

Transportation NEWS

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Earth Day marks 25th anniversary Employees reflect on personal commitment to environment

Rafael Power
Environmental Affairs Division

The first Earth Day in 1970 rallied more than 20 million Americans around the country and on college campuses to get involved in environmental "teach-ins," the largest grassroots mobilization in U.S. history.

Earth Day was the brainchild of Wisconsin Sen. Gaylord Nelson who wanted it to be an annual event that would focus nationwide attention on the critical relationship between people and their environment.

Earth Day was an environmental wake-up call for the nation. During a recent interview, Sen. Nelson spoke about what it meant for the country. "It was a truly astonishing grassroots explosion," Nelson said. "The people cared, and Earth Day became the first opportunity they ever had to join in a nationwide demonstration to send a big message to politicians — a message to wake up and do something," he said.

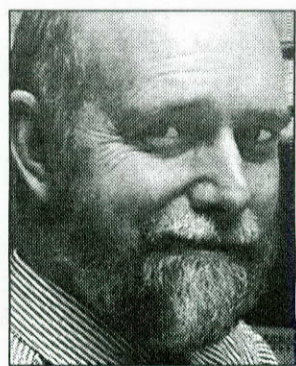
Earth Day helped create the modern environmental movement and the first environmental legislation — the Clean Air and Water acts. In 1980, Earth Day became a truly global event. In addition to the millions of Americans in all 50 states and territories, countless others in 141 countries will also participate in this year's celebration.

With Free the Earth as this year's theme, Earth Day '95 also celebrates its 25th anniversary.

Activities include hundreds of cleanups, restoration projects, parades, fairs, conferences, art and essay contests, and concerts supported by thousands of volunteers nationwide.

TxDOT will mark Earth day this year by kicking off a recycling campaign called "Reduce Your Waste." TxDOT will also have a booth at Austin's Earth Day Festival, and TxDOT employees are participating in Earth Day activities in other part of the state.

As Earth Day '95 approaches, several TXDOT personnel in Austin's Riverside Complex spoke about their personal commitment to helping preserve our environment.



David Dunlap
Staff Biologist
Environmental Affairs Division

"I do more for the environment on a large scale through my work as a Natural Resources Coordinator in the Environmental Affairs Division. I assist the districts in identifying environmental issues and ways to avoid, minimize or compensate for impacts. On a smaller scale, I help preserve the environment and conserve resources at home. I participate in

the city of Austin's curbside recycling program to reduce waste

going to the landfill. I use recycled paper products and preferably buy products in recycled or recyclable packaging. I had a programmable thermostat installed at home and am currently xeriscaping my yard, a process I began last year by planting drought-resistant buffalo grass.

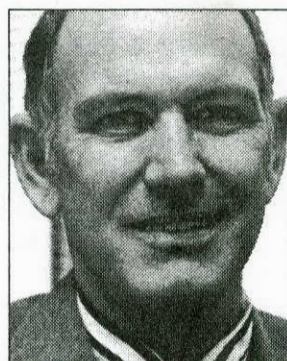
"The biggest change I made recently is using public transportation more frequently than I used to. This means riding the bus to and from work two to three days per week. It gives me time to read and avoid the aggravation that seems to go along with driving in Austin these days."



Norma Nández
Employment Branch Manager
Human Resources Division

"En mi casa se reciclan todos los materiales como botellas, revistas, aluminio y periodicos. Mantengo la temperatura del termostato a 68° a traves del ano y abro las ventanas para que entre el aire fresco. Tambien lavamos con agua fria. Los vecinos nos ponemos de acuerdo para ir a la tienda en el mismo coche. Mas del 75 % de lo que compro viene en envases reciclables.

En la oficina tuvimos que cambiar nuestra forma de pensar. Ahora todos participamos en reciclar y en usar materiales reciclados como el papel blanco que compra el departamento. Si es posible, usamos todos los materiales como sobres y carpetas varias veces antes de reciclarlos."



Laddie Bordovsky
Assistant Facilities Manager
General Services Division

"On the home front we recycle and insist that our children also participate. We participate 100 percent in the city of Austin's recycling program. Because of it, I'm more conscientious and always check everything that goes out in the trash.

"When I go to the store I am careful of what I buy. For example, we use biodegradable detergents. We change the oil on four vehicles at home and take the used oil and filters to a recycling center such as Quick Lube. I am more aware when I use pesticides and fertilizers on my lawn. I'm trying to educate myself on safer ways of dealing with pests. I also compost and mulch my yard.

"In the office I recycle white paper and aluminum cans. Recycling

Please see Earth Day, page 5

Inside



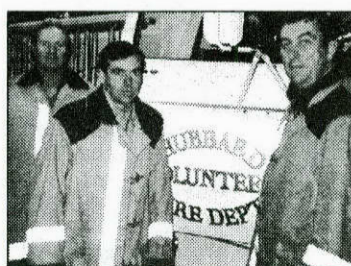
George King is an inspector for the Materials and Tests Division in the Houston District, and a prince of a guy, according to his employees.

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TxDOT photographer Michael Amador, late of the Dallas District, recently won three television programming awards.

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They spend their working hours helping others, but many TxDOT employees spend their off-duty time in volunteer service.

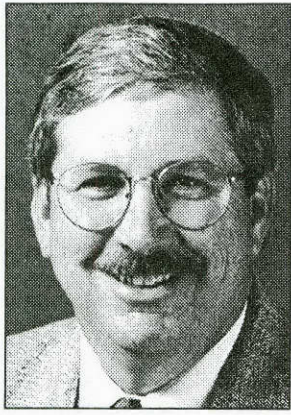
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Be a team player by displaying a new TxDOT Team Member sticker on your vehicle.

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Ask Bill



Q During the 11 years I have worked for TxDOT, I have become increasingly convinced of the need for spill pans to be installed around the fill ports on the top of asphalt distributors, asphalt tanks and booster trailers. These pans would catch any over-fill, boil-over material, or material sloshed out in stopping, and would funnel it back down into the tank where it belongs. This would preclude spilling hazardous material on roadways, rights of way or maintenance yards, and there'd be no need to introduce additional solvents into the environment for cleanup of this kind of spill.

I have also submitted a copy of this suggestion to Retooling TxDOT with drawings to clarify how the pans should be constructed. I would appreciate your thoughts and views on this idea if at all possible.

*Robert A. Beaulieu
Lubbock District*

A Thank you for your idea of a way to modify our asphalt equipment to reduce spills. It is commendable of you to go to as much trouble as you did in order to do your part toward improving our department.

Unfortunately, at this point it appears that the pans cannot be installed as you envisioned because the same pipe that would let the asphalt flow back down into the asphalt tank would also allow rain water to flow into the tank. A little water in emulsion might not be too bad. However, if the tank contained cut-back material, heating cut back that contains an appreciable amount of water can cause it to boil over. This can result in explosions and fires that destroy equipment.

It would be valuable to have a more effective means to compensate for the errors of overfilling, stopping too suddenly and so forth. Consequently, we will continue to discuss design possibilities with manufacturers and with our districts. We will be on the lookout for a workable design that might allow us to do as you have suggested.

.....

Q I have seen and reviewed the new policy effective Feb. 1, 1995 concerning the non-payment of partial per diem. When the department sends an individual to an approved activity away from the employee's normal work place, the entire cost of the trip should be covered regardless of whether or not it is one or two days.

The department has requested that personnel reduce the amount spent on travel by limiting the amount of overnight stays, which results in one-day trips. I believe great strides have been made in meeting this goal. However, when people go to other cities, they are usually limited to one or two local restaurants and have no other choice, including bringing their own lunches.

For organized activities with pre-arranged meals, the department covers the cost because it is normally included with the registration fee. So, why, when a department-approved activity does not have pre-arranged meals, is the department unwilling to cover the cost. An example of this is the Texas Quality Initiative Conferences which had breakfast, lunch and dinner included in the registration fee. However, the Transportation Conference had no meals included, yet the department encouraged all employees to attend by providing one-day shuttles.

*Catherine L. Wolff
Materials and Tests Division*

A Thank you for your letter regarding the new partial per diem policy. TxDOT's decision to stop partial per diem was influenced by many internal and external factors.

Several years ago, the IRS ruled that if an employee's business didn't require overnight travel, then the cost of meals paid for by an employer is taxable income to that employee. As a result of that ruling, TxDOT made changes in the way we handled partial per diem. Basically, it had to be paid as if it were part of a payroll. Because of state requirements, expense accounts had to go through normal travel expense processes, but because of IRS requirements, they had to go through payroll processes as well. This doubled the amount of work. Not long after that, the Legislature charged the Comptroller with the responsibility to identify new ways to cut costs. The Comptroller developed the Texas Performance Review, which recommended eliminating partial per diem.

One reason behind the IRS rule is that if overnight lodging is not required, then an employer-paid meal is not a real need. An argument is that the employee is not necessarily far from the normal work area; that circumstances for eating are not much different from the norm. For example, an employee whose headquarters is in Austin would be eligible for partial per diem just by traveling to Round Rock. That is true even if the employee's residence is in Round Rock.

Equity was another consideration. If an employee from the Austin District headquarters drove 10 miles north to Round

Rock he'd be eligible for partial per diem by working there for six hours or more. Another employee from the same office could drive twice that distance or more in another direction without leaving Austin. It doesn't seem fair for the department to buy a meal for one of these employees but not the other.

Abuse of the privilege was still another consideration. Eliminating partial per diem reduced the number of claims that appear unreasonable. For example, most trips to nearby towns or other areas outside headquarters normally require the employee to need to eat only lunch during the trip. In spite of that, claims for \$20 and \$25 for that lunch are not uncommon. We also considered the money that could be saved. That meant considering the direct cost of the payments made to the employees, and also the indirect cost of the extra processing by the travel offices, the payroll office and all the others named above.

We knew this decision would be greeted with enthusiasm by many, but greeted with disappointment by others. However, we hope that everyone will recognize the decision as one made for the best interest of all parties and factors considered, and as one that requires support from all employees.

.....

Q Why do we have training classes that teach us modern innovative ideas, but department policy doesn't allow us to use them, i.e. the writing class teaches us to be brief and to the point, but department procedure seems to be just the opposite. Why isn't there a uniform writing procedure for all state agencies?

*Sharon Johnson
Houston District*

A Thank you for your letter regarding department writing procedures. TxDOT does have a writing policy and procedure that encourages employees to write in a simple, straightforward manner. In the past, memos and letters often were bogged down with bureaucratic talk instead of simply addressing the issue. TxDOT's writing procedures are easily defined in the department's Communication Manual. Chapters 1 and 2 specifically address the questions you raised. As for all state agencies, there is not a uniform writing procedure. However, the trend is toward being direct and to the point.

.....

Got a question for Bill? Send it to "Ask Bill," c/o Transportation News, Main Office. We will forward it to the man himself and print your question and his response here. Include your name and work location. Transportation News will not respond to anonymous letters.

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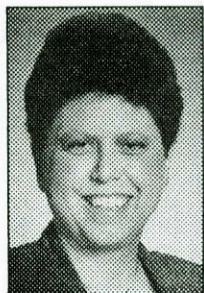
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A Day in the Life of ... George King

MAT supervisor treats employees like kings



Eloise Lundgren
Public Information Director

A lot of people would love to have George King for a boss.

"I don't chew people out," said King, who is a field area supervisor for the Materials and Tests Division's Houston office. "An employee goes in with one problem and gets chewed out, he comes out with two problems — he got chewed out and he still has the same problem."

King, who is a firm believer in the team philosophy, continued, "If one of my people fails, then I fail. If they succeed, then I succeed."

"There's no need to chew people out," he reiterated. "I always tell my folks, 'Okay, you made a mistake. Let's don't make it again.'"

That's pretty solid advice from someone who started with the department in 1962 as an inspector, worked his way up to lead inspector and then to his current position — all without ever having an accident.

"I've never had a day off work on account of an accident at TxDOT," King said proudly of his 33 accident-free years. And that's no mean feat because King has not only inspected materials in Texas, but also in several other states and three other countries — Africa, Korea and Japan.

King and his team of 20 employees, which includes both field and administrative personnel, are responsible for inspecting all the steel and concrete parts of highways and bridges — beams, girders, high mast light poles, traffic buttons, jiggle bars, signs, bolts and yes, even paint.

"Anything you see on highways we've either tested or inspected," he said proudly. "We make sure specifications are enforced and that everything does what the taxpayers are paying for."

When King and his inspectors are satisfied, they stamp each item so project engineers will know the materials are safe to use. "If they don't see the stamp, the stuff doesn't go in the ground or on a bridge," King explained.

It's not an easy task to walk around in George King's shoes — or any of the other department inspectors'. A lot of certification and coursework goes into making a materials inspector. For instance, King has a level II rating in radiographic and magnetic particle inspection and he's taken classes at the University of Texas in concrete inspection.

In addition to his professional coursework, he took 30 management classes to qualify him as a supervisor. After a day of following him around, I'd say George King knows his stuff — about steel, concrete and people.

And his inspectors agree.

Danny Leveritt, one of King's lead inspectors who I met at a steel plant, has the highest regard for his boss.

"He's really laid-back," Leveritt said of King. "Sometimes you just have to ask him how to do something, and he's always got the answer."

