 12 counties had computer workstations that provide a direct electronic link between the tax offices and VTR, and only five aren't scheduled.

And being in the core of connecting counties to the department is a "wonderful charge" to Manns. But I'm getting ahead of myself. You're probably wondering what exactly Mann's help desk operation is.

With a program as large as RTS, users are going to have questions, so the help desk staff spends its time answering telephone inquiries, monitoring problems with the system, broadcasting user information, identifying gaps in system procedures, training users, testing and distributing new software and, of course, preparing reports. And I'm just hitting the highlights.

"The primary customer for the group is the county," Manns explained, "but for me as an individual, it's my employees.

"They make me look good, so I do my best to try to equip them with the tools and resources necessary for them to do their jobs, even if I'm not here," he said.

Manns first came to Austin in 1994 to be a part of the RTS training team, whose mission was to go out to the counties and assist with the implementation of RTS. Six months later, after working on the inception of the help desk, Manns applied for the supervisor's job and got it "partly because of my knowledge of the RTS system, a can-do attitude and a lot of registration and title knowledge," he said. "The position itself continues to evolve, but I feel like this job was made for me."

Manns currently supervises 13 employees but will have 17 by June 1.

"My major consideration is for my group," he said. "I have the utmost respect for them. When we first set up, I sat alongside them, taking phone calls, too.

"Now my role is more managerial," he continued wistfully, "and it's hard because I've been here from the ground up and I miss the one-on-one contact. You can always feel the synergy in here."

Manns just wants his group to be the best. "We have to because we're serving Texas," he said proudly. "My goal is for this section to be a world-class organization, so we're always using Continuous Improve-

"You're just too good to be true, Melanie,"

*Suellen O'Hara,
"Gone with the Wind," 1939*

Ever wanted to meet someone who was "too good to be true" but figured that would only be possible in fiction? Ain't necessarily so.

In fact, it's really easy. Just go on over to the RTS Help Desk at TxDOT's Bull Creek location and ask for a fellow named Johnny Manns, the personable, good-looking RTS Help Desk supervisor.

ment ideas in response to our customers' needs."

According to Manns, the Help Desk is like a nerve center. "Problems and questions start here. Then, if they aren't solved or answered, they're moved out to specialists."

Help Desk employees work three shifts: 7 a.m.-4 p.m., 8 a.m.-5 p.m. and 9 a.m.-6 p.m.

"You have to remember that El Paso is in a different time zone," Manns told me. "Also, some counties work weekends, so we're available by cell phones and beepers."

Why are they so available?

"I think there's one basic principle involved in giving good customer service," he said, "and that's the 'expectation of being heard.' People just want one thing — for someone to listen to their problems. So we try to make sure we are available to hear what people have to say."

That philosophy is further emphasized in the Help Desk mission statement: "We are dedicated to the principle that if our customer has a problem, we have a problem and we commit ourselves to continuous enhancement of our customer service skills — we realize and accept that our external and internal customers are equally important."

Born and raised in Longview, Manns graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University with a business degree. His first job after graduation was as a manager-trainee with Picadilly Cafeteria. After about a year-and-a-half, he went to work for Ryder Truck Rental as a rental representative for two years.

"I received some good training with those private companies," he said, "like 'Just in Time Management,' which really helped prepare me for my career with the department."

Finally, Manns came to work at TxDOT, first as a registration auditor for the regional office and then as a field auditor, both of which are field-based jobs involving extensive contact with county officials.

"My contacts with the counties have always been the favorite part of my jobs," he said. "I've met lots of wonderful people who have all played a part, one way or another, in increasing my devotion to and respect for the department."

According to Manns, his criteria for job fulfillment is simple: He must like his work and he must learn from it. "Even when I buffed floors at Sears to help put myself through college, I learned something," he said with a smile. "I make it a point to learn at least 10 new things every day."

In his spare time, Manns likes to read, jog and perform volunteer work. His favorite writers are John Grisham and Anne Rice (I love those vampire chronicles, too, Johnny).

The community service organization for which he volunteers requires participants to provide nonmonetary aid to clients, ranging from cooking meals to driving them to doctors' appointments to simply calling to check up on them.

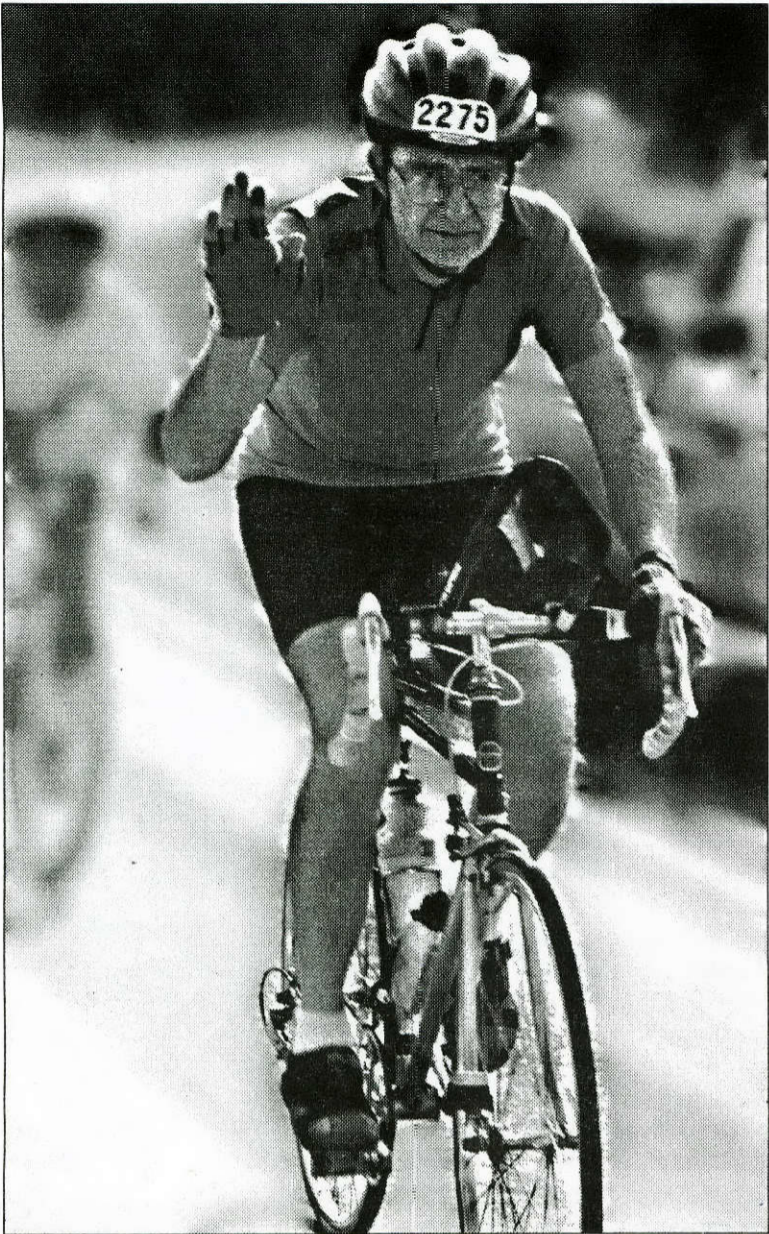
"I am now more aware of how blessed I really am to have good health and know wonderful people," Manns admitted.

And I'd be willing to bet all the people who have come in contact with Johnny Manns know just how blessed they are, too.★



Johnny Manns answers a question from Lois Meredith, one of the Help Desk's team members. Help Desk operators are the nerve center of the Registration and Title System Section's operations.

Donovan's two-wheeled trek fights MS



Ginnie Grayson
Motor Carrier Division

In today's fast-paced, stress-filled society, many of us try to find ways to squeeze some form of physical activity into our daily routine to help reduce stress. Because exercise is a key element to our mental health, as well as our physical health, it is important to make exercise not only bearable, but also enjoyable. In mid-April Terence Donovan, an auditor in the Motor Carrier Division's Compliance and Enforcement Branch, found a way to do both, and help others in the process.

Beginning in March, Donovan began a strenuous regimen consisting of almost daily bicycle rides (weather-permitting) of anywhere from 25 miles to 50 miles, plus a balanced diet of proteins and carbohydrates to fuel his body. Why did he do this? To prepare for a 170-mile ride from Houston to Austin benefiting the National Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society. By the time the ride rolled around, Donovan had logged more than 492 training miles.

This ride raises money for the MS Society; Donovan personally raised \$175. These rides take place across the country, but just like the Lone Star state, Texas is the biggest ride with just less than 7,000 participants. On April 19, Donovan, along with thousands of other riders, left Houston at 7 a.m. to begin a two-day journey through the winding back roads along Farm-to-Market Road 159, Texas 71 and FM 969 from Houston to Austin. The large group of riders was broken down into several smaller

groups of 500 riders each.

After riding 50 miles in two hours and 50 minutes, a personal best for Donovan, he and the friend with whom he was riding arrived in Bellville for lunch and a much needed 40-minute break. From Bellville the riders continued to La Grange, logging another 47 miles. There they met up with the other riders and stopped to spend the night in large circus tents provided by some 30-plus corporate sponsors. After a fried chicken dinner, everyone found the tents assigned to them and rested their weary bodies.

At 7 a.m. the following day the riders set off on the next leg of their trek, La Grange to Bastrop. Three hours and 40.6 miles later, the group of riders arrived at Bastrop State Park and took a 40 minute rest before finishing the grueling ride to Austin.

The last portion of the trip was the shortest, 32.4 miles, and was also the most rewarding.

"This was the easiest century ride (a ride consisting of 100 miles or more) I have ridden," Donovan said. "I couldn't have asked for better conditions. With the weather being cool and overcast, the wind was never a factor, which allowed us to pedal much longer and faster, up to 20 miles an hour from Houston to Bellville."

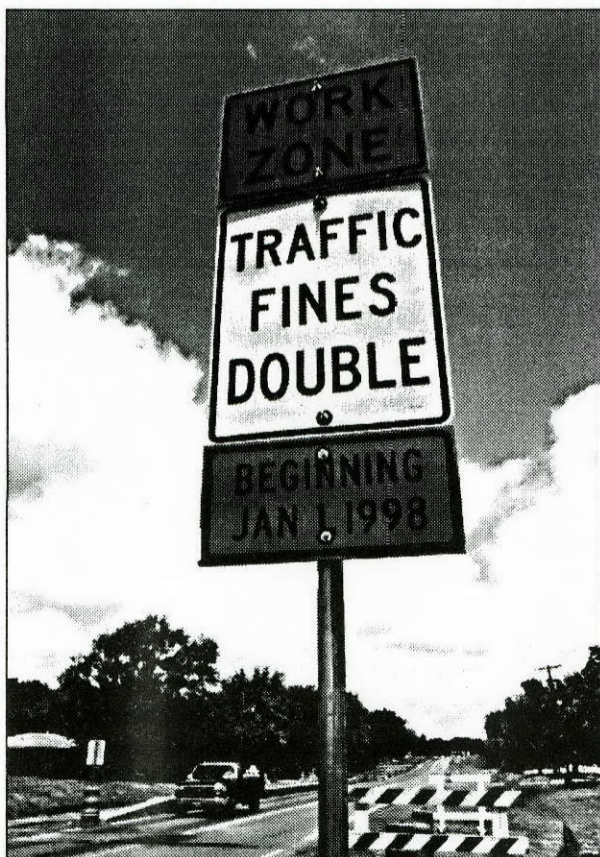
The dedicated riders completed a monumental task that most of us would only think about doing, and did it in only 10 hours and 40 minutes. Along the way, they also managed to offer a helping hand to others.★

This story originally appeared in Motor Carrier Dispatch, the Motor Carrier Division's newsletter.

Greg Quinn, ENW

Terence Donovan, a MCD auditor, rode 170 miles from Houston to Austin to help raise funds for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. The trip took about 11 hours.

Fines doubled for ignoring work zone signs



Griff Smith, TRV

Signs, like this one in Athens, are being installed to warn motorists of increased fines for disregarding construction laws.

Phyllis Chandler
Public Information Office

Motorists who blatantly disregard construction laws will have to ante up more money for their transgressions.

Under House Bill 981, which passed this last legislative session, fines will double for speeding in construction zones or ignoring warning signs. That means that motorists who don't obey posted construction warning signs could pay as much as \$400 for the offense. And for highway construction workers, the news couldn't have come at a better time, said TxDOT officials.

"Summer is probably our busiest time since a lot of our roadway construction and maintenance is done in the warmer, drier months. That's also the time more Texans are on the roadways traveling. Each year between May and August, on-the-job accidents and injuries at TxDOT increase significantly. HB 981 is just one more tool we can use to better our workers' chances of being safe on the roadway," said Bill Burnett, TxDOT executive director. Burnett and Rep. Clyde Alexander were on hand in Athens June 17 for the first unveiling in the state of a new work zone warning sign that will be posted in construction work zones. Alexander, who is chairman of the House

Transportation Committee, authored the legislation.