V.J. Pillai, lead paint inspector at the Fred Hartman Bridge project, traveled to Africa with King for seven months to inspect steel for the nearly completed bridge over the Houston Ship Channel. And, according to Pillai, the two of them made a pretty good team.

"Mr. King likes to tease me a lot," confessed Pillai, who is from India and is one of the most quiet, polite people I've ever met. "But he has been very supportive of me," Pillai added.

"I want V.J. to go back to school," King threw in. "He's got an engineering degree from India, but he needs about 50 hours to become a professional engineer in this country."

"I keep telling him, 'Go on back and get your degree and then you can be my boss,'" King said as Pillai smiled shyly. "That's what I always tell everybody about the department — at TxDOT, you can be and do anything."

King is not only supportive of his subordinates, but he also gives high marks to the Big Kahuna of the Materials and Tests Division — Katherine Hargett.

"She's turned everything around in this division, as far as I'm concerned," George asserted. "We work much better with the districts now. If any of the other field offices gets short, we help them out, and if we get short, then they help us out."

In fact, according to King, the Materials and Tests Division started the teamwork concept. "We're the cornerstone, you know," he said.

I told King and Leveritt that I played racquetball with Hargett every week. "When I get back to Austin, you want me to whip up on her for you?" I asked them. But they didn't, and they asked me to go easy on her. I didn't make any promises, though.

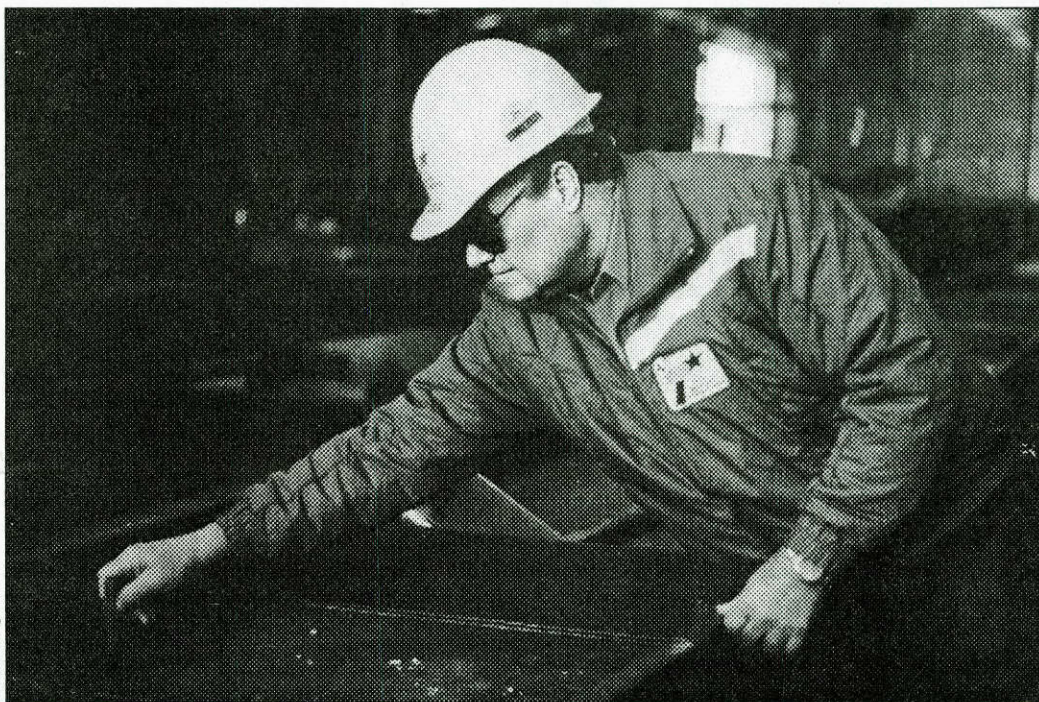
King, who was born in Mart and finished high school in Fort Worth, received an honorable discharge from the U.S. Marine Corps in 1956 in Houston. He worked at a Houston steel company for five and a half years before becoming one of the department's "few good men."

His wife, Marlene, is a secretary for the Texas Rangers (not the baseball team), and they have three sons, one daughter and nine grandchildren. King enjoys fishing and "raising a few cows near Franklin."

A self-described redneck, King appears to have only slowed down once in his life — in 1992, he had open-heart surgery.

"They did seven bypasses on me," King said. "The doctor said that was the most he had ever done."

I surmised that toughness must be a quality that runs in King's family. He told me that his 78-year-old mother was having open-



George King, field area supervisor for the Materials and Tests Division's Houston office, checks a field splice on a beam at a Houston steel plant.

heart surgery that very day. When he called to check on her, he was told she was in recovery and doing fine.

I asked him if he was sure he shouldn't be with her at a critical time like this, but he said simply, "I'd only be in the way, and when she came to, she'd want to know what was wrong — why wasn't I working?"

And his mother, like most mothers, is right. King is always on the move, as I quickly found out going from concrete factory to steel plant to construction project.

"They call me the working supervisor," he said. "I don't like to stay in the office; I like to be out and around."

Before I reluctantly left his company, I asked King one last question: If he could say anything at all to me, what would that be?

"You know," he said, "when I first heard you were coming to do a story on me, I was pretty nervous. But I think you're a pretty good old girl," he laughed as he gave me a hug.

Then he thought about my question for a minute, scratched his head, and said, "I've always enjoyed life, always enjoyed the positive side. I really haven't had many disappointments."

"I guess I've enjoyed traveling the most," he continued. "And I wouldn't have been able to do that if it hadn't been for TxDOT."

I think there may have been a few things TxDOT wouldn't have been able to do if it hadn't been for George King.

Drug tests for commercial drivers begin

Bonnie Adams
Associate Editor

Substance abuse can create life-or-death situations when drivers get behind the wheel. TxDOT's commercial drivers must now undergo drug testing to comply with Federal Highway Administration regulations. The new policy went into effect Jan. 1.

Cheryl Anderson, assistant director of the Employee Relations Section of the Human Resources Division, said that at least 50 percent of department commercial drivers will be randomly tested for drugs and 25 percent for alcohol each year. This includes urine and breath tests.

All employees were required to complete a certification form in December which identified commercial drivers in the department. Anderson said all commercial drivers cooperated in returning the forms. "Some non-commercial drivers who aren't affected by the testing initially refused to sign our certification form," Anderson said.

Besides those randomly chosen for testing, other commercial drivers may be tested for several reasons, including pre-employment testing; following on-the-job traffic accidents resulting in a fatality or a citation for a moving violation; and for reasonable cause.

Anderson said the last category is the most ambiguous. The decision to test an employee is based on a recommendation by the supervisor and substance control officer (SCO) trained in detecting substance abuse.

Anderson said supervisors and SCOs will use a checklist to help them determine if a commercial driver's behavior warrants testing. Testing will be based strictly on documented work performance problems and/or physical and/or behavioral indicators of substance use.

"Some supervisors may not be comfortable with this kind of situation; that's why we have the substance control officers and the Employee Relations Section. We're here as a resource for supervisors to answer questions or address any concerns they may have," Anderson said.

"Taking action isn't strictly on the frontline supervisor's shoulders," Anderson said. "The decision to conduct a reasonable cause test is ultimately up to the district engineer or division director."

Phil Dendy, director of the Workers' Compensation Section of the Occupational Safety Division, said the department pays \$37 for each pre-employment test. That includes the cost of specimen collection, lab testing and medical review officer (MRO) work. Dendy said the MRO must examine all results, negative or positive. The alcohol breath tests cost about \$20 each. Costs for specimen collection and testing are paid out of the occupational safety budget.

Pre-employment testing began in January. Dendy said about 40 such tests were administered in that month. Anyone testing

positive during pre-employment evaluation won't be hired.

"A big challenge in getting the specimen testing started has been finding collection sites in the more rural areas of the state. With a few exceptions, we now have sites in a 60-mile radius of department employees," Dendy said.

"A larger problem we had was locating breath alcohol equipment in rural areas," he said. The test equipment is expensive, and not every medical office or facility invests in it.

A vendor will perform all random collections on site throughout the state. Dendy said that this will be cost-effective because employees won't have to miss much work to travel for testing.

Southwest Medical and Rehabilitation Center, not TxDOT, will select commercial drivers for random testing, Dendy said. "They will be sure that the sample is statistically valid and that every commercial driver has an equal chance of being chosen for testing," Dendy said.

Random selection will be based on location, with all commercial drivers working at a selected location being tested.

"Once employees at a location are tested, the location goes back into the pool so it could be selected more than once a year," Dendy said. There's also a chance that the location won't be selected at all which makes the process a true random sample. He explained that there will be several random tests performed each year until the 50 percent mark is reached.

If a commercial driver tests positive for substance use, he will be removed from duty and mandatorily referred to the Employee Assistance Program and required to successfully complete the treatment.

After undergoing treatment, the employee will undergo a return-to-duty test and must test negative for drugs and have an alcohol concentration of less than .02 percent.

"Treatment is not certified to us until employees have met all their treatment requirements and that includes after-care," Anderson said. Drivers undergo a return-to-duty substance test before returning to driving and are then subject to follow-up testing for five years after returning to duty.

Waco chosen for first tests

Margaret Sanders
Waco District

Because of local flooding, Larry Sanders had already been at work for nearly 11 hours when he was told to return to the maintenance office early one Monday morning.

When he arrived, he learned that he and 11 co-workers in the Falls County maintenance crew had been selected as the department's first subjects for random drug and alcohol testing.

Sanders, a maintenance tech with the Falls County office, had the dubious honor of being TxDOT's first employee to be tested.

It was duty he volunteered for. "I wanted to set a good example for all the other guys," he joked. The truth, he later confessed, was that he just wanted to get it over with.

Even though a lot was riding on the results, Sanders said he wasn't nervous because he knew he didn't have anything to worry about. "I think it's a good program," he said, adding that he believes drivers should be clean and sober on the job.

The contractors tested 12 employees in Falls County before moving on to Waco where 27 in the McLennan Maintenance Section went through the routine. Guidelines cover only those operators with commercial driver's licenses, but many of these 39 employees felt that everyone in the department should be included. "It makes good sense to require operators of heavy equipment to be clean and sober," one said, "but if the department's policy is to be drug- and alcohol-free, we should all be held to the same standard."

Actually the current testing program is a result of federal law that went into effect last January, said district safety officer Jim Busby. At this time, the law applies only to organizations with more than 50 commercial drivers, but beginning next year, all commercial drivers will be subject to this federal testing program.

The two-part test involves standard breathalyzer test for alcohol and a urine test that screens for other drugs. What seemed to be a fairly simple routine held some surprises for most employees. For instance, very few could imagine how long 20 seconds really is when blowing at full strength into a breathalyzer. "When the guy told me to blow and blow hard, I thought there wouldn't be much to it," David Stimmel said, "but he kept telling me to blow harder. I thought I would pass out before he told me I was finished."

Some found they were more nervous about pouring the urine sample into two separate bottles — something the employee, not the test contractor, does — than about passing the test. Others worried that cold and allergy medications might skew the results.

Falls County Supervisor Johnny Blakley said he was caught by surprise when the testing contractor showed up at 7 a.m. "If we hadn't been operating on an emergency, the test wouldn't have created any problems at all for us, but it had been raining hard, and we had several trouble spots in the county," he said. About half the crew, including Sanders, had been out since 4 a.m. watching high water and moving department equipment from low-lying work sites. Blakley began calling people back into the office without being able to offer them an explanation.

The Falls County Section may have found its place in history, but that doesn't let the crew off the hook for future testing. "Random means just that," said Busby. "This program operates like a jury pool, with every section going right back in for each drawing. They could be tested again and again."

TxDOT inches toward metric deadline

Rich Rogers
Field Operations

The United States has been inching toward metrication since the days of our forefathers. When traveling outside this country, one notices that the rest of the world is decidedly metric. Only two other countries haven't jumped on the metric bandwagon. These countries, Myanmar and Liberia, are converting to metric.

Competitive pressure on the United States to conform is intense. The European Community, potentially the world's most powerful market, has specified that products with non-metric labels won't be permitted for sale. According to the Metric Guide for Federal Construction, Japan has identified the non-metric nature of U.S. products as a specific barrier to the importation of U.S. goods.

TxDOT and other state and local transportation agencies are working toward developing projects in metric units by Sept. 30, 1996, to comply with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) mandate. Texas Metric Construction Workshops are being conducted to help resolve issues that may arise during the transition to metric. TxDOT is sponsoring the sessions with the FHWA and the Associated General Contractors of Texas.

Metrics Through the Years

The metric system isn't new to the United States. Both Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams promoted the adoption of the metric system, but the federal government didn't take official action until 1866 when Congress legalized the use of the metric system.

The Metric Conversion Act of 1975 encouraged the increased use of metrics and provided a U.S. Metric Board to coordinate the voluntary conversion.

The FHWA developed a conversion plan and a timetable,

approved in 1991, to lead to complete metric implementation by Sept. 30, 1996.

To comply with requirements in the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988, the FHWA will authorize funding only for projects developed in metric units after Sept. 30, 1996.