Instead of the usual "Observe Warning Signs" that motorists typically see in construction zones, the new 3-foot-by-6-foot "Traffic Fines Double" sign will greet drivers as they enter work zones. The signs, which bear the typical construction orange and black, are strikingly different from most construction signs. According to Alexander, they carry more punch.

"Call it friendly caution from the state to speeders: you've been warned. The next time you speed in a construction zone or ignore a construction warning, it's going to cost you," said Alexander.

Although the signs were unveiled in June, enforcement won't begin until January 1998, the effective date of the legislation. Burnett said posting the signs early is a simple reminder to the public of the importance of the law.

In 1995, there were 9,337 work-zone accidents in Texas, claiming the lives of 112 Texans. More than 19 percent of those accidents were caused by drivers either speeding or driving too fast for conditions.

"Everyday our workers put their lives on the line to make Texas roads better, to help Texans get to their destinations. All we want in return is to work in a safe environment. We don't think that's asking too much," Burnett said.★

On-the-job safety department's top priority

In My Opinion



Eddie Sanchez, P.E.
El Paso District Engineer

Many of the jobs we do in the department are inherently dangerous and place the health and lives of the employees at risk. Safety should be our first thought as we begin our day and before each and every activity that we participate in.

I place safety as my number one issue for the district. Since our employees are our most important asset, it is only appropriate that we provide you with the best possible equipment and training available. However, most of the responsibility for a safe working environment falls on the shoulders of the employees. All the training in the world will not prevent an accident from happening if an employee does not use the training information properly or places the proper importance on safety.

The likelihood of vehicle accidents and personal injuries can be reduced if each of us is committed to a safe workplace. This

means believing that accidents and injuries can be prevented and that it is not just our bad luck that causes us to be involved in an accident.

What does lead to accidents and injuries are such things as:

- Failure to consider the safety aspect of each and every job before we begin;
- Taking a short cut in the job procedures;
- Ignoring safety practices and policies;

- Getting in too much of a hurry to start or finish the job;
- Not following the advice of fellow employees or supervisors;

and

- Improper or non-use of personal protective equipment.

In the El Paso District, we have an average of two personal injuries and two vehicle accidents per month this fiscal year. Although there have been no deaths, loss of life or life-threatening injuries, several of the incidents had that potential. This is unacceptable. I am asking each and everyone of you to reevaluate your priorities at work and make safety the top priority. We can improve our safety record by:

- Knowing and using the safe procedures for doing a job;
- Obtaining assistance when appropriate;
- Bringing unsafe situations to the attention of fellow employees and your supervisor;
- Using the proper personal protective equipment; and
- Actively participating in your section safety program.

As we enter the summer season, we have to be extra careful because of the increase in speed and traffic that this season brings. Also, for those of you who work out in the field, be sure to take the appropriate precautions to prevent heat exhaustion. Take plenty of water and sun screen to the job site to protect you from the sun. Your well-being and safety are of utmost importance to me.

Keep up the good work and remember to make safety your top priority.★

In My Opinion is an occasional feature in which Transportation News reprints columns by Management Team members. Sanchez's column originally appeared in The Dotted Line, the El Paso District's newsletter.

CRP volunteers help beautify birding site

Becky Kureska
Corpus Christi District

The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail resulted from a partnership between TxDOT and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) through the Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program. The Central Texas Coast section of the trail was the first segment constructed and features 95 birding sites, seven of which are enhanced with boardwalks, kiosks, observation platforms and/or landscaping.

Aransas Woods, located south of Rockport on the Texas 35 Relief Route, is one of these sites. It was named and signed as part of the trail, but not funded for improvements. A diverse group of volunteers has changed that.

The group recently spent a Saturday building a ramp and observation deck. The project resulted from a partnership among TxDOT, TPWD, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Aransas Bird and Nature Club. Volunteers from each organization brought saws, hammers and labor and completed the project in just one day.

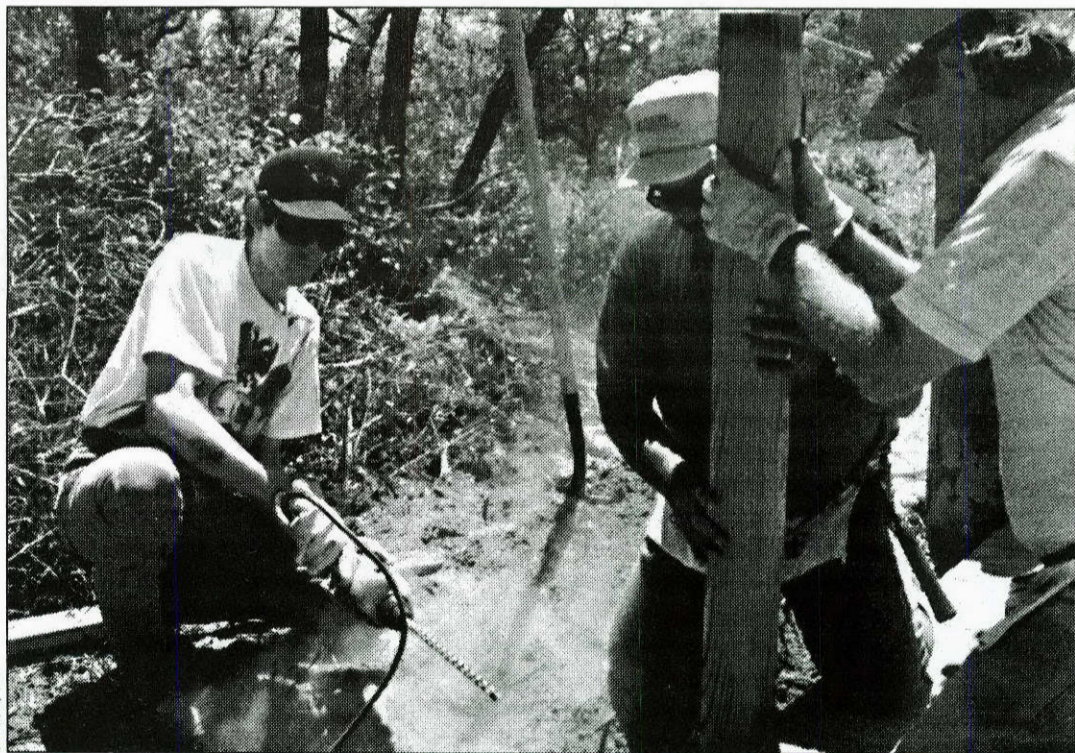
TPWD contracted the design of the facilities and arranged for the purchase of materials through a private donation. The site, which is on TxDOT's right of way, was donated by the family of an ardent bird-watcher who frequented the Rockport-Fulton area during his lifetime. The site is a

complex of grassland, oak motte and shallow-water wetland. A solar-powered pump, drilling of a well and fencing at the site are provided through a Challenge Cost-Share Agreement between TxDOT and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Aransas Bird and Nature Club will act as stewards for the site through an arrangement with TxDOT.

Corpus Christi District employees who devoted their Saturday to the project included Rockport Maintenance Supervisor Chano Falcon, David Potter, Victor Vourcos, Cliff Bost, and John Evers and his son Scott.

Aransas Woods is unique in the opportunity it provides for birders. It provides a visible example of benefits possible when agencies and citizens utilize resources, imagination and hard work for a common goal.

The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail (see



Vic Vourcos, Chano Falcon and John Evers of the Corpus Christi District volunteer their services at the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail location known as Aransas Woods south of Rockport.

Transportation News, October 1995) winds its way along the Texas coast, where birders can see more than 75 percent of the state's 600 bird species. It is comprised of 12 separate loops, with each encompassing an array of associated sites and birds. The Enhancement Program is funded through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991.★

Triathlon tests employees endurance, mettle

Meredith Whitten
Public Information Office

While many of their TxDOT co-workers spent Sunday, June 8 relaxing and staying out of the sweltering Texas sun, a group of Austin-area employees spent the morning doing something a bit more strenuous. Well, that's if you consider a 3.1-mile run, a 12-mile bike ride and a half-mile swim in Lake Travis strenuous.

The employees participated in the Danskin Triathlon at Pace Bend Park just west of Austin.

For some, it was the culmination of months of rigorous training; for others, it represented accomplishing a personal goal.

Kammy Strub, a transportation planner in the Transportation Planning and Programming Division, has been participating in triathlons for two seasons. She said competing in triathlons gives her a boost. "It makes you feel good about yourself. After you've finished you think, 'I can do anything,'" she said.

Strub regularly swims, bikes and runs, and she also has a weight program. Strub finished 22nd out of 213 women in her age group. She placed 83rd overall.

While some women, including Strub, competed in the entire triathlon, others raced as a relay team. Holly Palmer, Mayela Sosa and Amada Cortez of the Austin District participated as a team, finishing with a time of 1:45:49.

The first woman, in the professional category, crossed the finish line at just over one hour.

Palmer said the timing was right to compete in her first triathlon. "It was just something I was ready for. Jenny Peterman brought it up one day, and it sounded like a lot of fun, so I said, 'Why not?'" Palmer said.

Palmer, a former high school swimmer, had never raced more than 500 meters, but she said the 750-meter swimming leg was not a problem. "You have enough adrenaline to get you through it," she said.

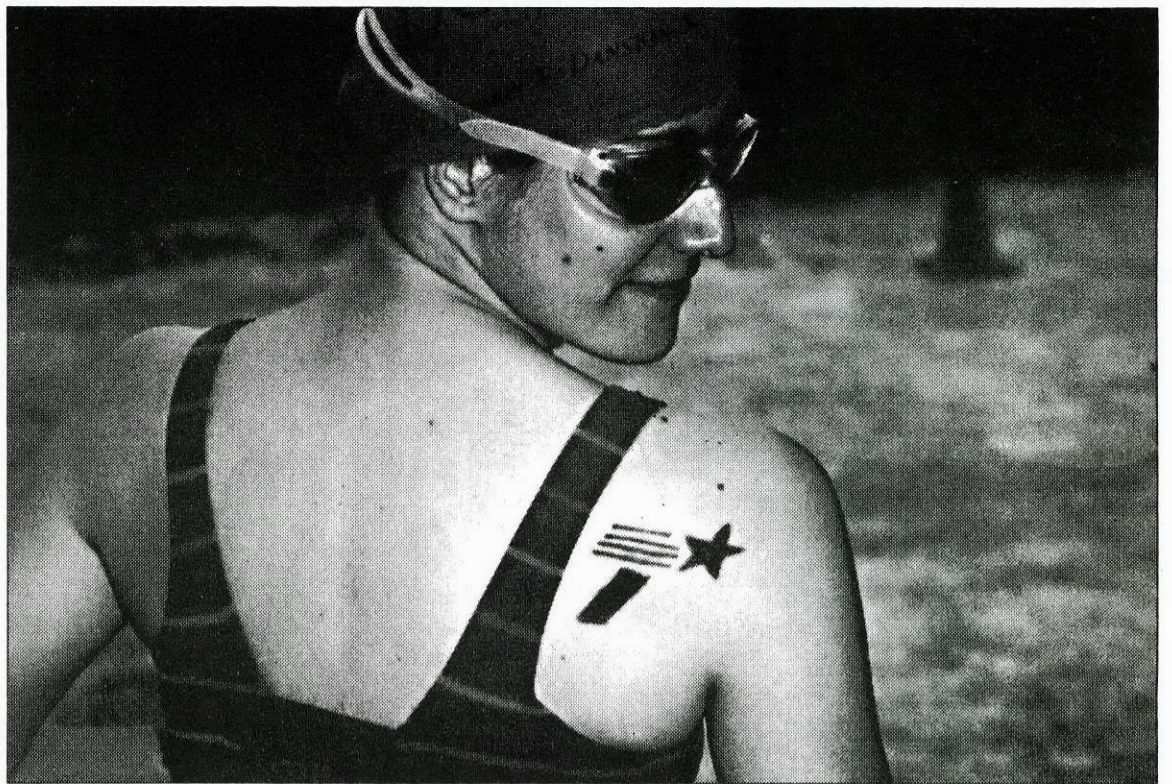
With the swimming leg coming first, the competitors were packed close together. "I didn't know swimming could be a full-contact sport," Palmer said.

Strub said of the three events, the 0.75 kilometer swim was her least favorite.

"It's kind of overwhelming," she said. "You're out there getting kicked and clawed."

But, by the time the women reached the second leg — the 20-kilometer bike ride — the participants had found their own pace, and there was more room to maneuver.

Despite the fact that it was an athletic competition, the Danskin triathlon series builds comradery among participants, who



Holly Palmer, above, and several other Austin-area TxDOT employees participated in the Danskin Triathlon June 8. Palmer and the other members of her relay team, Mayela Sosa and Amada Cortez, sported the department's logo during their legs of the competition.

vary greatly in their skill level. Crowds lined the sidelines until the very last woman crossed the finish line. When someone started to struggle, there was always someone to help them, and the crowd shouted cheers of encouragement.

"You saw everything from anguish to sheer joy as they crossed the line," Palmer said, "because it meant something different to everyone."

Palmer enjoyed her first triathlon experience so much that she's already planning on competing in the entire race next year.

"It seems like it takes nothing to break the habit of exercising, but leading a healthy lifestyle is something everyone should incorporate into their life," she said.

Palmer added that seeing the diverse group of women who competed encouraged her.

"There was every size and shape of woman out there," she said. "I thought you had to be this Olympic-type person, but that's not realistic. The women weren't out there for a fashion show, they were out there to be healthy."

The triathlon in Austin was part of the national series in six cities throughout the country. More than 1,000 women from across the country participated.

Danskin donates the proceeds from the race to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. Many of the race participants were breast cancer survivors or dedicated their race to victims of the disease.

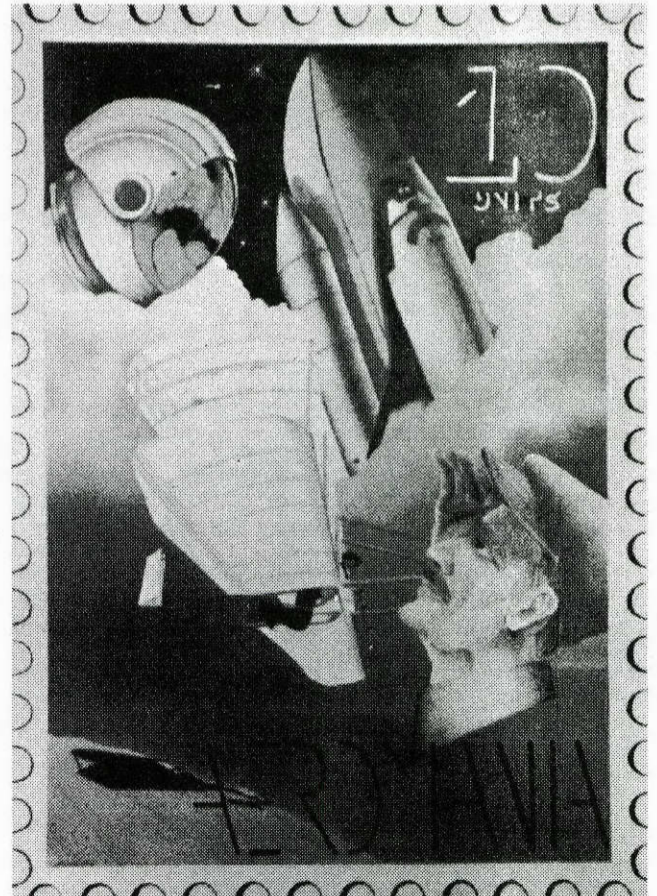
"When I found out that it

benefited breast cancer research, I really wanted to participate," Palmer said.

Other TxDOT employees who competed included Debra Jenne, Janet Green, Mary Secrest, Barbara Linzey, Jenny Peterman, Katherine Holtz, and Michelle Conkle.

Strub and Palmer both stressed the importance of exercising and encouraged other women to participate, no matter what their fitness level.

"The first year you can do a relay, or just one event," Strub said. "The point is to get out there and find out what it's all about. Just start."★



UPDATE

Since the story appeared in the June '97 *T-News*, Catherine Choi, 17, a student at Clearbrook High School in Friendswood, placed first in the International Aviation Art Contest. The judging took place June 4-6 in Switzerland. Choi will receive a gold medal for her aviation stamp artwork, above.

Historic San Angelo train depot gets facelift

Linda Ribble
Public Information Office

The preservation of the Historic Orient-Santa Fe Railroad depot is finally complete, a tribute to the citizens of San Angelo and Texas. An important West Texas transportation hub built in 1910, the abandoned depot was slated to be torn down in the 1980s when the Santa Fe Railroad donated the building to San Angelo because of the public outcry aroused.

The community's renovation efforts began slowly with ice cream socials and other activities to raise funds. It quickly became apparent that their attempts would not be enough to accomplish the extensive restoration planned. City leaders and the Historic Orient-Santa Fe Depot Inc. board sought government-aid programs to help accomplish the restoration. The 21 volunteer board members were charged with oversight of the renovation and utilization of the building.

Money from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) was used to rehabilitate two-thirds of the depot's first floor, now home to San Angelo's public transit system offices and a passenger terminal. Exterior and interior repair work included painting, installing a sprinkler system, roofing, landscaping and complying with the American Disability Act.

TxDOT Deputy Director of Public Transportation Margot Massey said, "FTA provides funds for the operation of San Angelo's bus system. These dollars can be used for capital projects, such as the depot rehabilitation, or operating expenses associated with local bus services. The federal share in this case was 80 percent of the total cost.

"TxDOT also provided matching funds covering approximately 13 percent of the costs with the remaining 7 percent paid for by local resources."

The second phase of the depot's restoration began in late 1995, with the completion of the first floor and the second floor funded through the Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program. Exterior and interior repairs included refurbishing the floors, replacing fixtures and electrical work.

A federal-local program, the enhancement program called for 20 percent of a selected project's cost to be supplied by local governments and 80 percent of costs to be supplied through the Federal Highway Administration. Authorized by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Act of 1991, the program is administered by FHWA and TxDOT. No state funds are allocated for the program.

Funding for enhancement projects was awarded by the Texas

Transportation Commission in April and November 1994 and August 1996. San Angelo city leaders applied for funding for the April 1994 call.

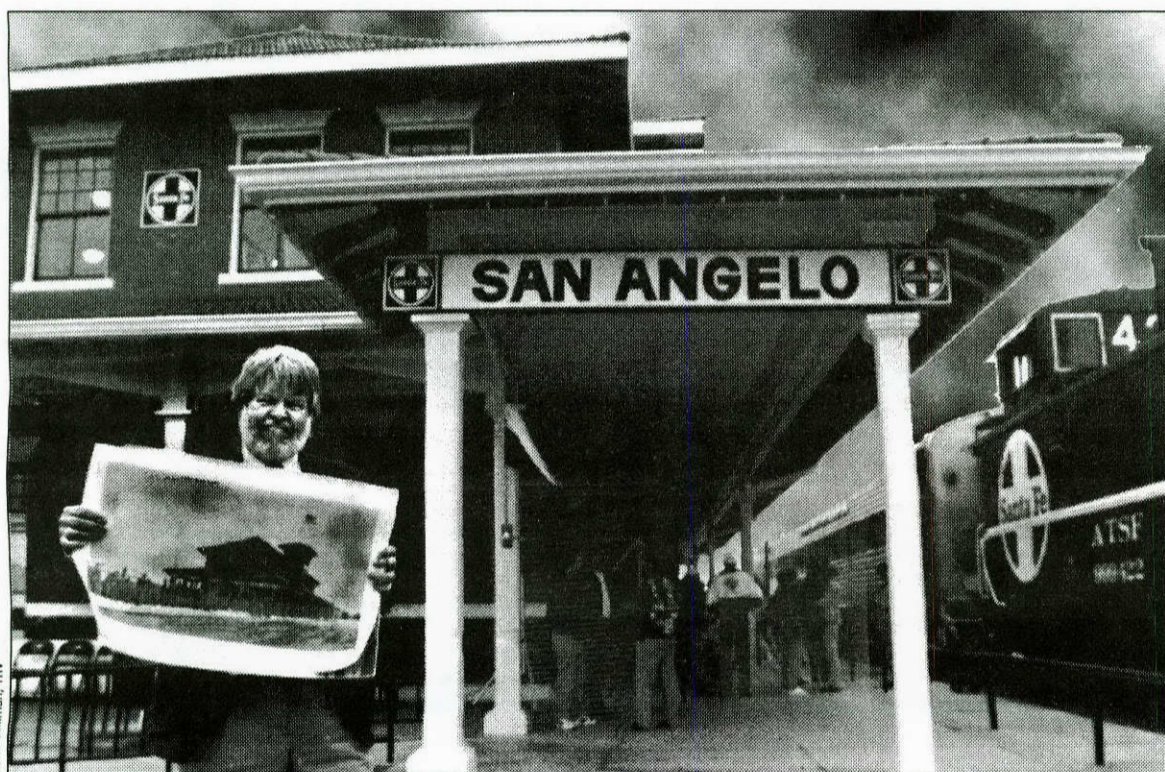
Out of 35 depots selected for the enhancement program funds, the Historic Orient-Santa Fe Railroad depot is one of only five depots completed so far. Of the completed depots, the San Angelo project has been the largest in scope, using \$864,020 in federal funds. The next largest project completed, the Edinburg Southern Pacific Depot Restoration, was awarded \$400,000 to acquire and restore a depot, left vacant for 10 years and less dilapidated, for use as a visitor center.

John D. Reyes, transit systems director and senior transportation planner for San Angelo, said, "Before the renovation, the depot wasn't being used for anything. In 1996, 124,000 passengers used the five fixed public transit routes and 38,800 passengers used the special transit system services. The second floor has office space, a public conference room and several smaller meeting rooms."

Reyes estimates that 134,000 passengers will use fixed-route services and over 28,000 persons with disabilities will use the special transit system in 1997.

Although the number of abandoned depots still standing in Texas is unknown, railroad buffs estimate the highest number of depots in existence at one time was 15,000 with about one-fourth

remaining. A variety of uses have been found for abandoned depots, most commonly as residences or businesses. The grand opening celebration, dubbed Railfest '97, was held April 26-27 and featured a ribbon-cutting ceremony, a color guard from Fort Concho National Historic Landmark and a model train show at the San Angelo Convention Center. Depot events included tours of the depot and its



Henry Schmidt, a renovation architect, holds a picture of the Historic Orient-Santa Fe Railroad Depot. The depot, one of five completed statewide, underwent extensive renovations to restore the grandeur of its past. Part of the renovation was funded by the State Transportation Enhancement Program.

new railroad museum, along with displays of railroad equipment and student art work. Several TxDOT employees attended.

During festivities, musical entertainment was provided by the Lake View Jazz Ensemble, the Central High School Jazz Band, Texas Pride (a barbershop quartet), the Angelo State University's Jazz Ensemble, Roy Barnett and Edison Junior High School's Los Musicos Brillantes.

Enhancement Coordinator Mira Garcia said, "Pending legislative action in Congress of surface transportation bills will determine the reauthorization of the program." For further information, contact Enhancement Program Director Doug Vollette at (512) 416-2783.★



Interstate work defines era

Dingwall set high standards as department blossomed

engineering career building levees. Millions of yards of fill were placed to bring the grade level above flood stage in the Trinity bottoms.

The first car rolled down the turnpike on Sept. 5, 1957, and the turnpike finished its first week in the black. In fact, it never showed red ink during 20 years of operation as a toll road. Less than a year later, the turnpike was hailed as the safest highway in the nation. In the first 20 years of operation, the fatality rate was only 1.9 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled.

The authority offered Dingwall the permanent job of engineer-manager. Dingwall turned it down. "I always enjoyed the building of a project — and I liked big projects. I didn't see much challenge in keeping the grass mowed," Dingwall said.

He returned to the highway department in 1958 as assistant state highway engineer. It was hard to say who was the most frugal, Greer or Dingwall. Dingwall drove a rusty old 1951 Chevrolet to work daily until 1968 when he took over the top job. In those days, the state highway engineer rated a state car of his own.

He and his wife, Ruth, often did the grocery shopping together. Shoppers in their West Austin neighborhood might see the Dingwalls comparing prices. Often, Dingwall would settle the matter by whipping out a pocket-sized slide rule and finding which item provided the most for the money.