Implementation of metric sign legends will not be required until after 1996 at the earliest. The FHWA will conduct a public education program and consider other appropriate measures before any nationally directed conversion to metric of highway sign legends.

Metrication Activities In the United States

According to the National Institute of Building Sciences, total U.S. government metric work could amount to \$50 billion annually by 1997, and as much as \$100 billion by 2000. The FHWA is one federal agency with an active metric construction program.

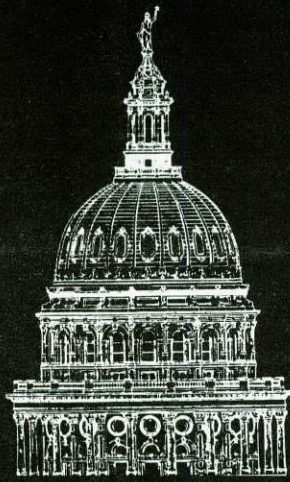
State and local highway construction programs tied to the FHWA's grant programs will be letting projects strictly in metric units after Sept. 30, 1996, unless a project exception is granted.

Why Convert?

If the United States wants to remain an international competitor, it must convert to metric. Metrication can produce benefits such as automatically improving both international acceptance and competitiveness. Metric units are also easier to use.

Waiting for national standards that are "hard" conversions which are being used by other countries will have benefits such as reduced construction costs, an improved ability to exchange information, a greater ability to share development costs, and if other states follow the same policy, contractors and consultants will be able to use the same equipment and procedures in other states and countries.

The
State Capitol
Building
is 94 meters tall
(309 feet).



Susan Hodgson, PIO

Rules for Conversion

"Soft" conversions, or metric equivalents, should be used until new national standards are established and accepted. "Hard" conversions, a new standard, should not be used if the benefit does not offset the cost. If there will not be any improvement in the marketability of the product, then a "soft" conversion should be used. For example, guard rail lengths should not be changed for the convenience of establishing a length that is easier to use in metric, since both Canada and Mexico use U.S. standards and the design standards for guard rail used in other countries are not compatible.

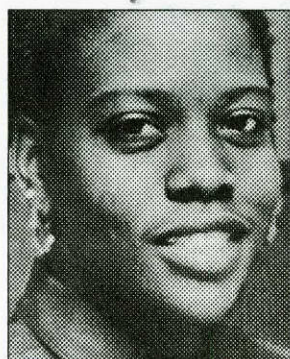
Metrication for the United States and agencies such as TxDOT is not an option. The longer the metrication effort is delayed, the greater the cost due to losses in the international market. The metrication effort does present several opportunities, especially if international standards can be developed.

Rich Rogers is TxDOT's metrication coordinator

Employees help make every day Earth Day

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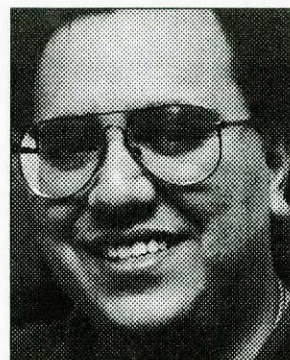
is not that hard and it does not cost us much more. It becomes a habit, like putting on your seat belts. It's second nature."



Patricia Jackson
Engineering Specialist
Design Division

"I started recycling in college back in 1990 when I had a roommate who did. We recycled glass, plastic and paper in our apartment. I now live in an apartment unit that does not provide recycling containers. However, I try to recycle whatever I can by separating plastic and paper and taking it to Randall's where they have a

recycling bin. At work I basically recycle paper."



Sam Reyes
Assistant Recycling Coordinator
General Services Division

"Ensuring everyone is informed about the recycling program is part of my job. It's a process of education. I've become more enlightened about recycling. I used to think recycling was just paper. For example, if you recycle one aluminum can, you save enough energy to run a TV set for three hours.

"You can make a difference, even in the small things. When I shop, I look for post-consumer content and things that can be reused. I buy cloth napkins rather than paper ones. I notice manufacturers are responding by reducing their packaging and I support them. I'm also thinking about setting aside an area in my new home for a compost pile."



Tonna Polk
EMS and Child Passenger Safety
Manager, Traffic Operations Division

"At home I use less paper goods such as paper towels, napkins, plates, cups and avoid using styrofoam cups. I recycle newspaper and aluminum cans at home and work. I recycle white paper at work. I have my car oil changed at facilities that recycle oil. I'm also more interested in preserving natural wonders such as Barton Creek."

(Background material for this article was provided by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group PIRG and Ecology Action, Inc.)

ISTEA funds catalyst for enhancements

Program funds broad range of non-traditional transportation-related activities

Rafael Power

Environmental Affairs Division

In communities across Texas, neglected or abandoned buildings, railroad depots, courthouses and other structures are being brought back to life. Hike-and-bike trails and scenic byways are being created. Landscaping, wetlands and beautification projects are embellishing existing sites.

The catalyst is an influx of federal funds provided by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) for transportation enhancements under the Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program.

Although only a small part of ISTEA, the program funds a broad range of non-traditional transportation-related activities, including

tion, the depot will house a visitors' center and an exhibit area depicting its own history, other historic transportation routes and railroads throughout the area.

The city of Dallas proposed enhancing an existing traditional system of transportation — the trolley. Dallas proposed restoring its historic trolley for its original purpose of mass transportation. According to the proposal, the project involves "construction of an extension of the McKinney Avenue Trolley into the West End District, a major restaurant and entertainment district located southwest of the trolley's present terminus at St. Paul Street and Ross Avenue; and to City Place, a mixed-use development northeast of the northern line turnaround."

One project is international in scope and will receive funding from the U.S. and Mexican governments.

The Roma International Suspension Bridge is the last of many such spans built across the Rio Grande in the early 20th century. This project will restore the 1928 span linking Roma in Starr County with the Mexican city of Miguel Alemán in the state of Tamaulipas. Once restored, the bridge will be operated as a pedestrian toll bridge.

Because of the bridge's importance to pedestrian traffic between both border cities, the Mexican government will contribute nearly \$300,000 to the project.

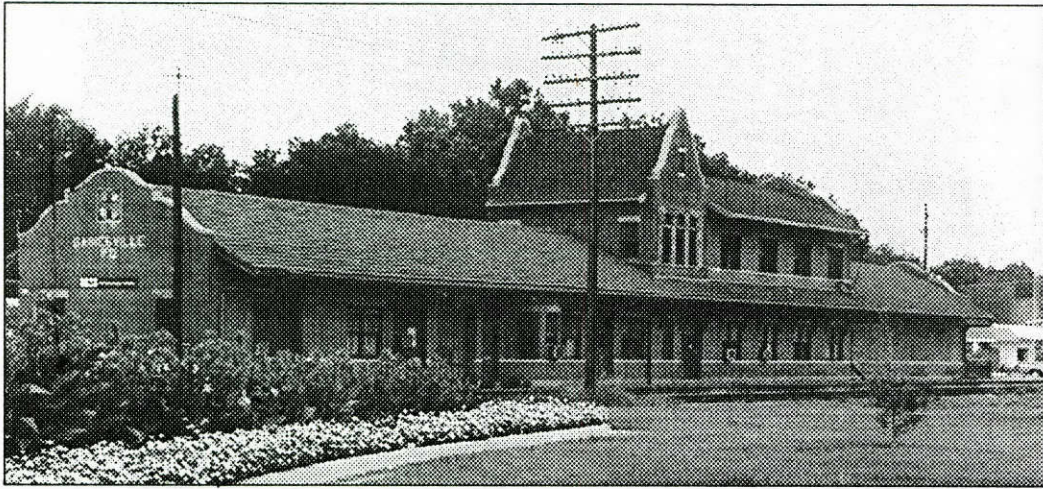
Not all projects are so apparently transportation related. The Old Irrigation Pumphouse in Hidalgo received \$720,000 for its restoration. Built in 1906, the pumphouse operated from 1912 to 1953 and provided water from the Rio Grande to irrigate this formerly barren area. The pumphouse is located next to Spur 241, near the McAllen-Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge.

The historic pumphouse is the last existing steam-powered irrigation pumping station in the United States. It will be restored as the Hidalgo Pumphouse Discovery and Heritage Center. This project was chosen partly for its strong economic and tourism potential. The commission granted both the Roma Bridge and the Hidalgo Pumphouse projects nearly \$2 million for both projects.

Another proposal receiving funding is the Texas State Cemetery in Austin. The cemetery, which has suffered from deterioration in recent years, will receive \$3.7 million for its restoration. Located at the corner of 7th and Comal streets, the cemetery is the final resting place for some of the state's most prominent figures.

Projects that not only enhance transportation but the environment as well are hike-and-bike trails. The abandoned Sunset (Southern Pacific Railroad) and Harrisburg (Union Pacific Railroad) rights of way will be converted into hike-and-bike trails linking neighborhoods and offering alternate routes and modes of transportation to the seriously congested downtown area of Houston. The Harrisburg Trail was partly used by the Mexican Army en route to the Battle of San Jacinto and later used for cattle drives to downtown Houston.

Although not all projects submitted are eligible or selected, nominators may resubmit eligible projects during later calls. Project nominators are encouraged to reapply during the next call scheduled for December 1995. Community involvement in the enhancement program will support continued preservation of much the state's historic structural and transportation heritage, encourage environmental interest and increase economic growth.



The Gainesville railroad depot as it looks today. Enhancement funding will be used to complete interior restoration as a visitors' center, transportation exhibit and offices for the Texoma Area Paratransit System, a tri-county regional public transportation system.

bicycle and pedestrian facilities, scenic and landscaping programs, historic preservation activities, and water-pollution control projects.

Texas will receive \$180 million in federal funds for transportation enhancement projects to be spent over a six-year period. To date, 196 projects from every district have been selected for funding, totalling about \$141 million.

A project nominated to the program is reviewed for eligibility by the Environmental Affairs Division and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for its relationship to surface transportation by function, impact or proximity. The project must also fall into one or more of 10 enhancement categories. Eligible projects are reviewed and evaluated by an interagency committee, the Transportation Enhancement Project Evaluation Committee. The Texas Transportation Commission then selects from proposed projects.

Many projects have a direct transportation lineage. The Santa Fe Railroad depot in Gainesville is such a project. The Mission Revival-style depot is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, as well as being a Registered Texas Historic Landmark. After rehabilita-

Journey Toward Excellence Awards to recognize quality efforts

Kim Vencill

Continuous Improvement Office

A call for nominations was recently sent to TxDOT's Senior Management Team for the newly-created Journey Toward Excellence Awards (JTEAs), which spotlight employees who have led the department on the road to quality. Award winners will be announced at the 1995 Transportation Conference. The deadline for submitting nominations is May 15.

The awards, introduced at the 1994 Transportation Conference Awards Banquet, were

created to recognize department employees' leadership in and commitment to TxDOT's quality initiative, which is concerned with meeting and exceeding customer needs and expectations at all levels of the department.

JTEAs will be presented in three categories. One award will recognize a district, division or special office's leadership and commitment to the quality initiative as a whole. Another award will be presented to a TxDOT team working with a sponsor to develop or improve a product, process or service using the quality process and principles.

The award presented to an individual recognizes a regular, full-time department

employee who is using quality processes and principles to develop or improve a product, process or service.

Management team members or team sponsors wishing to recognize employee leadership and efforts must submit applications by the deadline to the office of the executive director. A selection committee will assess all applications and make recommendations for recipients in each of the three categories to the executive director.

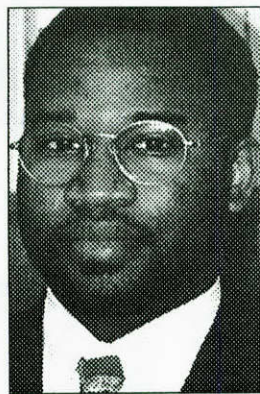
Applications detailing the awards' criteria and nomination process are available from the Continuous Improvement Office at 512.463.6640.

Allen, Hamilton recognized by US DOT

Victor Tsai
Houston District

Only engineers could go to Washington, D.C. and come away thinking the most interesting thing was the efficiency of the subway and the transportation system. But to TxDOT employees Larry Allen and Tyrone Hamilton, efficient traffic movement is a thing of beauty.

Allen and Hamilton were in the nation's capitol as part of a group of Texas Southern University students and professors recognized for outstanding achievement. Hamilton is pursuing a master's of science in transportation planning and management at TSU; Allen graduated with the same degree in December.



Tyrone Hamilton

The awards are given by the University Transportation Centers Program, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Allen, 36, was named Student of the Year in Region VI, the southwest region that includes TSU, the University of Texas at Austin and Texas

A&M. Hamilton, 28, received one of two full scholarships for \$9,000 awarded in a research paper competition. Allen was recognized at the Transportation Research Board Banquet in Washington D.C. Jan. 26.

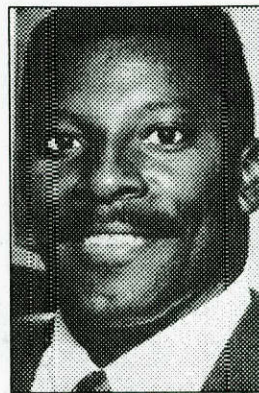
Hamilton, who works in the Houston District transportation management section, titled his prize-winning paper "Smart Cars, Smart Highways and Smart Drivers." He earned his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Southern University A&M in Baton Rouge, La. and has worked for TxDOT since last summer. His enthusiasm for Intelligent Vehicle Highway Systems shows in his work and at school.

"Once the traffic management system is operational, we'll be able to manage traffic movements more effectively," he says, referring to the upcoming opening of the traffic control center. "I think Houston really missed out on the opportunity to have monorail in 1980. The federal government paid 80 percent of the project cost, but now the teeming issues in support of the monorail system have been eroded."

It's obvious Hamilton is a supporter of public transportation when he talks about the Washington, D.C. subway. "That was my first time going to Washington, D.C. and I was very impressed with the clean and efficient subway system," he said. "Subway, riders can travel from one end of town to the other in only 15 minutes. Unfortunately,

here in Houston, subways aren't necessarily a transportation option because our soils are weak and the water table is high."

Hamilton met Allen, not at TSU, but playing basketball, which is another common



Larry Allen

interest besides transportation. Allen received his bachelor's of science in construction management from the University of Houston and has been working at TxDOT more than 10 years. When he decided to pursue an advanced degree, it was by accident that he wound up in transportation planning. He was taking classes while on TSU law school's waiting list when he saw some interesting titles under the transportation management program in the class schedule.

"I was excited to be a part of the transportation program at TSU because they stressed growth, communication skills and encouraged making contributions in the transportation arena," he said. Allen used TxDOT's Education Assistance Program to attend school, and will attend commencement ceremonies in May.

TxDOT photog wins top cable awards

James Black
Dallas District

TxDOT photographer Michael Amador is the winner of three television programming awards.

Amador, who recently joined the Travel and Information Division from the Dallas District, was the force behind "Beyond the Roadway," a 30-minute program on Dallas' cable access channels. Seen by more than 130,000 cable subscribers during its April 1994 inception, "Beyond the Roadway" covered TxDOT activities in the Dallas District.

In September 1994, the show won two cable access programming trophies at the Seventh Annual Crystal Awards, recognizing the best in Dallas' cable access programming.

Amador's first trophy came in the category of First Effort. "Beyond the Roadway" was honored for outstanding achievement in a new cable access program.

"Beyond the Roadway" also won the night's most coveted prize, the 1994 Jean Smalling Award for Dallas' Best. Named in memory of the former cable access trustee, the Jean Smalling Award is the ceremony's highest

honor, given each year to the best overall program produced for Cable Access of Dallas. Out of a field of more than 130 entries, Amador claimed the event's biggest prize.

In doing so, he also made Dallas programming history.

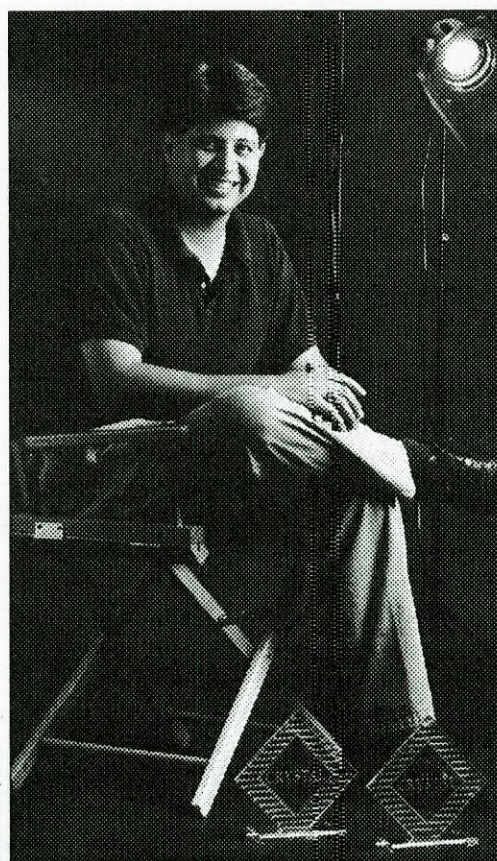
"This was the first time that a First Effort program won the overall award," said Regina Huckaba, public information coordinator with Cable Access of Dallas. "It was truly a first."

Judges based their decisions on four criteria: technical quality, clarity, imaginative use of the medium and the program's overall contribution to the welfare of North Texas residents. In each area, "Beyond the Roadway" grabbed high marks.

"Michael definitely went far beyond in helping viewers visualize and grasp specific information," said Cable Access membership coordinator Beth McKee. "I think that's a credit to his planning for each show."

In April, Amador returns to Dallas to accept a third award. "Beyond the Roadway" won second place in the Texas Media Awards and will be recognized during a ceremony April 5.

A 1990 University of North Texas graduate, Amador spent years learning the mechanics of



Michael Amador

radio and television production. Working for the Dallas District's public information office from May 1992 to March 1995, he and fellow staff members began putting his television studies to work.

"We knew we could use cable access facilities, but no one

knew how to actually produce a show," Amador said. "The hardest task was figuring out the format. I watched every news show I could: '60 Minutes,' 'Dateline,' 'Prime Time Live.' I found elements in those shows that I could incorporate into our show."

The first broadcast of "Beyond the Roadway" bears similarities to its more famous counterparts, with a format of pre-taped features introduced by an in-studio host. Initial stories showcased the efforts of the Dallas District's Courtesy Patrol, Texas 190 and the use of electronic message signs to improve freeway mobility.

"I wanted to make viewers aware of what TxDOT does to help people and our community. That's where the title comes from," Amador said. "I wanted to go beyond the idea that all we do is build roads."

Employees volunteer to aid others

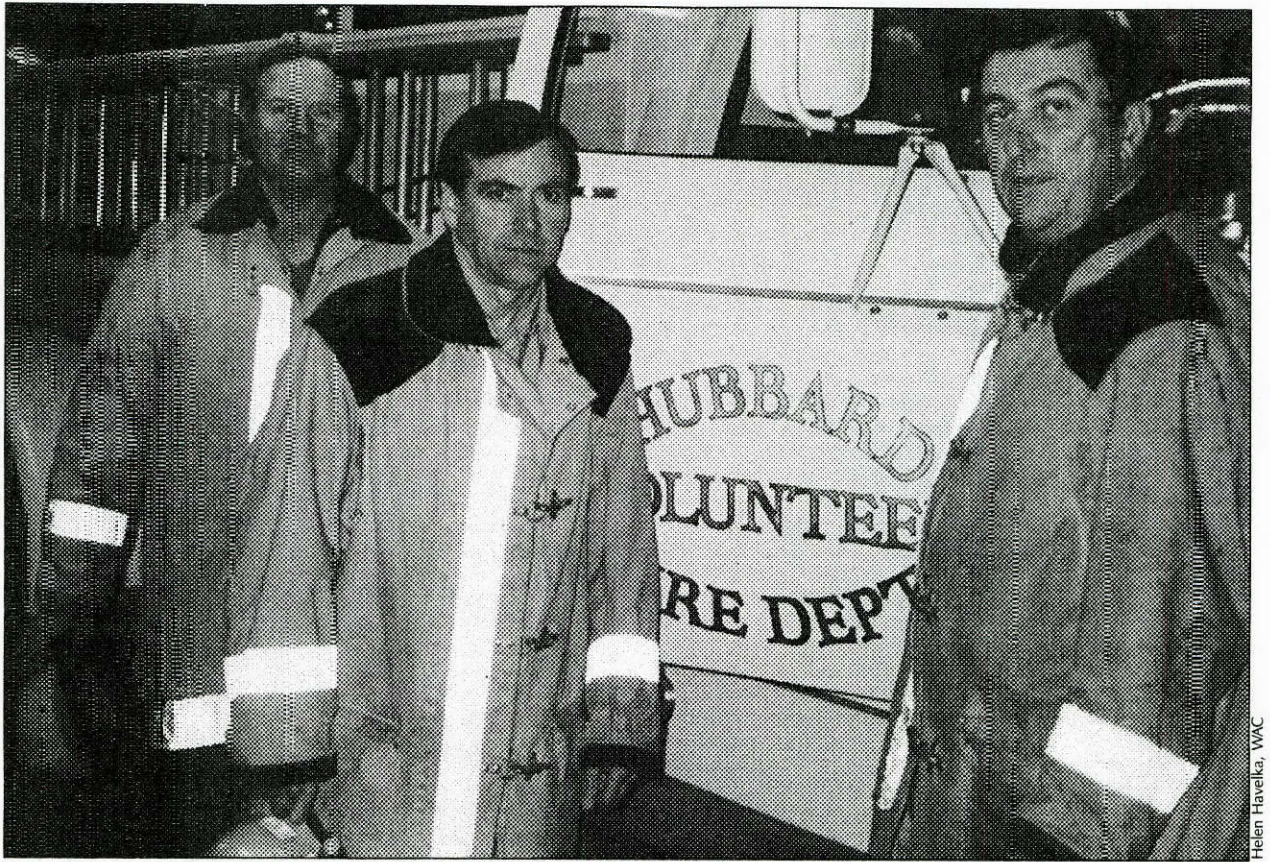
National Volunteer Week spotlights those lending a helping hand

Meredith Whitten
Associate Editor

As state employees, TxDOT's workers spend their workdays serving the citizens of Texas. But for many TxDOT employees, helping others doesn't end when the five o'clock whistle blows. Department employees around the state are active in their communities, volunteering their extra time to better the lives of others.

The methods of volunteering vary as much as the employees themselves: Our co-workers coach Little League, grocery shop for elderly people, deliver Meals on Wheels, work with abused children, tend to animals at the Humane Society and much more. But despite their diverse activities, they cited a common reason for volunteering: the desire to help others and give something back to their communities.

April 23-29 is National Volunteer Week, and although we take this time to salute them, the spirit of these employees' deeds shines brightly year-round.



Roy Jennings, Glenn Kuykendall and Wil Geltmeier serve in the Hubbard Volunteer Fire Department. Geltmeier estimates they face approximately 90 fires a year. Jennings and Geltmeier work in the Waco District and Kuykendall works in the Corsicana Area Office in the Dallas District.

When there's a fire in Hubbard, chances are one of the firefighters who responds will be a TxDOT employee. Waco District employees **Wil Geltmeier**, radio shop supervisor, and **Roy Jennings**, traffic signal maintenance technician, and Dallas District employee **Glenn Kuykendall**, Corsicana area office manager, all serve in Hubbard's volunteer fire department. Their services may be needed three times a week or three times a month, but regardless of the number of fires — Geltmeier estimates there are about 90 a year — these employees react quickly when called upon.

Geltmeier said he started volunteering because "somebody's got to do it. If everybody sat back and waited for someone else, it would never get done." As the training officer, he oversees the 22-person department's monthly training drills, which emphasize air tanks, hazardous materials, fire apparatus handling and first aid. Geltmeier also is a persuasive recruiter. "Every department needs the extra help. Some departments in Hill County only have nine people. It takes a person who wants to help his community, his friends and his neighbors. If you're talking to that kind of person, you don't have that hard a job convincing people to volunteer."

In fact, Jennings said he started volunteering after Geltmeier talked him into it. "I couldn't say, 'I'll let someone else do it,'" Jennings said. Jennings said he also volunteers because he would want someone to be there if he was in need. "Put yourself in the situation where you need help and no one shows up. It's a weird feeling," Jennings said. Jennings and Geltmeier also volunteer at southern Hill County's ambulance service in Hubbard. Kuykendall, whose father was a fireman, said "knowing that if there is a fire it might be your mother's house or your neighbor's house or even your own home" was just one reason he volunteered.

"We'd really miss the fire department if we had to call Hillsboro every time there was a fire," he said. Hillsboro might be glad that Hubbard does have a fire department. When the Hill County courthouse burned on New Year's Day 1993 (see March '95 *Transportation News*), several Hubbard firefighters were there fighting the fire. "That night I was talking to the chief of police and I told him we hadn't had a call in almost a month. Ten minutes later the call came that the courthouse was on fire," Geltmeier said.

As a native of the area, Geltmeier said seeing the lunging flames struck a personal note. "As I came around the corner on (Texas) 171

I could see a deep glow coming through the fog," he said. "About that time the bell tower fell in. That's a sight I'll never forget."

For the past two years, tax season has been unusually busy for **Karin Faltynek**, training accounts technician in the Human Resources Division. Three nights a week, Faltynek volunteers for the Internal Revenue Service's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

As a VITA volunteer, she assists low income Austin residents with their tax returns. The program has sites throughout the Austin area, and Karin coordinates the Carver Library site, where she estimates she has helped about 100 people. Karin said she decided to help with the program because she has been on the receiving end of VITA.

"When I was overseas with my family in the military, it really helped," she said. "I thought if I could ever repay them, I would. I have a skill and I see a need where that skill can be put to use." Since she has been in the thick of tax season lately, Faltynek has cut back on her other volunteer endeavors. She teaches CPR courses for the American Red Cross, delivers for Meals on Wheels and works at the Humane Society.

Faltynek said she enjoys the personal contact and the reward of seeing others benefiting from what she does. "It's important to get a satisfaction that you may not get from your job," she said. "Volunteering is not like a job where you get a paycheck or a financial reward. There's a people reward, too."