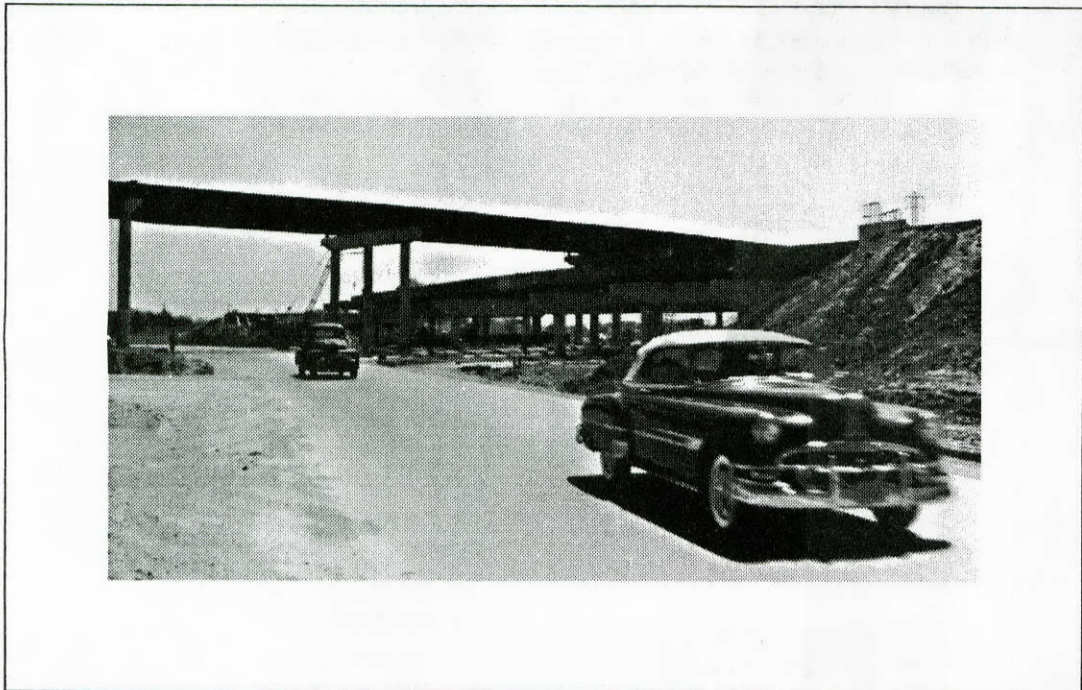
Dingwall loved to tell stories. Sometimes, he enjoyed his own stories so much he broke up in laughter before he got to the punch line. Often the stories were on himself. After he retired in 1973, he and Ruth moved back to Comanche where they had been high school sweethearts. They bought a house on the edge of town with several hundred feet of highway frontage.

"The highway department wasn't keeping the ditch trimmed as well as I liked," Dingwall said, "so I would get out on the riding mower and cut it to suit me."

Dingwall had the common touch. He seemed to relate to the problems of the working stiff. Once at a meeting, Dingwall asked a young engineer from the Austin District, Roland Gamble, to stand up. Gamble at the time was on a project in West Austin that was an early part of MoPac Expressway. "I just wanted you to see the man who has the hardest job in the highway department. The state highway engineer drives through his project twice a day," Dingwall said.

Dingwall was in office when women got to wear pants. He OK'd the historic memo, a request from the Main Office Employees Advisory Committee, in 1970.

Before then, there was an unwritten dress code that women who worked for the department should dress in, well, dresses.



Interstate construction got off to a frenzied start, but changing times and attitudes caused delays. Motorists became familiar with constant construction statewide, as this April 1955 photo of a three-level grade separation in Waco shows.

As his last assignment, Travel and Information Division staffer Hilton Hagan wrote a history of the department. In celebration of the department's 80th anniversary this year, Transportation News is running excerpts from that work. This is the fourth chapter.

Hilton Hagan

Travel and Information Division

Highway people wondered what life would be like without Greer. They needn't have bothered. The new state highway engineer, James Colin Dingwall, was handpicked by the master himself.

Dingwall was different, though. He was neither an Aggie nor a graduate of The University of Texas. He attended college at Southern Methodist University, but did not graduate. On his behalf, the wording of the law was amended to specify only that the state highway engineer must be a registered professional engineer, which Dingwall was.

Graduate or not, he was a superb engineer. The Texas Turnpike Authority sought out Dingwall in 1954 to build the Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike. The two warring cities got together long enough to agree they could not wait years for the highway department to provide a high-speed traffic artery between them. In 1953, drivers traveling between the two downtowns encountered 45 traffic signals in 32 miles on U.S. 80, the major highway in the corridor.

Many had reservations about whether the toll road would ever pay for itself (it did, on schedule, too). The \$58.5 million turnpike was a money-maker from the beginning.

Dingwall was undismayed at the prospect of building the turnpike. "I never had seen a controlled-access project until I was transferred to the Gulf Freeway job (in Houston). But then I had never built an airfield until the Corps of Engineers put me to doing that in the war. Anyway," said Ding, "a toll road is just a freeway with a fence around it."

"fired" him for the umpteenth time, Dingwall got a box and started cleaning out his desk, carefully packing all his personal belongings.

"What are you doing now?" Van London demanded.

"Cleaning out my desk. You fired me," Dingwall replied.

"Get back to work," snapped Van London.

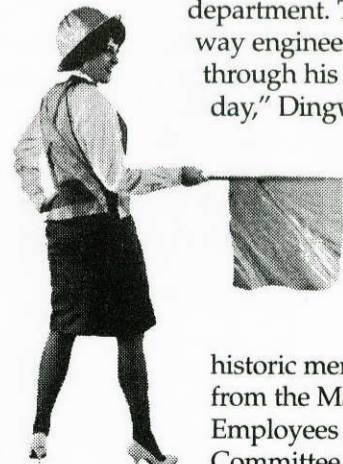
Dingwall joined the Army Corps of Engineers in World War II. He spent the war building airfields at Laredo and in Guatemala, Brazil and the Azores. After the war, Van London was named engineer-manager of the Houston urban expressway project — ranking on a par with a district engineer, but charged specifically with developing superhighways in the urban area. He put ex-Maj. Dingwall in charge of the Gulf Freeway job. By the time the Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike people approached him, he was well-seasoned in expressway design of the day.

Members of the highway commission were ex-officio members of the turnpike authority board. As it had happened to Greer 14 years earlier, Dingwall was minding his own business in the road design division when the phone rang. It was Commission Chairman E. H. Thornton. Ding was surprised to hear him say: "We want you to head up the turnpike organization."

The turnpike was built and in operation in less than three years, including design, right-of-way acquisition and construction, an astoundingly short time for such a major project. It was a marvelous piece of engineering management.

The project was split into sections with several consultant design firms working simultaneously. At one time, at least 20 major contractors were working. In addition to roadways and structures needed for a full 32-mile freeway, the route involved the relocation of part of the channel of the Trinity River, the same river where Ding began his

Courtesy TRV



Until 1970, women, like this one modeling the "new flagman vest," had to wear dresses to work.

There were a few specific exceptions in the field. A "lady" could wear slacks, say, if she worked in accounting and had to climb atop a pile of aggregate to measure it for inventory. Any other time, in the office, a dress was expected.

The Magna Carte for women's wearing apparel was in the form of a memo to Dingwall from the Employees Advisory Committee dated Oct. 22, 1970:

"The Employees Advisory Committee has received numerous requests from women employees asking that they be permitted to wear tailored pants suits to work.

Dingwall approved it with a notation: "Concur in the committee's recommendation." Thus, the Age of Aquarius dawned, feebly, on the highway department. But it was a change. And not many things had changed for women employees of the highway department in the previous 55 years.

For the most part, women were in clerical roles in the department up to the early 1970s. The few who did have professional credentials worked their whole careers for entry level pay, often two or three grade levels below males with similar education and experience.

Most of the time, women automatically were passed over for management. And the few women who did make it to the supervisory ranks, unless it was supervising a few other women, were the exceptions, not the rules.

Bessie Bergstrom was listed on the roster of top administrative personnel as "chief clerk" in charge of motor vehicle registrations as early as 1929. In 1945, the registration division was merged into a new Motor Vehicle Division and Bergstrom's name dropped off the roster of the executive staff. No other woman would head a major unit of the department until Dian Neill became head of the Motor Vehicle Division in 1986. Bergstrom stayed on with the department, in the finance division, and became one of a handful of employees to achieve 50 years service.

During World War II, women moved into engineering-related jobs temporarily while the men were off fighting the war. They were expected to step aside when the male veterans returned. Most of them did.

Many women working for the department can recall when man and wife could not both work for the department. It wasn't that long ago, if romance blossomed in the office and the couple decided to wed, it was most often the woman who quit and went looking for other work. After all, his job probably paid more.

Tommie Pinkard, former editor of *Texas Highways*, was hired as a journalist about a year before two men were hired as information specialists, two full pay grades higher. All three of them did about the same kind of work. Not that this sort of thing was peculiar to the highway department. Lots of employers did it, public and private sector.

When Pinkard began in 1964, women in the Main Office were not permitted to drive state cars. In some districts, women were not even allowed to ride in state cars. Who knows what scandal it might create if someone saw a man riding with a woman in a state vehicle in the middle of a working day.

Tom Taylor, director of the Travel and

Information Division, assigned the task of writing an article on the sights and sounds of Houston for the AASHO national meeting to Pinkard. But how to get to Houston?

Taylor called John Nations, head of the Equipment and Procurement Division. Why couldn't Pinkard check out a state car for the trip to Houston? Was it only because she was a woman? Not exactly, Nations explained. It had to do with the state's accident liability. When men went to work for the department, they had to have a physical as a prerequisite to operating state equipment.

"So if Tommie had a physical, she could drive a state car?" Taylor asked.

"Guess so," Nations replied.

"Tommie, go get a physical," Taylor ordered.

Tommie did, and drove off triumphantly to Houston — and the annals of department folklore — in a snappy, plain black, bottom-of-the-line Plymouth, sans air conditioner or radio.

Word of this historic breakthrough got around, and soon other women in other Main Office divisions got themselves qualified to drive state cars. Sure enough, at least one person called in to complain about "some blonde hussy" driving a state car around town. The "hussy" turned out to be a female engineer on a bona fide trip from the Main Office to Camp Hubbard. The ban on women drivers in department cars went out without further ado.

The department hit a high-water mark while Dingwall was boss, with 20,500 employees on the payroll in 1972, at the height of the push to get the Interstate highway system finished. Originally scheduled to be completed by 1972, the Interstate was delayed during the Vietnam War when the federal government manipulated releases of funds from the Federal Highway Trust Fund.

The money was in the trust fund, proceeds from 4 cents federal tax on motor fuel, plus excises on other items related to the operation of motor vehicles. Federal officials attempted to regulate the economy somewhat by holding back authorization to the states to spend the money.

There were cycles of feast and famine as far as federal funding went during the late 1960s and 1970s. The government was battling inflation linked to wartime spending. The holdbacks were aimed at helping to cool an overheated economy. Whether they achieved that purpose or not, they put the Interstate highway system once and for all behind schedule.

It wasn't just uncertain funding that derailed the Interstate schedule. There also was red tape. Part of the fault lay with the changing times. Consumerism, civil rights, the women's movement, the beginnings of an awareness of what we were doing to our environment and a new emphasis on involving the public all resulted in more regulation, more scrutiny. This scrutiny was translated by the bureaucracy into a bewildering jungle of paperwork.

By September 1971, the average lead time necessary to bring a highway project from conception to the award of a construction contract was six years and five months. That was up — way up — from 34 months in

1956, the year the real work on the Interstate began, and 44 months in 1961.

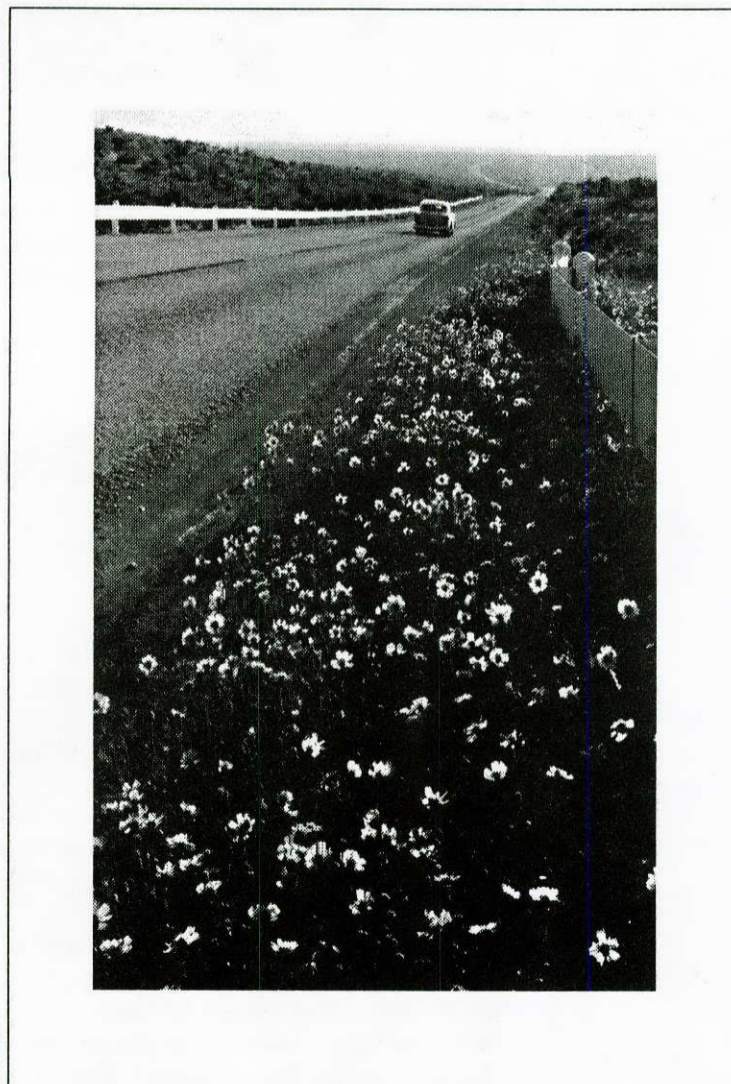
This, of course, did not set well with Dingwall. Remember, he built the Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike in less than three years. To dramatize what was happening, Dingwall, Marcus Yancey, Bob Lewis and several staffers of Lewis' Highway Decision Division charted all the things that could go right — or wrong — in the almost seven years it took to get a project going.