One evening a week, **Pam Swain** leaves her job as administrative technician in the Public Information Office and heads to Austin's Center for Battered Women Outreach, where she counsels children of abused women. Swain said she teaches the kids, who range from 9 to 12 years old, to take a different path than the violent ones they have known. She instills self-confidence in them by encouraging them to set goals and not succumb to peer pressure.

Although she signed up to work at the center for a social work course she was taking, Swain found that she was getting more than college credit for her efforts. "I really like helping people," she said. "There are a lot of people who aren't as fortunate as I am and they need help. I think if we're able to help them, we should."

Kenneth Brooks, right of way agent in Jasper, recently was honored as Young Person of the Year by the Jasper Chamber of Commerce for his volunteer efforts. As chairperson of the Lone Star Youth Council, Brooks is overseeing the construction of a local youth center. The center will provide activities for elementary through college students after school, including tutoring; it also will serve as a place for older citizens to get together daily for activities and lunch.

With the average 30 hours per week — including lunch hours — Brooks spends with the Youth Council he has had to limit one of his other volunteering passions: the Jasper Youth Baseball Association. In fact, he admits he has "stretched myself so I don't have any time."

Brooks grew up in the Jasper area, and though he left to attend Southwestern Louisiana University on a baseball scholarship, he returned determined to give something back to the community. "I wanted to help the community and the youth of Jasper," Brooks said. As the father of two children — Kendrick and Kimberly — he sees his endeavors as a way to keep "youth involved year-round and off the streets."

He said volunteering is important, even if you think the results don't directly affect you. "If everyone would get involved," he said, "there would always be someone there for others that need help."

...

When the annual Girl Scouts cookie sale begins, engineering technician **Peggy Bledsoe** can be found right in the middle of it. As Girl Scouts Service Unit Manager for Lampasas County, Bledsoe coordinates the activities and events — including the infamous cookie sales — of more than 100 girls in the county.

Bledsoe, who works in the Lampasas Area Office in the Brownwood District, started working with Girl Scouts more than five years ago as a troop leader. And, although she was never a scout herself, she got involved because of her daughter, who is a Cadette Girl Scout. Bledsoe said having a personal interest in what you do makes volunteering more rewarding.

"If there's a particular field that interests you, jump into that, you'll have more fun," she said. She added that volunteering benefits both those who receive help and those who give it. "We're so busy in our lives," she said. "We need to give something back to the community. And volunteering is a way to do that. Volunteering expands your horizons."

Besides working as a traffic safety specialist in the Fort Worth District and taking care of her two small children, **Jackie White** finds time to volunteer an average of 20 hours per week. On week-ends she can be found teaching Bible class to 3-year-olds or on the ball field coaching T-ball to 5- and 6-year-olds. In addition to chasing balls and showing kids which way to run, White says her job as coach also involves "blowing noses and cuddling kids."

Also, two nights a week, White stocks shelves, cleans cans and packages food at her church's community food pantry. Her husband, **Richard White**, a construction inspector in the Fort Worth District, also works at the food pantry a couple of nights each week.

White said she started volunteering because "I wanted to set a good example for my kids." She also genuinely enjoys her volunteer work, something she feels is essential if you are going to help others. "If you volunteer just to volunteer, you're not going to enjoy your work very much," she said. "Volunteer to do something you like because you'll enjoy doing it much more."

...

Once a week, **Tom Beckendorf**, engineering technician in the Atlanta District, spends his lunch hour at Atlanta Primary School participating in the Partners in Reading program. As a volunteer, he assists second-grade students who have problems reading. Usually he listens to the students read, but sometimes he reads to them.

Beckendorf, who has two young children, said he saw an ad in the paper for the program and decided to volunteer because "it was a good way to get involved and help the kids out." He said the students have responded well to the program even though it means they sacrifice half of one lunch hour each week. And even though he gives up a lunch hour a week as well, Beckendorf said "it's satisfying knowing that I may play a part in helping a child's life."

The program runs from mid-October until the end of the school year. About 40 people from the community participate, including seven employees from the district's design section and two from the accounting section, including **Teresa Willis, Deborah Crenshaw, Chris Hehr, Lance Simmons, Deann Simmons, Paul Wong, Susan Noble and Angie McCasland**.

Beckendorf said he views the time he spends volunteering as an investment in the future. "An hour doesn't seem like a lot, but not only are you helping that child to read, you have the potential of helping the community as that child gets older. If you can keep these kids from dropping out of school later on, then they can give something back. The opportunity to change some young kid's life is there."

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National Volunteer Week is sponsored by the Points of Light Foundation to recognize those who help others and to call attention to the need for more involvement. For more information on volunteering opportunities in Texas, contact the Governor's Office's Community Leadership and Volunteer Services at 800.839.5323.

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Thanks to the public information officers in the Atlanta, Brownwood, Fort Worth and Waco districts for their assistance with this article.



Marcus Sandifer, ATL

Tom Beckendorf, engineering technician in Atlanta, listens to Regis Hillmon, a second-grader at Atlanta Primary School, read. Beckendorf and several other Atlanta District employees participate in the Partners in Reading Program.

State Use Program teams TxDOT, disabled

Bonnie Adams
Associate Editor

When Dorothy Plowman worked in the San Angelo District in the 1970s, she discovered a valuable resource that would one day provide the work force TxDOT depends on for a variety of services.

“TxDOT employs 2,300 special Texans in the program. It not only helps people with disabilities, but it also helps the department.”

Dorothy Plowman
State Use Program coordinator

employs 2,300 special Texans in the program. It not only helps people with disabilities, but it also helps the department,” said Plowman, State Use Program coordinator since 1993.

TIBH is a nonprofit organization that works as a liaison to provide workers who perform highway and building maintenance, clerical support and other contract services for the department. Plowman said services must be provided within 10 percent of the fair market price for comparable labor.

The figures, however, don't reveal the human side of this success story, nor the intangible benefits TxDOT, its employees and State Use workers receive in their working relationship.

“The positive hardworking attitude of

This idea resulted in the department joining forces with Texas Industries for the Blind and Handicapped (TIBH) to employ special Texans. TxDOT launched its State Use Program in 1978, and since then it has become the leading state agency in Texas and the country for contracted employment of disabled workers.

TxDOT provided \$14 million in wages or 64 percent of the state total of \$22.4 million paid to the State Use Program in 1994. “TxDOT alone

these individuals is evident in the results of their work,” said El Paso District Engineer Mary May. “They take pride in the tasks they perform and are always friendly and willing to lend a helping hand.”

Last year, Plowman visited all 25 districts to spread the word about the State Use Program and its benefits. Her message fell on receptive ears, and districts embraced the program just as the department itself has done.

Plowman said that State Use workers come from community rehabilitation programs statewide, and work close to home. Workers perform jobs on a continuing basis so they can become comfortable and proficient in their work. The Construction and Maintenance Division is responsible for implementing the program.

Larger districts such as Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston made strong use of the program, each purchasing \$1 million to \$1.8 million in services in 1994. But smaller districts also relied heavily on the program. The Lubbock District, for example, spent \$1.1 million dollars in contract services in 1994.

“I think it's a great program. We've had really good success with it,” said Ann Finley, Lubbock District contract administrator. “The State Use employees are always so excited to work, to go the extra mile.”

New jobs are being found for workers to perform. Finley said workers started roadway litter barrel pickup in November. “We were able to free up TxDOT employees who were making those runs,” Finley said. She said TxDOT saves money by having the contract service perform such jobs.

“In the El Paso District, these workers perform specialized duties and functions necessary for the continuous operations of the department, releasing FTEs for use in other areas,” May said.

State Use employees have tackled several landscape maintenance projects in the Lubbock District. “They have taken on a very

large amount of work,” said Finley. Workers mow and maintain tracts of up to 100 acres.

“I really try to talk to every maintenance supervisor in the district and get what services they want,” Finley said.

Since the program is decentralized, districts and divisions can tailor it to their own needs and perform the necessary contract management. “We want the district engineer to have the flexibility to sign these contracts in the field so they won't have to come to Austin,” Plowman said. She simply tries to facilitate the program.

Andrea Nelson of the Corpus Christi District likes being able to customize contracts to the district's needs. The district has written specific contracts for State Use workers to perform lawn service and housekeeping jobs.

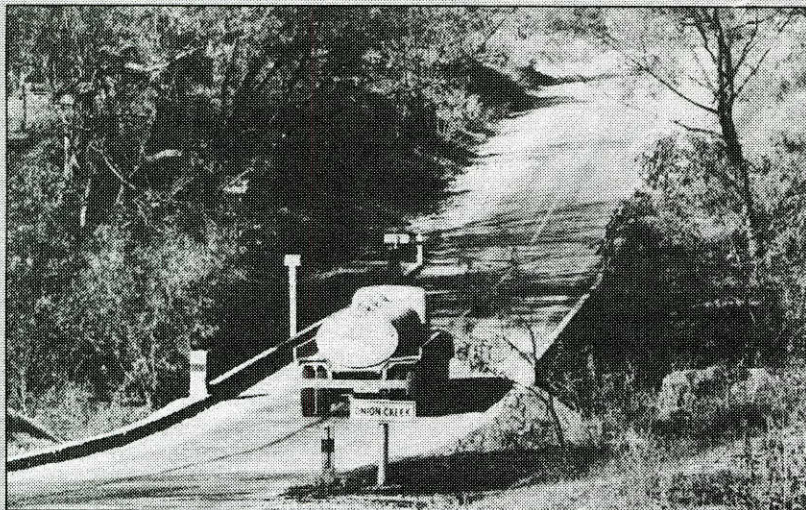
“We didn't want the job descriptions to be ambiguous. This gives the workers consistency. Everybody needs to have a certain amount of consistency in their job,” Nelson said.

Plowman credits the program's success to district, division and department support, and the workers themselves. “I have been able to meet a lot of the TxDOT employees who work with these people and it has a very positive impact on both sides,” she said.

Nelson agreed. “It gives our employees a greater awareness of people with special needs and they're people just like we are,” she said. “We need to have involvement with the community. If we work hard together, we can fulfill that goal.”

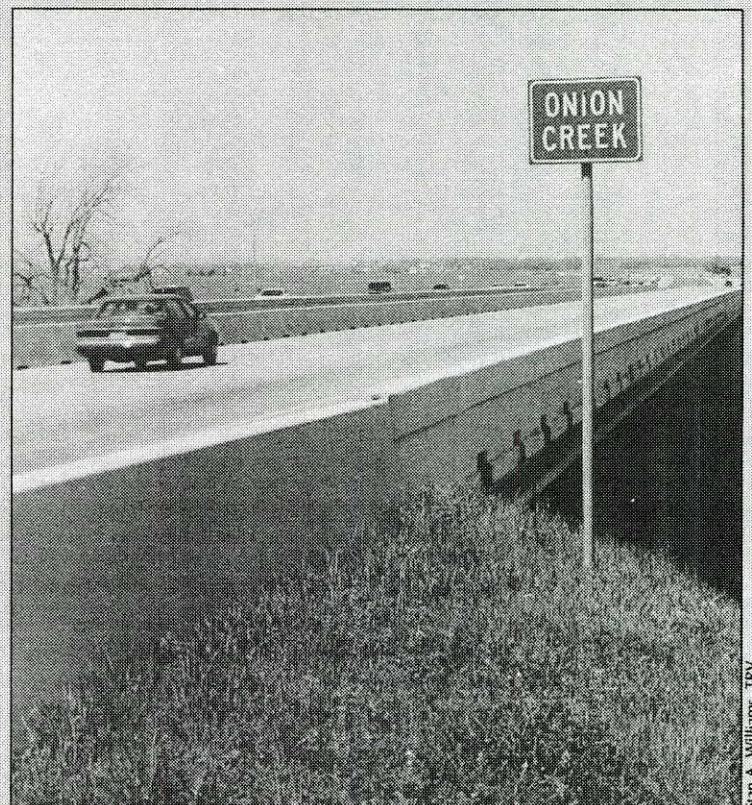
Another aspect of the State Use Program is the products available through TIBH. TxDOT is one state agency that purchases products produced by blind and disabled Texans. In 1994, the department spent \$1.5 million on products ranging from pens to furniture. This amount is roughly 14 percent of last year's statewide total of \$11.4 million in products.

Then & Now



The Onion Creek crossing on Texas 71 east of Del Valle has changed drastically over the years. Widening the two-lane undivided road to a four-lane divided road was necessitated by the rapid growth of the area, which is in the southeastern Austin District.

Compiled by Anne Cook, TRV Photo Librarian



San A. Williams, TRV

Birthday gift becomes life-long hobby

Anita Steans
San Angelo District

Holy pigeon!

That's what Donald Peterson screams when one of his birds wins a race.

Peterson, an engineering assistant in the San Angelo District, got into raising pigeons when he received a pair from his grandmother on his ninth birthday. He kept them in a box in his house in Managua, Nicaragua. When his family moved to Mexico City, Peterson was forced to give his pigeons away.

In his new hometown, Peterson watched hundreds of pigeons land on the roofs of skyscrapers. One day he discovered a little "apartment" on the top of a building. He watched as birds landed on a ramp and entered their loft. The owner of the loft explained how he trained the birds for racing. Peterson was fascinated.

Without his parents' knowledge, Peterson bought a pair of pigeons and built a loft atop his house. Every morning and evening he would retreat to the roof to care for his birds.

Several years later, Peterson moved to San Luis Potosi, Mexico, and built another loft. By then his flock had grown to eight. When a lost bird landed at his loft, Peterson used the identifying number band on the bird's leg to find its owner, who invited him to join a racing club. When he was 14, Peterson entered his first race, taking second place in his category. He was hooked.

Although he had to leave his pigeons behind, Peterson moved back to the United States, where he acquired more pigeons. He joined two clubs and started racing again. His birds took first

place during the young-bird racing season in both clubs.

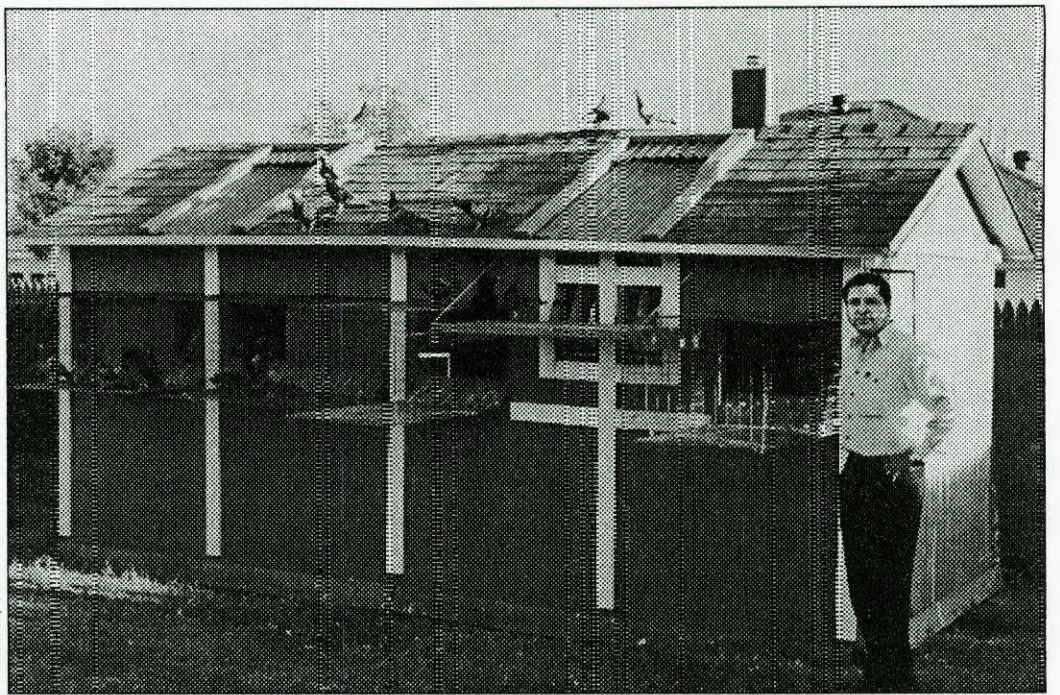
Peterson joined TxDOT in 1986 in Del Rio. There were no racing clubs nearby, but he continued to breed birds and care for them. In 1989, he transferred to San Angelo and was pleasantly surprised to discover the San Angelo Racing Club. He joined and registered 30 birds.

Breeding and training racing birds is demanding. Owners provide well-balanced meals, clean drinking water, vitamins, medication, vaccinations, bath water, a clean loft and other things to keep their flocks happy.

When a pigeon is about four days old, its leg is banded with a permanent number issued by the American Racing Pigeon Union. No bird can enter a race without this number. After three or four weeks, babies are placed in a loft with other birds of about the same age. About a week later, the birds are placed on a landing ramp on the loft. At this stage they will only flap their wings and learn how to get inside the loft. Two weeks later, the birds are confident enough to fly in circles around the loft. They continue this confidence-building process for about a month.

When 20 to 30 birds are placed outside the loft, they learn to fly in a flock, usually 30 to 40 minutes at a time, extending their distance from the loft each time. Within a few weeks, they fly around the city. Now they are ready to be trained for racing. Peterson trains his pigeons in graduated distances of 10-mile increments, up to 50 miles, twice a week, for about a month before the first club race begins.

About a week before a race, Peterson adjusts his pigeon's



feeding regimen, adding more protein to the diets of the birds entering short races and more starch to those entering long races. Peterson defines a short race as 100 to 300 miles.

Racers are registered with a numbered race band or rubber counter mark, then released simultaneously. When released, they circle to get their bearings, then head for their home loft.

Owners have a time clock to record when their pigeon arrives. When a pigeon returns home, the numbered race band or rubber counter mark is immediately removed from its leg and inserted in the clock, which records the exact time the pigeon arrived. Clocks are turned in at racing headquarters to determine the winner. Racers are judged on the fastest speed, based on yards per minute (ypm) to the home loft. The longest race Peterson has entered is a 600-mile race from Tucson, Ariz., where he captured first place.

Pigeon racing will probably

Donald Peterson, San Angelo District engineering assistant, with his pigeon loft, which serves as a home to 60 racing pigeons.

never overtake football in the hearts of Americans, but in 1992, 35 states had pigeon clubs with a total membership of nearly 14,000. Sometimes the top prize in a race is an automobile. In the 1993 Cowtown Futurity Race in Fort Worth, one of several races Peterson enters annually, the winner received a new pickup.

Peterson admits, however, that he is not into the sport for money. He receives special gratification when his neighbors tell him how much they enjoy watching his birds.

Most fanciers fly about 30 birds per race, but they may own many more. Peterson has 60 birds, and he knows most of them by name.

Peterson said, "Some people raise cats, dogs, or horses for pleasure. I happen to raise pigeons. And it all started with Grandma."

German shepherd steals hearts of Fort Worth motorists

Jodi Hodges
Fort Worth District

We've all seen a dog roaming along the Interstate right of way at one time or another and worried that it may wander into traffic and get killed. But, a few miles later, we forget that we saw the dog and re-enter our own worlds.

In west Fort Worth, motorists and business owners couldn't forget about a stray German shepherd who had made her home at the interchange of Texas 183 and I-30. For the past six months, motorists became accustomed to seeing Island Girl, named for her median home, and would look for her as they drove by the interchange.

Fort Worth District safety officer Howard Hill, who monitors Tarrant County freeways for safety and accidents, first noticed Island Girl last November.

"The first time I saw her my concern was, 'Well, here is another dog who is going to get killed.' But then, I just started watching for her and started seeing food and stuff left for her," said Hill, an avid dog lover with three German shepherds of his own.

Nearby home and business owners began leaving bags of dog food, bowls of water and even a dog house for Island Girl. But, caring for her grew into fear — fear that she may get killed on one of the numerous busy freeways and arterial roads.

Since Island Girl would not let anyone come near her, many theories developed: She had been abused, she was dumped at the interchange and was waiting for her owners to return, or was just wild and decided that the interchange made a good home.

Area residents became so attached to Island Girl that they repeatedly asked local animal control and shelter agencies to catch her so that she could go to a good home, far removed from busy traffic. When initial pleas went unanswered, residents began contacting the media and asking others Hill and for help.

"They began calling me to see if there was anything I could do. I told them that the dog being on the right of way was really not a problem," said Hill. "And I had seen Island Girl enough that I knew she would be alright because she was traffic smart. She would look both ways (before crossing) — better than a kid."

Please see Dog, page 13

Finding homes for '45-mph couch potatoes'

Underwood matches families, retired racing greyhounds

Meredith Whitten
Associate Editor

One afternoon, Jon Underwood stopped by a pet store to pick up some dog food for his 13-year-old Labrador/German shepherd mix, Annie. But when he left the store, he had more than a couple of cans of Alpo.

Underwood, who is director of TxDOT's Research and Technology Transfer Office, had adopted Genie, a retired racing greyhound, after talking to members from Greyhound Pets of America (GPA) in the store.

"We got to talking to them, and wound up filling out an adoption paper for one. We got the first one, and the rest is history."

Three years later, Underwood owns five

greyhounds and also is president of Austin's chapter of GPA, a national nonprofit group dedicated to finding homes for retired racing greyhounds.

The organization's four Texas chapters get their dogs from the more than 500 greyhound breeders or trainers in the Texas Greyhound Association. These breeders notify GPA when they have dogs that have retired or didn't make it on the track. Members fetch the dogs, and begin finding homes for them.

Nationwide last year, the organization placed about 5,000 dogs. Underwood said his chapter, which primarily serves Central Texas, has placed about 400 dogs in homes in the past three years. However, he stressed that that's just the tip of the iceberg.

"That's not anywhere near all the dogs that are available," he said, estimating that about 20,000 greyhounds are available for adoption each year. Most of the dogs are euthanized after they retire from racing —

usually between the ages of 2 and 4 — because feed bills and vet bills are too costly for the breeders. "So, if there's not someone there like our group to take them, they're put down," Underwood said.

The group charges a \$100 adoption fee, which covers spaying or neutering, one year's shots, a heartworm check and cleaning the dog's teeth, which deteriorate from the raw-meat diet they consume while training. While the organization's goal is finding a permanent home for the

dogs, GPA also places dogs in foster homes, where they adapt to life outside of the track.

Most of the dogs have been pampered by their trainers, but need time to adjust to life away from racing.

"When they come in from the track they don't know anything but racing. They tend to go into a little bit of a depression. And for three or four days they stay to themselves," Underwood said. But once the dogs adjust, they become friends for life.

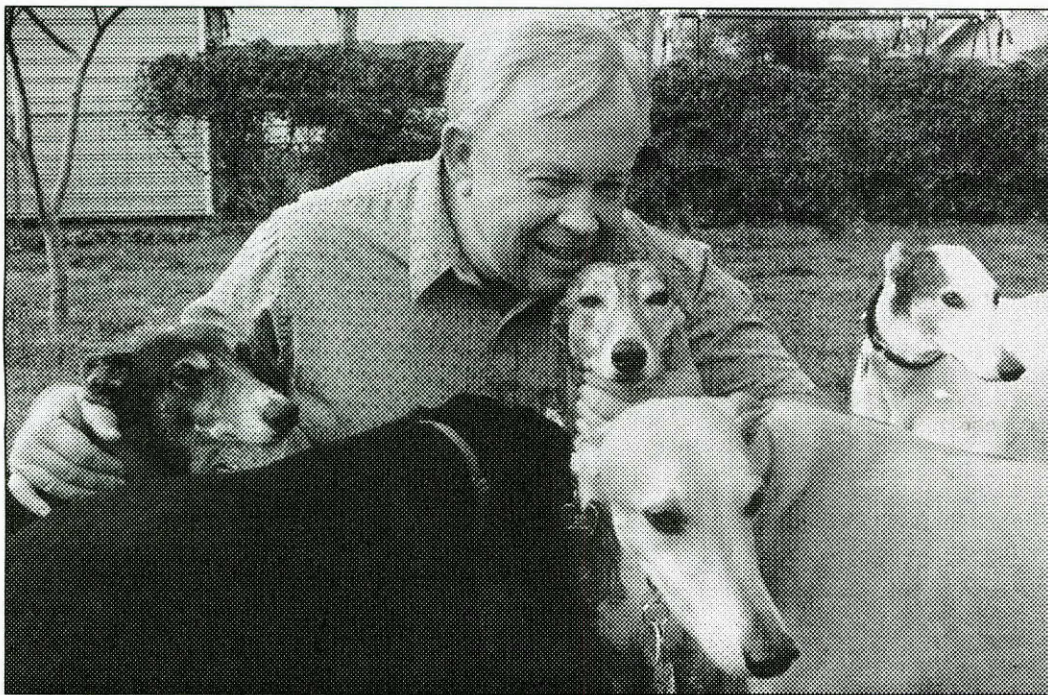
Before his trip to the pet store, Underwood knew little about greyhounds. "I'd been to the greyhound races, but, like most people, I had just seen them through the window down on the track. But when we went to the pet store, we saw them up close and got very interested."

On the average, greyhounds live to be about 12-14 years old, and weigh between 60-75 pounds. Underwood said their even temper, intelligence and playfulness make them good pets. They're calm, laid-back, and generally indoor dogs. Underwood refers to greyhounds as "45-mile-per-hour couch potatoes" because 45 mph is their top speed and "they're couch potatoes — they'll sleep on the couch about 80 percent of the time if you let them," he said.

In his spare time, Underwood and some of the 200 other members in his chapter of GPA appear with their dogs at local pet stores, fairs and other events, educating people about greyhounds and signing them up to adopt the dogs.

"Unless you know a breeder or a trainer, the only way you can get a greyhound is through an adoption group," he said. "Our program is picking up steam. Last year, we had more dogs adopted than ever before and this year is starting out on record pace. Hopefully we'll continue to do well."

Underwood shares what he's learned from owning greyhounds: "You get a grown dog; you don't have to go through puppy training — they're housebroken when they come in. More importantly, you get a good, healthy dog that has unconditional love."



Gay Shackelford, TRV

When RTT Director Jon Underwood leaves the office, he goes home to the wagging tails of his five greyhounds (left to right), Genie, Ebony, Fame, Todd and Dodger. Underwood is president of the Austin chapter of Greyhound Pets of America.