The result was a 12-foot-long "flow chart," although "flow" was much too active a verb to describe the snaillike movement of paperwork through the federal bureaucracy. By 1971, Dingwall, then president of AASHO, had shared the chart with his fellow chief administrative officers. In state after state, the huge flow chart was featured in newspaper photos.

In June 1971, Dingwall was summoned to Washington with two other Western Association of State Highway Officials (WASHO) representatives to testify before a congressional committee on the red-tape issue. A New Hampshire congressman told Dingwall that Texas was the cause of the hearings.

The congressman had gotten his hands on a copy of the flow chart and took it to the Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight. After the hearings, the subcommittee took the FHWA to task for imposing tighter restrictions than those called for in the statutes.

Please see Dingwall, page 10



Roadside beautification, such as these wildflowers along U.S. 90 between Dryden and Sanderson, has always been important to the department.

Dingwall

Continued from page 9

Dingwall, meanwhile, warned the folks in the highway department that they, too, needed to guard against creating their own streamers of red tape, dragging things needlessly out into the murky future. It was a good fight, although only partially successful.

Still, things did get done. Gaps in the Interstate system in Texas were closing. Big jobs, such as the Loop 410 bridge over the Houston Ship Channel, were completed. It was the largest bridge of its kind ever built in Texas with its 500-foot horizontal span, and 150-foot vertical clearance to carry two lanes of freeway traffic over the channel. Another big bridge linked South Padre Island to the mainland, the Queen Isabela Causeway, longest in Texas. The San Antonio North Freeway, after two decades of controversy was becoming a reality. Other cities were expanding with the impetus of the freeway and the automobile.

Highway officials — like most other pub-

lic agency heads — were struggling to find a realistic and practical approach to the new awareness the population had gained about the world around them. While he was president of AASHO, Dingwall summed up his feelings about the growing concerns of American society in the 1970s:

"What have we really done to the quality of life — we engineers — we builders? One hundred and fifty years ago the life expectancy of a male in the United States was 38 years. Today it is almost 70 years. Who is dying from all this pollution? The man who was burned out before he was 40 worked a 72-hour week in a job, probably by necessity, within walking distance of his home. His opportunity was limited by his ability to get around. The average earnings were \$300 — a year.

"Women had it even worse. Their work week was more like 98 hours and the quality of their lives was not much more than bare subsistence. In their short lifetimes, men and women 150 years ago probably never heard the sound of an orchestra, owned a book or traveled more than 20 miles from where they were born.

"Highways helped change all of this. The highway builders have designed and built the greatest system of transportation facilities the world has ever known. Highways have enabled the average American to increase his productivity, widen his range to seek job opportunities as well as those for education, recreation, cultural enrichment and the enjoyment of the beauty of the great outdoors."

One of the things that took place while Dingwall was head of the department was the beginning of the Lady Bird Johnson Awards. In 1970, the former first lady presented

the first award, to Joe H. Derrick Jr. of

Stephenville.

"With all the news today of doom and gloom, I want to get my small word in that there are some good things going — flowers, parks and landscaping. I want to thank the highway department for its interest in esthetics that makes driving along our highways a pleasure," Johnson said.

Dingwall could look with pride on the part he played in making things happen. A lot of good things that happened for better working conditions and benefits for the rank-and-file highway department hand during his tenure.

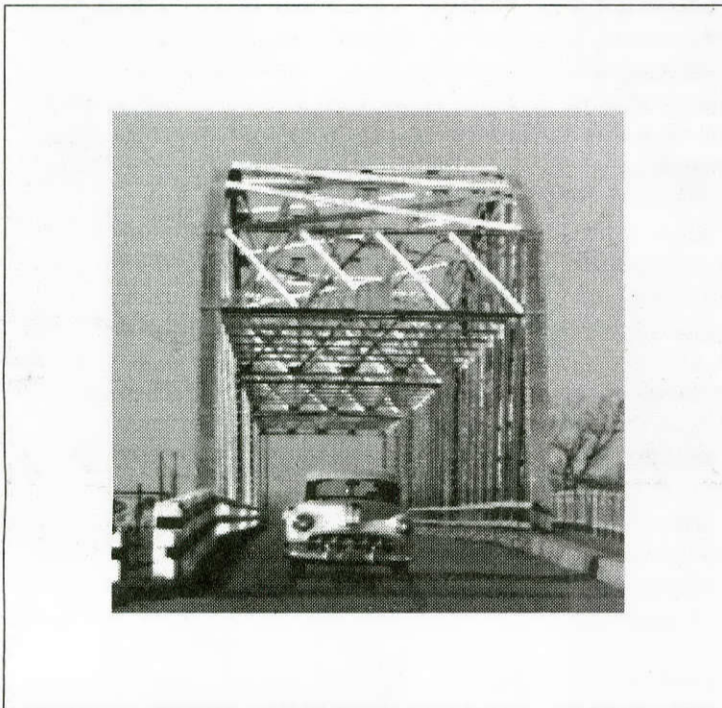
Dingwall dreamed of having Texas highways and bridges all brought up to modern standards in his time as the boss. But there just wasn't enough money. He and the six people who served on the highway commission while he was state highway engineer — Hal Woodward, Jack Kultgen, Herb Petry, Garret Morris, Greer, and Charley Simons — could see shifts in the public attitude toward their work. Not everyone was glad to see highway dollars at work in the neighborhood.

Dingwall saw wider missions for the department in transportation in general, not just highways. Some of his comments on his retirement were prophetic:

"I'd like to see a separate fund set up for mass transit, or in-city transportation systems. I believe the big city transportation problem is more of a social one than it is of transportation — or at least is more closely related to social problems. Congress may have to set up a separate fund and such a system always will have to be subsidized because fares alone will not support it."

The Interstate system in Texas was one of Dingwall's proudest achievements — and disappointments: "When Congress authorized the Interstate system in 1956, the target date was 1972," Dingwall said at the time of his retirement. "If funds had been available, we could have finished it in 1972. It would have been good for me to finish in 1972 and walk away. But I leave it in good hands." Dingwall turned 65 in 1973 and passed the torch along to his top assistant, Banister Luther DeBerry.*

Note: James Colin Dingwall died in 1991.



Although Interstate construction got most of the attention, the department also was a leader in bridge construction during the 1950s and '60s. This photo features the Colorado River bridge on Texas 71 in Bastrop County.

Disabled placard expiration just around the corner

Mike Viesca

Vehicle Titles and Registration

Disabled person placards have started to expire.

The first of the permanently disabled person placards that were issued in 1992 began to expire on June 30. TxDOT reminds citizens that they must obtain new placards to remain in compliance with state and federal laws.

Permanently disabled person placards are hung from a vehicle's rearview mirror and entitle the holder to certain parking privileges. Placards may also be displayed in any vehicle used by or for the transportation of a disabled person.

"State law requires that permanently disabled person placards be renewed after five years," said Jerry Dike, director of TxDOT's Vehicle Titles and Registration Division. "We started issuing placards in July 1992 through the county tax assessor-collectors. Five years later, the first wave of these placard holders must get replacements. Citizens should pay close attention to the expiration date because there won't be any renewal notices for placards."

Placard renewals are processed through the local county tax assessor-collector. Citizens are asked to take their expired placards to the tax office, where they will complete a form and pay a \$5 statutory fee per placard. Permanently disabled Texans may obtain up to two placards; they also have the option of getting one placard and one set of disabled person license plates.

Approximately 800,000 permanently disabled placards have been issued statewide since 1992. First time applicants for permanently disabled person placards or license plates have to meet certain eligibility requirements; their application must also bear the signature of a licensed Texas physician or optometrist. The county tax assessor-collectors issue placards locally to individuals, not motor vehicles. Because there's no centralized database, information as to the bearer of a placard is available only through the county tax offices.

Questions about permanently disabled person placards should be referred to TxDOT at 512/465-7611, or to the local county tax assessor-collector's office.*

Implementation teams building for the future

Myrna Klipple
Retooling Office

Department employees are paving the way to improving the way TxDOT does business. As retooling teams transition the Fiscal Services and Supplies, Materials and Equipment projects to a new group for implementation, the teams can look back on the long route they traveled and be proud of their results.

Although the road may have been bumpy at times, the teams continually focused on results. All team members were involved with providing detailed maps for the next stage of retooling.

The implementation stage of retooling provides an opportunity for more employees to work together on specialized teams and focus on building policies and procedures for TxDOT's future. It is important that these teams do not lose momentum to carry out the plans provided to them from the initial retooling teams.

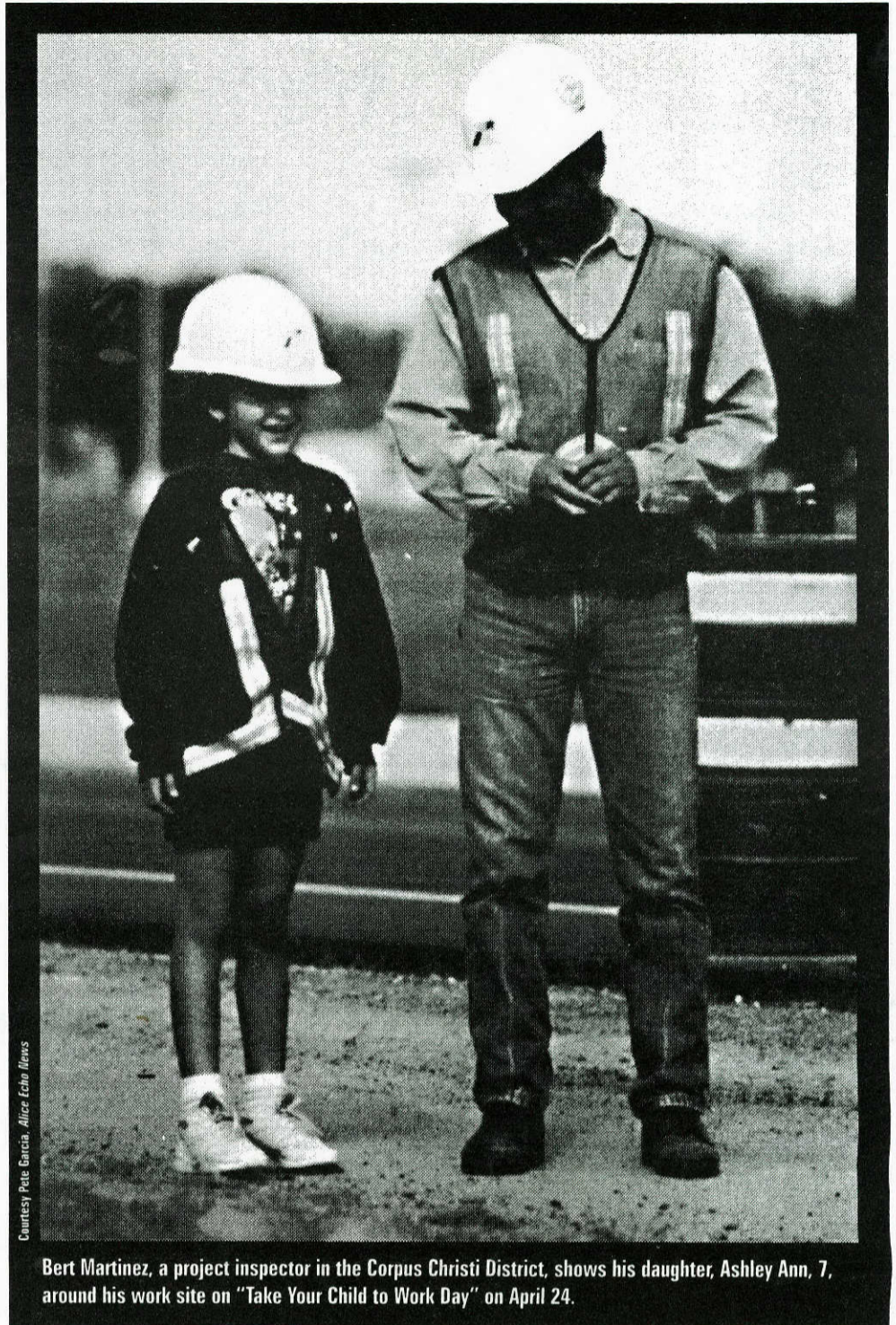
Leading the Fiscal Services team are co-implementation managers, Bill Campbell, director of special projects for the Budget and Finance Division, and Tanya Hynson, chief accountant in the Fort

Worth District. They will lead these implementation teams through development and implementation of policies and procedures for the payroll, budget, voucher, financial planning and accounting processes. These teams will also identify the requirements needed for technology solutions to make these areas work even more efficient.

Co-implementation managers for the Supplies, Materials and Equipment team, Glenn Hagler, equipment purchasing manager in the General Services Division, and Gary Humes, director of operations in the Brownwood District, are busy preparing the project plans and time lines to use during implementation.

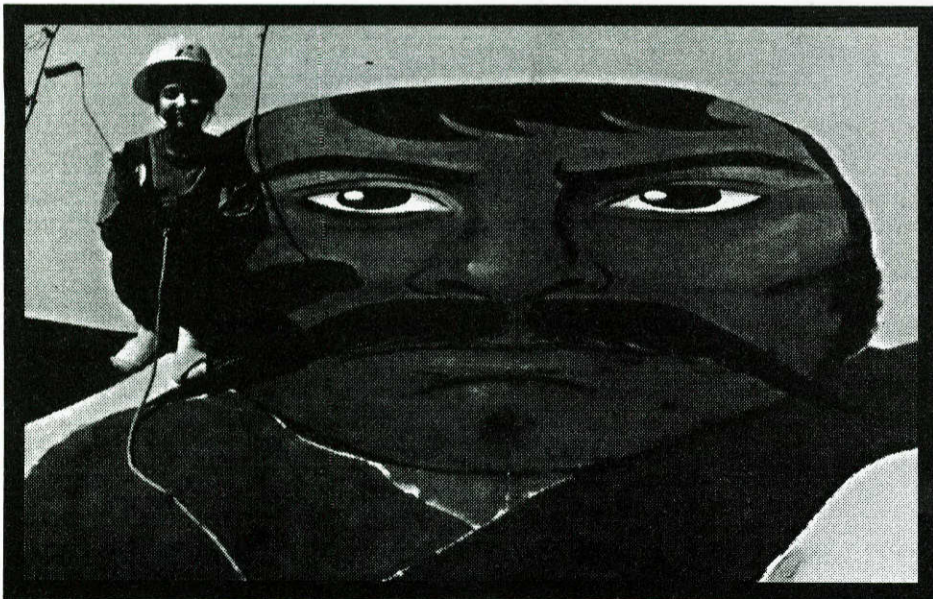
The implementation managers will lead business improvement project (BIP) teams in building the redesigned processes in the equipment fleet management and purchasing areas. Additional BIP teams in other areas may begin work after the redesign has been completed and approved later this summer.

"Retooling TxDOT is creating tomorrow today to assist with the challenges TxDOT faces in a drastically changing business environment," said Brian Rawson, director of Retooling.★



Bert Martinez, a project inspector in the Corpus Christi District, shows his daughter, Ashley Ann, 7, around his work site on "Take Your Child to Work Day" on April 24.

Art student's roadside mural reflects local heritage, culture



Laredo District art contest winner Lupita Ramon, an art student at Laredo Community College, works diligently on her mural located on Texas 359 just east of "Three Points."

Cristina Guevara
Laredo District

TxDOT's Laredo District held a mural design competition in Webb County during March and April. Local artists were encouraged to submit a poster design which would be the basis for a mural located on Texas 359 east of "Three Points" in South Laredo. More than 100 entries were judged by a local panel that included Laredo District Engineer Luis Ramirez, District Landscape Architect John Long and Julio Mendez, a Laredo high school instructor.

On May 4, TxDOT officials announced that Lupita Ramon, an art student at Laredo Community College, won the mural design contest.

In conjunction with the reconstruction of Texas 359 in Laredo, Price Construc-

tion Inc. built a concrete wall that would be used by the artists for painting the mural.

"The mural turned out great," Long said. "Because this was the largest canvas that Lupita has ever worked with, she recruited the assistance of two local artists, Jorge Vasquez and Leo Benavides. Their enthusiasm and teamwork got the job done in four days."

The team painted around the rain, in the blazing sun and on the hot concrete. Motorists shouted complements and tooted their horns in acknowledgment of the work they were doing. The mural Ramon designed celebrates the Hispanic culture and focuses on the fighting spirit of the local heritage.★

This story originally appeared in Texas Border News, the Laredo District's newsletter.



Courtesy Scott Beckwith

These photos show the three funnels that joined to form an unmerciful twister rating F5 on the Fujita scale.

began to wail outside the volunteer fire department downtown. People in the shops and stores came outside to see what was going on. "What's that? what's happening? is something wrong?" rippled through the town. Everyone noticed the menacing clouds and knew immediately the siren was not calling firefighters to the station, but was instead warning that a tornado may be approaching. Larry Igo owned a downtown business restoring vintage Chevrolets. He, his wife Joan, their daughter and twin boys were at the shop when the

warning came. Larry walked outside, looked at the sky, and shouted for his family to get in the car. They were going home to Double Creek Estates where it would be safer than staying at the shop. The sky grew more ominous. Time was running out.

3:05 p.m. A stone's throw from the Double Creek neighborhood, Williamson County sheriff's deputies were keeping a watchful eye on Interstate 35. The tor-

nado at Salado was reportedly moving south and they were concerned about traffic on the interstate driving into the teeth of the storm. Ernest Bizzell, TxDOT's assistant maintenance supervisor in Georgetown, was northbound on the interstate after hearing reports that a tornado was in the area. The air was dead calm and the darkening skies sent a chill up the spines of those who saw it. Then, a few drops of rain began to fall and stopped after a few minutes. Time was growing shorter.

3:10 p.m. Back at Double Creek, the sultry air was suddenly broken by a strong gust of wind. The kids outside looked up from what they were doing and noticed the eerie color of the sky. There was still no real concern here because the neighborhood was too far from the downtown area to hear the siren. Parents appeared in yards and began calling their youngsters home, trying to be heard above the wind. The Ruiz brothers, ages 15 and 14, heard about the storm and fled their

mobile home. They ran about a quarter of a mile to the Moehring family's house. The Moehrings, who had known the two boys for

Twister

Continued from page 1

School had let out for the summer the previous Friday and the Double Creek Estates neighborhood west of downtown Jarrell was full of kids enjoying the start of their vacation. As they played, rode bicycles or just did what youngsters do during the summer, a storm of cataclysmic proportions was bearing down on them.

3:00 p.m. The siren

years, hustled them inside. Suddenly, golf ball sized hail began pounding the area. Time had run out.

3:15 p.m. A short distance north of the neighborhood, witnesses saw not one, but three tornadoes dancing in a pasture. Television news videotape shows that the three twisters then joined together to form a giant killer. TxDOT's Bizzell saw the monster funnel and quickly turned his truck around. The twister bore down on Double Creek Estates with almost no mercy and even less pity. The little neighborhood lay directly in the path of the tornado and the residents now knew it. They also realized that they had no options and that wherever they were, that was as far as they were going.

The storm slammed into the northern part of the development first with a fury rarely seen on earth. Winds estimated as high as 270 mph began demolishing even well-built homes as their occupants cowered inside.

The five members of the Igo family were probably the first to die, their home ripped from its foundation. The twister relentlessly bored deeper and deeper into the neighborhood. Forty-one year old Billy LaFrance put his wife and daughter into the bath tub. Not wanting to crowd them, he huddled beside the tub as the twister ripped into their home. He was pulled through the roof of the house as his family watched in horror. Another woman who had climbed into a bathtub for safety felt the tub lift from the floor and in an instant she was torn from the house. A 44-year-old grandmother hugged her 5-year-old grandson trying to assure him that everything would be all right. Livestock weighing over a thousand pounds were lifted by the twister and slung throughout the area. Several horses met the same fate. Sheep and goats were pulled into the vortex. Family dogs stood resolutely in their yards and barked menacingly at the approaching killer before they too disappeared into the maelstrom. Houses were torn apart as if they were made of paper. Cars and trucks were flung about like toys. An 18,000-pound farm combine was rolled end over end, over end. Barns, workshops and garages were pulled apart effortlessly. Power poles and trees snapped like toothpicks, the grass was pulled from the ground and the pavement on County Road 305 was literally vacuumed up. The Moehring house began to come apart.

And then there was the banshee wind. Survivors frequently refer to the demonic howl the tornado made as it ripped their homes apart. They could hear the sound of screaming metal as outbuildings were dismembered; they were fully aware of their own homes being demolished while they were in them. One survivor said, "When the walls were falling, it sounded like someone was slamming a bunch of doors real hard. We didn't think it would ever stop." The lyrics from Gordon Lightfoot's song, *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*, with a minor modification, aptly describe the horrific experience:

*Does anyone know where the love of God goes,
when the wind turns the minutes to hours?*

As the funnel receded slowly to the south, torrential rains began to fall. People slowly emerged from what was left of their homes. What they saw left their faces frozen in masks of disbelief. The damage had been catastrophic. Where scores of homes once stood, now there were only slabs. Everything had been carried away by the twister. The storm had laid waste to the neighborhood. They didn't yet know that 26 of their neighbors lay dead, 14 of them children.

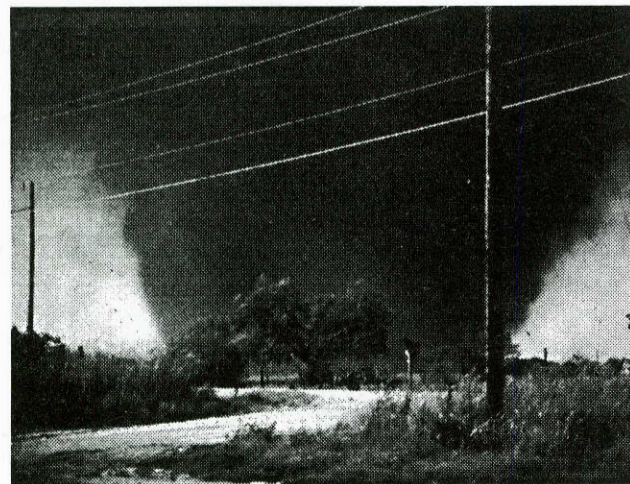
"We've got massive damage in Jarrell!" The excited voice of a sheriff's deputy crackled over the radio minutes after the storm's fury had passed. Crews from TxDOT's Georgetown Maintenance Section were already rolling toward the devastated area to help where they could. Calls were also being made to the district headquarters and to Travis Central Maintenance in Austin.

Twenty-three miles southwest of Jarrell lay Cedar Park, a bustling suburb of Austin. It was now late afternoon and the town's Albertson's supermarket was crowded with people. Someone burst through the front door shouting, "There's a tornado coming!" The store manager got on the P.A. system and ordered everyone to move to the rear of the store near the freezers. The announcement came in the nick of time. Minutes later the supermarket was struck and the roof on the structure collapsed. No one was killed, thanks to the manager's quick thinking. A full sized steam excursion train two blocks away was also targeted. The train's fuel car was knocked off the tracks and tipped over, spilling one thousand gallons of diesel oil. The twister bullied its way into a residential neighborhood selectively tearing up property there. Fortunately, by this time, the storm had lost some of its rage. No one was killed by the Cedar Park twister. The only fatality was a man who suffered a heart attack in the wake of the storm.

Yet it still wasn't finished. The twister dipped one more time at the community of Pedernales Valley near Lake Travis, killing one man and damaging a portion of Texas 71. As torrential rains fell on Austin, a woman drowned in the city's swollen Shoal Creek. And then it was



Courtesy Scott Beckwith



Courtesy Scott Beckwith

over. It had been nearly two hours since the carnage began. Twenty-nine people had died.

Crews from Travis North Maintenance headed to Cedar Park. Their main concern was building an earthen berm around the spilled diesel fuel to prevent contamination of nearby waterways. Travis South Maintenance was headed toward Pedernales Valley as the storm breathed its last.

Back in Jarrell, the scene was surreal. Red and blue emergency lights flashed everywhere and a roadblock was set up in the middle of the tiny downtown. The command post and temporary morgue were established in the volunteer fire department. Stunned residents of this town of less than one-thousand wandered about trying to learn the fate of friends and loved ones. The smell of death hung in the air.

A young man and his wife approached a TxDOT employee at the command post and said, "My mother and my little brother are missing. A fireman told me they were dead. How can I find out?" The man spoke in monotone and he had the ashen look of someone who knows but hasn't fully realized that his life has changed forever. He was directed to a nearby church where families were given the sad news as the dead were identified. It was a ghastly and painstakingly slow task. By 8:00 PM, the remains of 24 people were in the temporary morgue. The atmosphere continued to be unstable throughout the night as cloud to cloud lightning flashed across the sky and thunder was heard frequently. A night like this must have been what Shakespeare envisioned when he described the eve of Caesar's murder.