TxDOT sick-leave pool a boon to those in need

Bonnie Adams
Associate Editor

Their illnesses and circumstances vary, but what they share are medical emergencies demanding more sick leave time than they've accrued at TxDOT. For four years, the department's sick leave pool has relied on employees to donate sick leave to help co-workers facing catastrophic illnesses or injuries.

Alex Byrd, Incentive & Special Leave Branch Manager, HRD, said about 12 percent of TxDOT employees have donated time to the pool with about 5 percent of all employees donating on a yearly basis. Their donations help people like Noah Bilano of the Abilene District.

When Bilano's infant daughter, Macy, was diagnosed with a brain stem tumor in 1994, he relied on sick leave pool time. Noah and Patty Bilano took seven-month old Macy to New York for surgery. "It let me

spend time with my baby, because we didn't know how long we were going to have her," Bilano said. Without using sick leave pool time, the maintenance technician said he would have had to stay home or take a leave of absence.

Macy, now nearly two years old, has responded well to treatment. Her father credits her recovery to surgery, chemotherapy and "the man upstairs." The couple still makes a weekly trip to Lubbock for their daughter's treatment. Bilano said it hurts him to see other parents whose ill children aren't doing well.

"I wish my story could stimulate more people to donate sick leave days," Bilano said. "I don't know how I'll ever pay the department back." Bilano said he plans to donate to the pool when he's built up some time.

San Antonio District Engineer John Kelly is one of many employees who have contributed to the pool. "If we're serious about

TxDOT being a team, then it's just the right thing to do. It's quick and painless and makes you feel good for helping others."

When Connie Ender of the Atlanta District was diagnosed with cancer, she said, "I didn't know what I was going to be able to do." As a single mother with three sons, ages 12, 5 and 4, her first concern was supporting her boys if she had to miss work. She hadn't been with TxDOT long enough to accumulate substantial sick leave.

"I was really worried whether I'd be able to keep my job," said Ender, a graphics operator in the district's design section. She wasn't aware of the sick leave pool until her supervisors told her about it.

Angie McCasland, district assistant human resources officer, coordinates sick leave time donation and distribution. "Our supervisors will call in and say, 'We have this situation, what do we do?'" she said.

Within the last year, McCasland said

Please see Sick leave, page 15

District/Division Briefs

Lufkin employees honored with Extra Mile

Four Lufkin District employees were honored in February for their role in rescuing nine people during the fall 1994 floods. TxDOT's Extra Mile Award was presented to Jimmy Capers, Randy Pierce, Christopher McFarland and Louis Parten at the Texas Transportation Commission's meeting in Longview.

Capers and Pierce helped rescue seven people, including five children, after their car was swept into the rain-swollen San Jacinto River in October. McFarland and Parten rescued two people and a dog from two cars that were washed off FM 230 in Houston County in December.

Tech added to MSCE program

Texas Tech University at Lubbock has been added to TxDOT's Master of Science in Civil Engineering (MSCE) program. The Civil Engineering Department of Texas Tech University offers graduate education in environmental engineering, geotechnical engineering and structural engineering. Potential participants are encouraged to obtain the graduate school catalog of Texas Tech University to be familiar with the programs.

Applications for admission to Texas Tech University for the 1995 fall semester may be obtained by calling the Graduate Admission Office at 806.742.2787. Applications for admission to TxDOT's MSCE program are obtained by calling the Engineering Professional Development Office, Roger A. El-Khoury at 512.305.9036 or Marilyn Dell at 512.305.8621.

Due to this new development, the Engineering Professional Development Office is extending the deadline for applications to TxDOT's MSCE program for the 1995 fall semester to May 12, 1995.

VTR celebrates black history

The Vehicle Titles and Registration Division held its first Black History program on Feb. 28. With the theme "And Still I'll Rise," the program celebrated African American Heritage. VTR employees Kathy Guy, Rose Anderson and Pat Muse organized the program. "African Americans have made many contributions to the existence of this great country. My heart was truly touched by the participation of VTR employees and others who came together to make this a success," Muse said.

More than 100 people attended the program. As guests arrived, they looked over African sculpture and artwork, black artwork, African wardrobe and headdress. Food prepared by VTR and other TxDOT employees provided a prelude to the program. Traditional southern fare and African American favorites were served.

"I was pleased to see so many people attending our first black history celebration without knowing what to expect," Anderson said. Guy, Muse and Anderson said the program was special because it was employee conceived and initiated, planned and organized, and used employee talent.

Laredo District receives PR award

A state public relations association has recognized the TxDOT's Laredo District for a project publicizing the groundbreaking for the district's new office in Laredo.

The Laredo District received a bronze "Best of Texas" award from the Texas Public Relations Association for the tabloid publication, *Moves Ahead*. The tabloid was distributed in eight Laredo area newspapers, as well as the *Laredo Morning Times*. It highlighted the creation of TxDOT's newest district, the opening of a temporary office and the groundbreaking for the district's permanent office.

Laredo District Public Information Officer Cristina Guevara coordinated the production of the tabloid. "I am honored by TPRA's recognition, and I'm happy to be a part of TxDOT's great statewide team of public information officers."

Guevara extended special thanks to TxDOT's main Public Information Office in Austin. "This award would not be mine if not for the hard work and help I received from my colleagues," she said. "They were instrumental in making my vision a reality."

Barling elected EWTG treasurer

Sandy Barling, program administrator in the Information Systems Division, was elected treasurer of Executive Women in Texas Government (EWTG). EWTG is a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing and encouraging women in Texas government and higher education by offering educational, interactive and professional opportunities. These opportunities provide members with skills and knowledge to excel in their careers in Texas government and higher education.

EWTG supports women in Texas government and higher education by increasing understanding of issues related to Texas government and higher education through meetings, seminars and conferences; by providing leadership and management training opportunities; by encouraging professionalism through peer support and mentor programs; by creating a vehicle for elected and appointed officials to recruit women for executive positions in Texas government and higher education; and by offering opportunities for professional interaction among women in Texas government.

Dog

Continued from Page 11

After several months of concerned residents' calls and media attention, animal control and shelter agencies, the Fort Worth Police Department and Hill attempted to catch the dog in February.

Island Girl was too fast and too smart to be caught that day, but the event drew such interest from passersby that television news stations covered the story for two days. Also, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* wrote several stories on Island Girl and on the concern of residents, motorists and animal agencies. Motorists even began stopping along the interchange to persuade Island Girl to come to them. Many of them offered their homes to Island Girl if caught.

In the week following the publicity, the drama escalated when the Fort Worth animal control division caught Island Girl by shooting her with a tranquilizer dart. The agency's good intentions went awry, however, when the dart's needle hit a bone and wrapped around Island Girl's spine, paralyzing her.

A television news crew, on hand to tape a happy ending of Island Girl's rescue, instead reported on the event's sadness. The dog was rushed to a veterinarian. After examination, the director of the Humane Society of North Texas took her to a Dallas veterinary surgeon.

"I just saw her about 7:15 a.m. like I have many mornings, just perched up there on her domain," said Hill on the day of the tragedy. "I've pulled dying or dead dogs off of the roadways before, but she had just become special because of the way it's been working out."

After surgery, Island Girl's prognosis was guarded for several days. Her spinal column was only bruised by the dart and her condition seems favorable. She can wag her tail, but her chances of walking still are only 50-50. For now, she gets around in her canine-wheelchair. Island Girl has 10 physical rehabilitation sessions each day and is taken for a walk in her wheelchair three times a day, 45 minutes at a time. A loving retired couple has adopted her and will make a safer home for her than the medians of a busy interchange.

As a side note, the citizen outcry about the type of dart gun used to capture Island Girl resulted in a radio station raising \$1,080 for a newer, gentler gun for the Fort Worth animal control division.

Service Awards

April

Abilene
25 years
 Jesse F. Houghton
5 years
 Jamie L. Branch
 Tommy J. Jones

Amarillo
35 years
 Bobby G. Ramey
30 years
 William D. Webb
15 years
 Jana H. Perez
5 years
 Rory R. Gomez

Atlanta
30 years
 William C. Culberson
 Billy B. Peace
15 years
 Kevin S. Ward
10 years
 Dan W. Reynolds
 Charles L. Stracener
5 years
 Mark C. Lorance

Austin
30 years
 Luther W. Toungate
20 years
 Robert L. Steeds
10 years
 David F. Cortez
5 years
 Dennis D. Segner
 Clyde R. Wheat

Beaumont
30 years
 James Tomplait
20 years
 Joseph R. Guillory
15 years
 Kenneth J. Brooks
 Gary D. Dougharty
 John E. Gibson
 Lee W. Matthew
 Robin A. Outhouse
 Karen F. Stratton
 Raymond Tyler

Brownwood
15 years
 Beatrice S. Crisp
10 years
 Jimmy E. Pierce
 Jefferson C. Stewart
 Sam E. Swan
5 years
 Herman W. Dunlap Jr.

Bryan
15 years
 Ronald D. McMurrey
10 years
 Glenn G. Heintschel
 Walter M. Parnell

Childress
20 years
 Johnny T. Tiffin

Corpus Christi
20 years
 Jose M. Salinas
 Thomas E. Word Jr.
15 years
 Raymundo M. Saenz
 Martin K. Timmerman

Dallas
35 years
 James F. Loper
25 years
 Robert R. Smith
 Johnny E. White
10 years
 Juan M. Cano
 Michael R. Chavez
 Donnie G. Newman
 Dorothy M. Prasifka
 Juanita R. Silva
 Jake W. Skaer
5 years
 Bobbie D. Garrett
 Wallace B. Heimer
 Kimberly A. McFadden
 Michael R. Richmond
 Jack A. Whitehead

El Paso
15 years
 Raymond E. Lucero
10 years
 Wanda M. Fisher

Fort Worth
30 years
 Everette O. Slaughter
25 years
 William K. Klose
15 years
 Earl R. Spurlock
10 years
 Amir H. Aramoon
 Gina T. Johannessen
 Alisha W. Wickens
5 years
 Charles R. Collins
 David S. Friend

Houston
25 years
 John C. Hemme
 Francis E. Wilson
20 years
 Ralph W. Bloomfield
 Allen R. Revia
15 years
 Carlos Cadena
 George A. Cifranic
 Howard B. Hawkins
 Ronald W. Hurd
 Edward F. Murphy II
10 years
 Quincy D. Allen
 Robert D. Brown
 Jesus R. Garcia Jr.
 Harley S. Harper
 Daniel Leija
 Earl W. Roberts
 Simon M. Sada Jr.
 Jerry W. Tipton
5 years
 Joe R. Gonzales
 Jarrett L. Hamilton
 Joe J. Hanak
 Mary T. Logan
 Richard L. Nelson
 Harold C. Scheffler III
 Jarret L. Williams
 Charles R. Wusterhausen

Laredo
15 years
 Rebeca S. Gutierrez
10 years
 Dorina N. Alaniz
5 years
 Juan M. Garza

Lubbock
30 years
 Ronnie B. Hickson
25 years
 Danny G. Holland
15 years
 Ronnie L. Bales
10 years
 Jimmie D. Howell
 Phillip D. Reese
5 years
 Randy W. Bounds
 Rex A. Murphy

Lufkin
35 years
 Charles B. Piland
30 years
 O. L. McCarty
25 years
 Royce T. McCarty Jr.
15 years
 John T. Corbin
5 years
 Stephen W. Walker

Odessa
25 years
 Ramon H. Rodriguez Jr.
20 years
 Gonzalo M. Cano
 Louis A. Garza
10 years
 Guadalupe A. Rede
5 years
 Alain F. Gallego
 Ramon V. Rodriguez
 Lesley E. Watts

Paris
30 years
 Jerry Simpson
25 years
 James D. Ponder
15 years
 Bobby L. Beck
10 years
 Bobby R. Jones
5 years
 Jeannette A. Ross
 Joseph P. Tidwell

Pharr
30 years
 Antonio Flores Jr.
15 years
 Flavio Garcia
10 years
 Tomas Beltran
 Enrique Ruiz
5 years
 Juan M. Carbajal
 Ricardo A. Gil
 Juan M. Mendoza
 Francisco Trevino
 Roel A. Vera

San Angelo
35 years
 Ramiro C. Minor
25 years
 Emiliano R. Gonzales
 15 years
 Daniel G. Bolt
 Mario F. Talamantez
 Rocky E. Youngblood

San Antonio
30 years
 Saul G. Gomez
 Ray Lerma
 John P. Pierson
25 years
 Johnnie G. Green Jr.
 John P. Kelly
 Wayne J. Pehl
 Kenneth L. Ricks
 Raul H. Salas
 Felix M. Solis Jr.
20 years
 Daniel W. Nelson
15 years
 Arnulfo Ramirez
10 years
 Jane C. Miller
 Travis W. Thompson
5 years
 Samuel A. Aguirre
 John A. Cox

Tyler
15 years
 Peter C. Eng
 Clifford R. Mouser
10 years
 Walter G. Brown
 Patsy B. Nichols
 Raymond M. Ray
5 years
 Orval O. Greenwood
 Ted J. Pittinger

Waco
25 years
 Kenneth L. Evans
 B. M. Paul Jr.
 John W. Self
5 years
 Richard P. Polansky