All night, TxDOT employees were a study in organization amid the chaos. They delivered portable lights which were used to help in the search for victims. When law enforcement agencies began running out of flares, TxDOT was called on to bring in more. Flashing barricade lights were needed as was additional fuel for the portables. Time after time the TxDOT employees were summoned by authorities. Everyone in Jarrell knew that no agency could bring the manpower and horsepower to bear as quickly as TxDOT. Several workers stayed throughout the long night and were there when the sun rose on the heartbreaking scene of devastation.

May 28 dawned clear and calm. This was the first really good look anyone had of the area following the storm. The destruction was total. The neighborhood was a mass of mud, the grass having been taken by the twister. The names of the victims were beginning to filter throughout the tiny community. It was now becoming obvious that many of them were children. It was enough to make the angels weep.

One of the first priorities was to remove the dead livestock from the area. In the growing heat, the carcasses would soon become a public health problem. Again, TxDOT was called upon. Crews moved in with front end loaders and dump trucks and spent much of the day hauling off the dead animals.

In the days following the storm TxDOT helped clear County Road 305 of hundreds of trees that had blown down. Crews also provided fuel for the mobile DPS command post, and after the survivors had searched through the ruins of their homes, the almost insurmountable task of hauling the debris away began.

One employee of the Travis Central Maintenance Section viewed the destruction and said, "You don't think much about tornadoes until you see the personal effects of these people. Everything they had is lying out here on the ground." There was a photograph of a woman playing the guitar, a torn baseball card, several baby books, a few articles of clothing, toys. All of it, "lying out here on the ground."

"You guys haven't seen a gray pickup truck have you?" One week to the day after the storm, William Ickes, a personable young man in his early 20s, was poking around the rubble of what had once been his home. He saw the TxDOT employees working nearby and hoped they had found his truck among the wreckage. No one had seen the vehicle that had been parked outside Ickes' residence when the storm hit.

Ickes was one of the lucky ones. He and five other people had huddled inside of a bathroom to ride out the storm. When they emerged, they discovered the bathroom was all that was left standing of the home. He tells the story matter of factly. But even as he tells it, his eyes constantly dart in the direction from which the twister came.

The residents of Jarrell have an antic toughness about them that was therapeutic for many. Most of them talk confidently of rebuilding at Double Creek. The TxDOT crews, after working at their grim tasks for so many days, needed to talk with people like Ickes. It was good to hear the stories from people who had lived through it. Ickes was able to smile and even joke some about his experience. When asked if he actually saw the twister, he laughs readily and says, "Oh, yeah. Man, I'll never forget *that* as long as I live!"

Epilogue: There are hundreds of stories to tell following this type of disaster. This article has touched on just a few of them. Some are heavy with irony.

The downtown shop the Igo family left for the supposed safety of their home was not damaged by the storm.

The mobile home from which the Ruiz boys fled to the Moehrings received some damage, but was not destroyed. It is still standing today. The brothers, along with the four members of the Moehring family, perished. In front of the slab that used to be the home, stands a spray of flowers and several homemade memorials. On one is written in a childish hand, "To the Moehring family—We will miss y'all very much! Y'all were great friends!" Four pennies were placed beside it.

The woman who hid in the bath tub survived. She was yanked out of her house and was airborne for some distance before she and the tub fell to the ground.

Wednesday was the day strong men cried. When the bodies of 44-year old Emma Mullins and her five year old grandson Ryan Fillmore were found, Mullins was still curled around the boy in a protective posture. She remained steadfast, even in death.

One of the people who crowded into the bathroom with William Ickes was the brother of retired TxDOT Georgetown Maintenance employee Otis Person.

The home of Dee Berry, licensing supervisor in the Motor Carrier Division, was destroyed by the tornado. Mercifully, no one was injured.

At this writing, Billy LaFrance's wife and daughter are still in the hospital. His wife was critically injured.

The National Weather Service sent a team to Austin to study the Jarrell tornado. After viewing the scene and television news footage, the twister was classified as an F5 on the Fujita scale. An F5 storm is rare and is the most intense on the scale. It is sometimes referred to as "the finger of God." The NWS said the twister was also unusual in that it moved from north to south.

A washing machine from one of the homes was found five miles away near the Theon exit off Interstate 35 south of Jarrell.

William Ickes never found his pickup truck.★



John Hurt, AUS

In their wake, the tornadoes' debris was strewn about what was once a Jarrell neighborhood.



John Hurt, AUS

TxDOT crews responded quickly to help with cleanup in Jarrell.



John Hurt, AUS

Tim Weight, Tom Ohlendorf, Rudy Martinez, Paul Hanneman and Gene Stabeno discuss TxDOT's game plan for cleanup efforts in Jarrell.

Service Awards

JULY

Ablene

10 years
Michael D. Donaldson
Randall B. Eaton
5 years
Randall K. High

Amarillo

20 years
Jimmy D. Cotter
Danny L. Massie
Frank Montoya
15 years
Cheryl G. Luther
Miguel H. Morales
Mark E. Tomlinson
Carl K. Whatley
10 years
David A. Davis
Sean L. Frederiksen
5 years
Randy J. Hochstein

Atlanta

35 years
Jerry L. Yates
20 years
Brad A. Haugh
Kenneth J. Smith
15 years
Sherry K. Estes
James D. McCall
10 years
Charles W. Montgomery
Rodney E. Vandusen

Austin

40 years
John R. Zaleski
25 years
Lonny R. Hocker
20 years
Dewey S. Barton
Ronald W. Garrett
10 years
Charles C. Chance
Karen M. Dubose
Billy G. Grona
Jerry W. Herzog
Mark G. Meuth
Josephine A. Morton
Jimmie L. Taylor
5 years
Nancy L. Barton
Vicky M. Breeden

Beaumont

20 years
Carole J. Morgan
Patrick E. Pearson
15 years
Acil J. Diffey

5 years

Dudley A. Franzen Jr.
Henry K. Horn
Robert D. Sartin

Brownwood

25 years
Randall L. Henderson
20 years
Wayne R. Hurford
15 years
Arthur R. Hall
5 years
Darron W. Moore

Bryan

30 years
Paul D. Slatter
10 years
Bobby G. Noland
James D. Riley

Childress

10 years
Clarence R. Butler
Gary D. English
Earl B. Morrow
5 years
Mary K. Cappleman

Corpus Christi

30 years
Bobby C. Anderson
25 years
Nancy P. Cooper
15 years
Daniel G. Gonzalez
10 years
Fidencio M. Gonzalez III

Dallas

25 years
Gene O. Rodgers
20 years
Sandra M. Garnett
15 years
Mark A. Ball
Xavier S. Kelley
10 years
Christi A. Barrier
Danny J. Huckeba
Linda W. Tischler
Charles E. Walker
Charles W. Wilson
5 years
Trena L. Brand
Phil M. Crabtree
Alan D. Houston
Charles A. May

El Paso

15 years
Alfredo Lopez
Eddie Sanchez

10 years

Robert L. Cordova
Timothy F. Twomey
5 years

Jose E. Arzaga
Ricardo Lugo
Norma Ruiz
Fernando A. Sanchez

Fort Worth

35 years
Arlie A. Lacy
30 years
James O. Jeffcoat
25 years
Jimmy G. Burton
20 years
William C. Riley
15 years
Kyle S. Smith
10 years
Taylor F. Buckner
Tommy J. Hollandsworth
Jesse R. King
Myron J. Menzie
Joel P. Shawver
Vicki P. Stewart
5 years
Jerry L. Cooper
Leo Ehlinger III
Kysha M. Hill
Jennifer B. Peterson
Calvin B. Smith
David K. Thacker

Houston

35 years
Elizabeth R. Sechelski
25 years
Melvie L. Corliss
Tommy M. Dunkin
Guy B. Gray Jr.
John G. Minks
20 years
Linda C. Dumont
Charles F. Hearn III
Anthony W. Mapp
15 years
Glenda M. Blackburn
Don W. Brotherton
Margie O. Corbin
Cynthia S. Huggins
Becky L. Johnson
Shirley C. Moore
Jimmie L. Paden
Earnest R. Williamson
Madonna M. Wise
10 years
Richard Carlos
Mark S. Farrar
Chris R. Graham
Jesse L. Rawls
David E. Williams

5 years

Lillie J. Hooper
Richard Powell
Larry J. Rosemon
Curtis E. Vaughn
Elworth J. Wilcox Jr.

Laredo

20 years
David H. Torres

Lubbock

30 years
Floyd R. McElroy
25 years
Julia F. Halford

Lufkin

15 years
Anson D. Moffett
Betty P. Sanders
Clifton E. Shirley
10 years
David L. Duff
5 years
Curtis R. Harper
Johnnie L. Parks
Ronnie C. Releford

Odessa

25 years
Roman O. Gonzalez Jr.
20 years
Sallie M. Boyd
Mario B. Lujan
Timothy H. Zaverucha
15 years
Joseph A. Alvarado
10 years
Jesus O. Ramirez

Paris

35 years
Bobby J. Kile
20 years
Michael A. Serrano
Earnest J. Yates
10 years
Linda R. Clark
5 years
Robert E. Cox
Loyce D. Johnson

Pharr

30 years
Bernabe Contreras
25 years
Arturo R. Silva Jr.
Jerrel D. Stewart
15 years
Arturo Davila
10 years
Noe Beltran
Benjamin Flores Jr.
Lauro Galaviz

Roberto Loera
Martin A. Polanco
5 years
Leticia Vela

San Angelo

30 years
Fidel R. Sepeda Jr.
15 years
Albert V. Acosta
10 years
Sheila M. Dooley
Berry A. Ethington
Paula D. Summerlin

San Antonio

35 years
Gerald J. Adamietz
25 years
Ernest L. Sanchez
10 years
William L. Capeheart
Gregory D. Dismuke
Christine C. Jauregui
Roland G. Krellwitz
Timothy D. Lowak
5 years
Oscar A. Hurtado

Tyler

35 years
Charles F. Cooper
15 years
Dennis R. Cooley
10 years
Rickey W. Gates
5 years
Johnston L. Warren

Waco

30 years
Glenn B. Drake
Darwin J. Ivicic
15 years
Zane L. Webb
10 years
Charles E. Ferry
5 years
David P. Blackiston
Philip J. Bukowski
Jeffery C. Kennedy

Wichita Falls

15 years
Donny W. Reed
10 years
Kara J. Nichols
Billy D. Taylor

Wichita Falls

15 years
Donny W. Reed
10 years
Kara J. Nichols
Billy D. Taylor

Yoakum

30 years
James D. Brenner
Orville O. Pruetz
15 years
Gerald Freytag
James D. Ivy
10 years
Jon Adame
David G. Basile
Richard Z. Montgomery

Audit

5 years
Virginia P. Rodriguez

Aviation

20 years
Yolanda S. Alvarez

Budget and Finance

20 years
Anita M. Merz
15 years
Cynthia D. Belyeu

Business Opportunity Programs

30 years
Juan Vega
5 years
Carlos S. Rodriguez

Civil Rights

10 years
Doris A. Kosik
5 years
Janet I. Mayfield
Doris B. Pabon

Construction and Maintenance

35 years
Clark W. Titus
10 years
Debra A. Green
5 years
Yvonne Y. Liang

Design

30 years
Geneva W. Bass
15 years
Larry W. Halterman

General Services Division

30 years
William D. Morrow
25 years
Charles E. Martin
15 years
Glenda M. Bentley
Timothy K. McKee

10 years

Judy S. Gage
Michael J. McAndrew
5 years
Carol P. Griffith
Jimmie M. Grigsby

Information Systems

30 years
Vennie G. Davis Jr.
20 years
Paul S. Hejl
15 years
Ronnie F. Kaluza
10 years
Jerald R. Swan

Materials and Tests

10 years
Robert V. Eberle
Edward O. Morgan

Motor Vehicle

5 years
Robert W. Westcott Jr.

Traffic Operations

10 years
Adrian W. Madison
5 years
Winfred B. Logan
Edward G. Schroeder

Transportation Planning and Programming

30 years
Agustin Chavez
10 years
Troy N. Hollan

Travel and Information

5 years
Sarah F. Rangel

Vehicle Titles and Registration

30 years
Janice G. Kitz
Sylvia K. Rushing
25 years
Charles S. Crayton
Virginia R. Lewis
20 years
Charles A. Johannessen
15 years
Frances E. Moon
10 years
Sheila A. Turney
5 years
Jerrie A. Whipple

Employees open hearts, lend hands to victims

Melissa Welch

Public Information Office

Not even one full day after tornadoes wreaked havoc on Central Texas, TxDOT employees began pulling resources for those who were caught in its path.

Dee Barry, licensing supervisor for the Motor Vehicle Division (MVD), was one of the victims. In the final minutes of the tornado's fury, her home off of U.S. 71 in Austin was destroyed, and her belongings scattered.

MVD Director Brett Bray and Deputy Director Heidi Jackson were at her home the next morning helping pick up what could be salvaged.

Before noon, a group of MVD employees were on hand to lend more help. By dusk, scattered personal items had been picked up, boxed and protected from the rain.

Other acts of generosity were being repeated across the state. A trust fund was created at the Public Employees Credit Union to help Dee and her family purchase immediate items. Donations came in from TxDOT offices all over the state.

"The Design Division contributed money, food and kitchen gadgets by having a kitchen shower," said Gail Anderson MVD legal assistant, who coordinated the efforts to help Barry. "The Retooling Office had a bake sale to raise money, and Tyler District donated 14 trees to replace those that were destroyed."

TxDOT's giving was not limited to its own employees. The Wichita Falls District office became the community drop-off center for donations. "When we arrived at work at 7:30 a.m. there were people waiting in line to drop things off, and it was a continuous and steady stream until 5 p.m.," Alisa Browning, engineering technician, said. "One of the most memorable was a woman who went to one of the local bread stores and bought 100 loaves of bread and brought them in for us." District employees collected enough food, clothes, toys, furniture, dishes, and pots and pans to fill one-and-a-half tractor-trailers. They also raised more than \$1,200. The Salvation Army volunteered to transport the donations to Jarrell.

Austin TxDOT offices collected donations in each building. Dewitt C. Greer building employees donated money and a carload of goods.

Julie Thomas, public relations director for American Red Cross of Central Texas, said that the generosity of the people of Central Texas, as well as those throughout the state and country, was overwhelming. "Red Cross did not solicit any donations. They came pouring in on their own," she said.

In less than three days the American Red Cross collected enough money to cover the relief effort. The only other disaster to receive such an outpouring of support was the Oklahoma City bombing.

"All I can say was that the support was overwhelming. We have a lot of good, generous people that work at TxDOT," Anderson said.★

In Memoriam

Bobby F. Lester, Engineering Technician III, Transportation Planning and Programming Division, died May 31, 1997.

James H. Barnes, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Tyler District in 1984, died April 14, 1997.

Jose S. Benavidez, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Pharr District in 1988, died March 7, 1997.

Endress C. Bohls, Maintenance Technician II, retired from the General Services Division in 1972, died March 27, 1997.

Roger H. Boroff, Telecommunications Specialist, retired from the Information Systems Division in 1996, died April 1, 1997.

Bernabe L. Camacho, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Yoakum District in 1973, died May 28, 1997.

Irene C. Carlson, Engineering Technician III, retired from the Dallas District in 1987, died March 10, 1997.

Samuel E. Carter, Marine Supervisor II, retired from the Houston District in 1991, died January 5, 1997.

Leslie H. Clifton, Engineering Technician V, retired from the Childress District in 1967, died April 21, 1997.

Hyacynth M. Dobbs, Personnel Assistant I, retired from the Yoakum District in 1967, died May 24, 1997.

Eddie G. Ereman, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Amarillo District in 1981, died March 16, 1997.

Ross L. Fitzpatrick, Engineer IV, retired from the Pharr District in 1981, died April 14, 1997.

Candelario M. Flores, Maintenance Technician II, retired from the San Angelo District in 1990, died February 8, 1997.

James L. Gardner, Jr., Engineering Technician V, retired from the Corpus Christi District in 1975, died March 7, 1997.

Johnson G. Gault, Chief Accountant III, retired from the Materials and Tests Division in 1976, died April 8, 1997.

Alfredo Guerrero, Maintenance Technician II, retired from the Corpus Christi District in 1984, died April 12, 1997.

James R. Kumlax, Engineering Technician III, retired from the Dallas District in 1981, died April 6, 1997.

Paul E. Leach, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Childress District in 1981, died March 20, 1997.

D. W. Little, Maintenance Technician II, retired from the Brownwood District in 1984, died April 11, 1997.

Harold L. Maxwell, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Paris District in 1985, died May 30, 1997.

Carrol W. Moore, Roadway Maintenance Supervisor III, retired from the Wichita Falls District in 1992, died April 17, 1997.

Russell R. Moore, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Childress District in 1987, died April 16, 1997.

Willie S. Morgan, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Childress District in 1987, died April 12, 1997.

Santos Nerios, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Corpus Christi District in 1987, died March 27, 1997.

Richard S. Oglesby, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Dallas District in 1992, died March 21, 1997.

Claudia J. Pearson, Administrative Technician III, retired from the Right of Way Division in 1981, died April 2, 1997.

Lester W. Pope, Jr., Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Lufkin District in 1992, died May 25, 1997.

Herbert O. Schrader, Maintenance Technician III, retired from the Houston District in 1977, died April 15, 1997.

Walter S. Summy, Maintenance Construction Foreman III, retired from the Brownwood District in 1970, died April 12, 1997.

William M. Teague, Maintenance Construction Supervisor II, retired from the Childress District in 1976, died March 3, 1997.

Virgil E. Terry, Maintenance Technician II, retired from the Brownwood District in 1970, died April 20, 1997.

Eduardo Torres, Maintenance Technician IV, retired from the Pharr District in 1995, died April 5, 1997.

Joseph R. Van Ness, Staff Services Officer I, retired from the Right of Way Division in 1977, died December 9, 1996.

Thomas E. Wilson, Administrative Technician IV, retired from the Amarillo District in 1973, died April 25, 1997.

Retirements

April

Atlanta

James R. Grafton
Maintenance Technician IV
29 Years

Houston

James D. Kennedy
Program Specialist II
5 Years

San Angelo

Eliberto Nombano
Maintenance Technician IV
18 Years

May

Beaumont

Alda G. Jones
Maintenance Technician III
22 Years

Joseph E. Smith

Maintenance Construction Supervisor
30 Years

Yoakum

Albert Edwards
Maintenance Mechanic I
18 Years

June

Fort Worth

Don H. Hudson
Maintenance Technician III
18 Years

Design Division

Richard O. Clark
Engineer V
30 Years

Get PIC

Nothing goes better with your morning cup of coffee than the latest edition of PIC (Public Information Coordinator). And now it's even easier to access PIC. Just send a GroupWise message to MWHITTEN. In the subject box type GET PIC. Do not type anything in the message box. The latest PIC will be in your mailbox in mere minutes.

PIC consists of summaries of news clips of interest to TxDOT employees. The department calendar, news releases and the agenda for commission meetings are also on PIC.

PIC is updated by 9:45 a.m. every business day by the Public Information Office.★

Calendar

JULY

4

Independence Day (holiday)

14-16

Radio System Specialist Workshop, Corpus Christi, TRF

31

Commission Meeting, Harlingen/McAllen

AUGUST

17-20

Safe Communities Workshop, Corpus Christi, TRF

20-22

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Project Management Course, Corpus Christi, TRF

27

LBJ's Birthday (holiday)

28

Commission Meeting, Austin

SEPTEMBER

1

Labor Day (holiday)

3-5

Texas/Mexico Border Conference on Border Safety, South Padre Island, PHR

10-12

NIGP Professional Development Class, Austin, GSD

25

Commission Meeting, Austin

OCTOBER

13-15

Transportation Conference, College Station

15-17

NIGP Professional Development Class, Austin, GSD

30

Commission Meeting, Austin

NOVEMBER

3-4

NIGP Professional Development Class, Austin, GSD

3-7

Research Management Committee Meeting, Austin, RTT

4-7

Human Resources Management Conference, Austin, HRM

5-7

NIGP Professional Development Class, Austin, GSD

11

Veterans' Day (holiday)

20

Commission Meeting, Austin

27

Thanksgiving (holiday)

28

Holiday

DECEMBER

18

Commission Meeting, Austin

24

Holiday

25

Christmas Day (holiday)

26

Holiday

January

1

Holiday

7-8

Management Team Meeting

Letters

About six weeks ago after 5 p.m., we were traveling through Monahans and had a flat. The suburban was loaded with cases of oil and groceries. Two of your employees (**Mike Valenzuela and Tony Bustos**) were kind enough to stop to unload enough oil to get to the spare tire and then change the flat. They reloaded the oil and spare tire. We tried to pay them, but they would not accept any money. We appreciate them very much.

Carolyn Battens
Pecos
Annabell Coleman
Balmorhea

Anthony Bustos and Mike Valenzuela are maintenance technicians in the Monahans Maintenance Section, Odessa District.

.....

Thank you for the courteous and friendly behavior that was shown to me by your employee **Kendal Mosely** on May 5. He was kind enough to assist me with a flat tire, whereas other motorists passed me by. Again, thank you, Kendal, and the Texas Department of Transportation. All was appreciated.

Wyvonne Gaji
Midland

Kendal Mosely is a maintenance technician V in the Midland Maintenance Section.

.....

On Wednesday, May 28, several employees from the Abilene District Office of TxDOT Sign/Barricade and Signal Shops helped us with maintenance on the Winters Freeway street lights.

The city's traffic signal supervisor told me that because of their help we were able to accomplish much more work. He also stated that it was a pleasure to see how two governmental agencies could work together for the good of our customers (the citizens who drive on the Winters Freeway).

I just wanted to personally tell you that we really appreciated their help and to thank you for cultivating admirable cooperation among our respective employees.

Jon Krieg, P.E.
Traffic Engineer
City of Abilene

Crew members were Traffic Sign Technician Bobby Voights; Radio/Sign Shop Supervisor Robert Hallford; Taylor County Maintenance Section Sign Technician Sam Isbell; and Taylor County Maintenance Section Roadway Crew Chief Don Jordan. All work in the Abilene District.

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On behalf of present and future generations of Pepper Tree lovers — thank you! The "Pepper Tree" has a tremendous amount of history surrounding it and has been featured in *Texas Highways*.

I'm extra grateful for the healthy pepper tree seedlings, as I wasn't a good caretaker of number one, and probably worried and wore down the old tree by checking on it. I know I became a nuisance to our county TxDOT boys about the tree, but they continue to humor this platinum blonde. Proof of that is their getting you involved, and you putting your green thumb magic to work.

Thanks to you, our Pepper Tree will live on by our El Camino Real marker from TxDOT below the visitor center/museum, our courthouse square by the big historical marker; on the Jordan School Campus facing Texas 21 (El Camino Real) and more especially in our hearts.

Eliza H. Bishop
Houston County Historical Commission
Crockett

The employees were Joe L. (Larry) Melson, Crockett Maintenance Section supervisor, and Jerry W. Crisp, a building maintenance mechanic, of the Lufkin District.

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I recently had a flat tire on I-35 while traveling through Austin. A flat tire on a motor home is a big problem. It requires two jacks and a strong arm. **Bruce Murphy** was invaluable in his assistance since he had to drive a considerable distance to get the tire repaired. This was my second flat, and my spare was useless. Thanks.

Gerald Wright
Ontario, Canada

Bruce Murphy is a Courtesy Patrol member in the Austin District.

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My husband and I live in Fulton, and on Oct. 7, we were on our way home from East Texas when our motor home stalled and the motor quit — on U.S. 77 just north of Victoria about 25 miles.

We were so thankful for your help and the two people from your department pulled us off the road and watched and guided traffic around us.

Hopefully, our motor home is fixed, and we will be taking it home to Fulton today.

Once again, your help was surely a godsend for us senior citizens. Your men were so helpful and courteous.

Mrs. George Lambert
Fulton

The two men were Royce W. Brown and Michael J. Kostelnik. They are maintenance technicians in the Lavaca County Maintenance Section, Yoakum District.

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This note is long overdue concerning Groom Transportation Department.

Toward the end of April, I was returning from a vacation trip as a passenger in the auto of Mr. and Mrs. Doss Ledbetter of Amarillo.

It was windy, we had driven a long way, we were tired and we were anxious to get home. A tire blew between Shamrock and Groom during lunch hour.

We were ignored until your employee drove up. First, he was a very, very nice, personable man, and secondly, a thorough, efficient, helpful, caring man going beyond his call of duty. His service was absolutely great! He found us and got us on the road, would not take gratuity and checked to see if we found a place to get a new tire.

Mrs. Helen Gilless
Perryton

The employee was Ralph Robinson, maintenance technician in the Groom Maintenance Section, Childress District.

I can't thank you enough for the service you provided me. I have never run out of gas before in my life. Sunday, I did. I had my two children with me, and there were no gas stations anywhere. They made sure the car started before they left me. I tried to pay them, but they wouldn't take any money. I don't know what I would have done if they hadn't showed up. They were very polite and courteous. Thanks again, **Charlie Deskin** and **Frank Herber**.

Julie Schramm
San Antonio

Clarence (Charlie) Deskin and Franklin (Frank) Herber work as Courtesy Patrol members in the San Antonio District.

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