Wichita Falls
25 years
 Shirley W. Cary
15 years
 Albert D. Burton
10 years
 Johny C. Grimes
5 years
 Joe D. Brogdon

Yoakum
25 years
 Royce W. Brown
 Robert J. Fikac
15 years
 James J. Crawford
10 years
 Gilbert Martinez Jr.
 Daniel Y. Perez

Budget and Finance
20 years
 Ruby W. Crenshaw
10 years
 Caren S. Cowfer
5 years
 Donald H. Gonzenbach

Construction and Maintenance
10 years
 Deborah C. Dunn
 Debora K. Flores

Environmental Affairs
10 years
 Anthony C. Horne

General Counsel
10 years
 Robert W. Jackson

General Services
25 years
 Robert E. Driggers
20 years
 Karen D. Koopmann
5 years
 Richard L. Crandal Jr.
 Pamela J. Dobias
 Mary J. Galindo

Information Systems
35 years
 William A. Hill
25 years
 Emmett L. Robbins
5 years
 Sandra G. Doyle

Internal Audit
10 years
 Garland G. Griffith

Materials and Tests
10 years
 Earl O. Leaverton

Occupational Safety
5 years
 Leroyce Jones

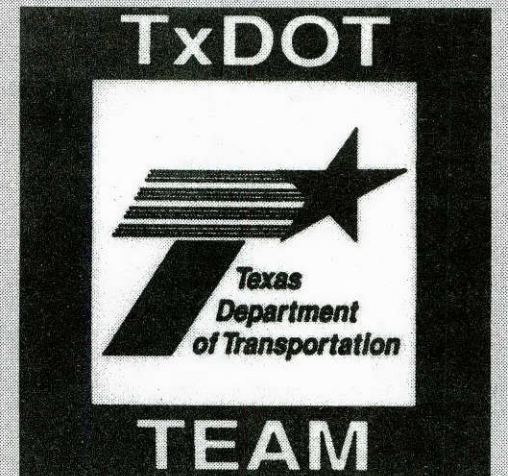
Right of Way
30 years
 Sherry P. Singleton

Traffic Operations
15 years
 David E. Mitchell
10 years
 Darin K. Kosmak
 Johnnye I. Rackley
5 years
 Gregory R. Brinkmeyer

Transportation Planning and Programming
15 years
 Jeffrey A. Rue

Vehicle Titles and Registration
25 years
 Linda H. Mohr

Join the team



You may remember an "Ask Bill" letter a few months ago that suggested the department develop a new window sticker to replace the popular "highway family" stickers of a few years ago. The suggestion was so well received that a "TxDOT Team" sticker was developed. The new red, white and blue team stickers will be distributed to employees beginning this month. The stickers are available in two versions, one that can be applied to the inside of the window and one for the outside.

The stickers were designed by the General Services Division and printed by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

With team members in every community in Texas, the stickers will help identify fellow team members having car trouble and generally raise our visibility across Texas.

Initially each employee will receive one sticker. A limited number of additional stickers will be available through your district engineer, division director or special office director.

Retirements

November
Tyler
 Carl Brown, 12 years
 Maintenance Technician II

December
Fort Worth
 Alton F. Thouvenel, 32 years
 Roadway Maintenance Supervisor V
Tyler
 John H. Cullon, 13 years
 Maintenance Technician III

February
Transportation Planning and Programming
 Samuel F. Dunkin Jr., 30 years
 Program Administrator II
March

Houston
 Crystalline Hankins, 10 years
 Administrative Technician II
 Arnold Steinbach, 29 years
 Maintenance Technician IV
Paris
 Billy M. Palmer, 23 years
 Engineering Technician III
Yoakum
 Arthur J. Harris, 30 years
 Maintenance Technician IV

In Memoriam

Retirees

Thomas C. Brazzil, Nolanville, retired from Waco District in 1980, died Feb. 2, 1995.
 Sidney C. Cox Jr., Mineola, retired from Tyler District in 1982, died Jan. 17, 1995.
 Melvin L. Dennis, Palestine, retired from Bryan District in 1980, died Jan. 10, 1995.
 Freida H. DeWolfe, Crockett, retired from Lufkin District in 1975, died Jan. 19, 1995.
 Bernice L. Field, Brownwood, retired from Brownwood District in 1976, died Jan. 11, 1995.
 Henry C. Griffen Jr., Marshall, retired from Atlanta District in 1983, died Feb. 1, 1995.
 Edwin J. Hawkins, Bedford, retired from Fort Worth District in 1981, died Jan. 21, 1995.
 Fred E. Herms, Bastrop, retired from Austin District in 1969, died Dec. 21, 1994.
 Ray W. Jarnagin, Austin, retired from Materials and Test Division in 1985, died Dec. 4, 1994.
 Jesse W. Leard, Tyler, retired from Tyler District in 1971, died Dec. 29, 1994.

Melvin O. Littleton, Port Aransas, retired from Corpus Christi District in 1981, died Nov. 28, 1994.
 Alice Peters, Austin, retired from Budget and Finance Division in 1975, died Jan. 18, 1995.
 Elmer M. Pritchard, Brownwood, retired from Brownwood District in 1974, died Jan. 14, 1995.
 Thomas C. Roe, Aledo, retired from Fort Worth District in 1970, died Jan. 6, 1995.
 Willie E. Sansing, Brownfield, retired from Lubbock District in 1976, died Oct. 28, 1994.
 Perry N. Strange, Kennard, retired from Bryan District in 1984, died Jan. 1, 1995.
 Guy W. Teasdale, Athens, retired from Tyler District in 1978, died Jan. 20, 1995.
 Carl Wilson, Jasper, retired from Beaumont District in 1962, died Jan. 23, 1995.

Sick leave

Continued from page 12

about six Atlanta District employees have used donated time. "I can't think of any who were turned down," she said. "Our people in the district are good about donating too." She said summer employees and those leaving TxDOT usually donate their unused sick leave time to the pool.

Following two surgeries in as many months, Ender missed several months of work in the summer of 1994. "Getting a check each month really helped a lot. I was very fortunate. Without it, I would have had to move back with my mother," Ender said. She credited her bosses and the district with their support.

Ender said she plans to donate sick leave time back into the pool. "Sometime down the road, someone else will need it," said Ender, having recovered from successful cancer surgery.

Byrd said the department is streamlining its approval process and spelling out the approval criteria for employees. He stressed that the medical condition must be life threatening, or cause the employee to be off work for more than three months. Employees may also be approved due to catastrophic illness in their family, such as that of a spouse or child.

"Now we have five days to decide if we're going to approve or deny an application, but we're trying to reduce that to a one- or two-day turnaround," Byrd said.

"A lot of our donations come in at the end of the fiscal year from summer employees," Byrd said. Any employee may donate eight to 24 hours per fiscal year and the donation isn't irreversible.

Employees have donated 216,457 hours of sick leave since the program's inception in 1990. That's equal to 27,057 eight-hour work days that have helped employees such as Eduardo Ortega of the El Paso District.

Ortega had an operation on both legs in October, 1994. He returned to work part-time and used sick pool leave to supplement the lost time. "I think this is a tremendous thing that the department has created for people who need it," said Ortega, an engineering technician who joined the department in 1967. "To me, this is very important to donate time."

Ann Cogdill, El Paso District human resources officer, said that an employee applying for sick leave pool time must first use up his own sick leave.

Cogdill said the district's summer employees and retirees often donate time to the pool. TxDOT employees who leave the department may also donate time.

"We really appreciate the concern that everyone has shown for their co-workers," Byrd said. In response to an appeal for donations from Bill Burnett in January, more than 13,500 hours have been donated by more than 800 employees, and donations are still coming in.

The current balance of the pool is 12,170 hours. Employees who haven't donated up to 24 hours for this fiscal year and wish to do so, or those wishing to request sick leave time from the pool may contact their human resources officer or Alex D. Byrd at 512.706.6362.

Calendar

APRIL

3-5 Management Team Meeting
 9-14 Texas Travel Counselors Conference, Odessa, Midland, San Angelo, Abilene, TRV
 10-11 Relocation Assistance Conference, Tyler, ROW
 13-14 Relocation Assistance Conference, San Angelo, ROW
 21 San Jacinto Day (state holiday)
 24-25 Administrative Services Conference, Austin, BUD, GSD, ISD
 26-28 Texas Airport Operators Conference, Austin, AVN
 27 Commission Meeting, Austin

MAY

8-12 Public Relations Certification Program, Austin, PIO
 14-17 Transportation Research Board — "3D in Transportation: Present and Future," Houston, HOU
 18 Research and Development Committee Meeting, Austin, RTT
 22-24 Texas Regional Concrete Pavement Conference, Austin
 25 Commission Meeting, Austin
 29 Memorial Day (holiday)
 31-6/2 Transportation Planning Conference, Houston, TPP

JUNE

5-9 CAiCE Training, Austin, ISD
 6-8 11th Annual Internal Audit Conference, Austin, AUD
 19 Emancipation Day (state holiday)
 20-22 Traffic Operations Conference, Austin, TRF
 29 Commission Meeting, Austin

JULY

4 Independence Day (holiday)
 10-12 Management Team Meeting
 27 Commission Meeting, Austin

AUGUST

27 LBJ Day
 31 Commission Meeting, Austin

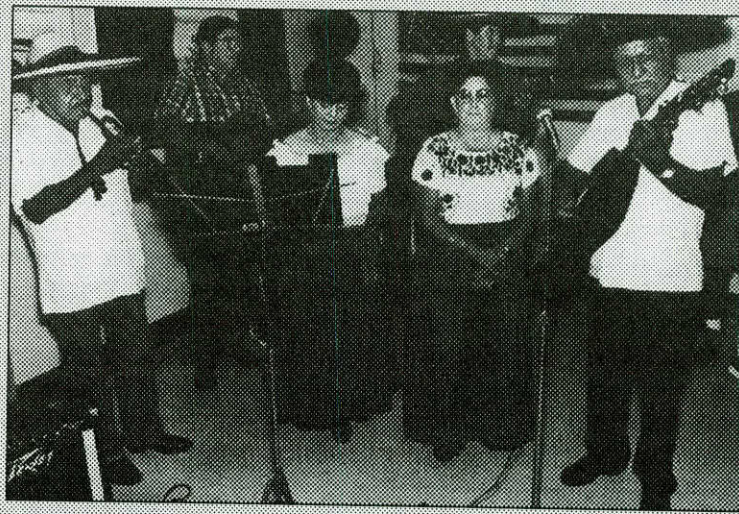
SEPTEMBER

28 Commission Meeting, Austin

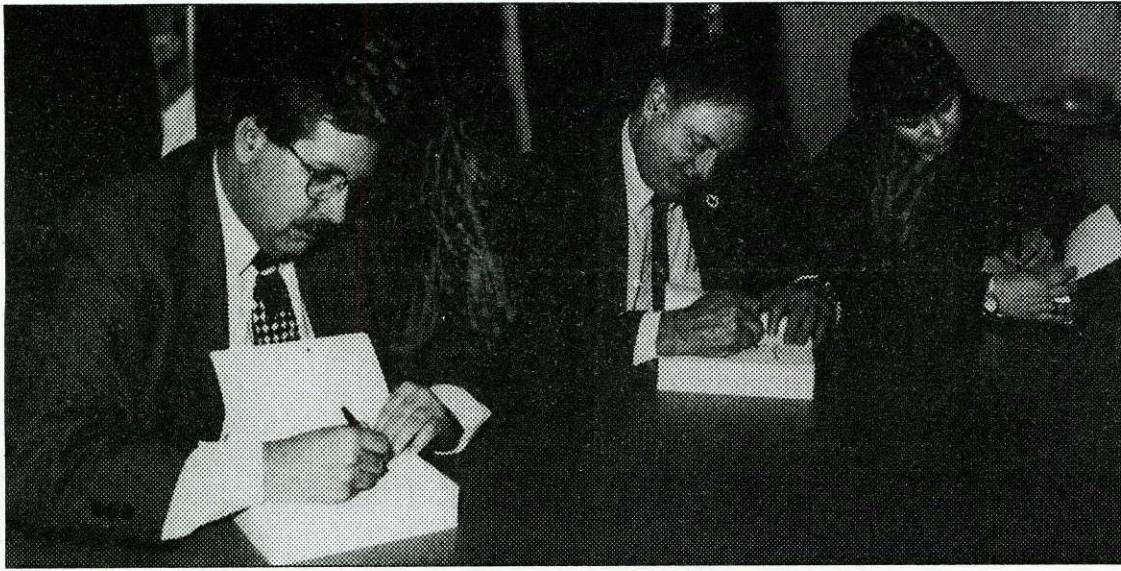
OCTOBER

16 Management Team Meeting, College Station
 16-18 Transportation Conference, College Station
 26 Commission Meeting, Austin

¡Vamos a la fiesta!



Employees of the General Services Division formed a mariachi band as part of Diez y Seis festivities at Austin's Camp Hubbard. Groups around the state will be celebrating Cinco de Mayo next month.



On Jan. 13, 1938, the Texas Highway Department introduced the first official *Standard Specifications for Road & Highway Construction*. That book was red and soon became known as the "red book." Last month the department issued its latest version. The 1995 book is also red, and though it does not attempt to reinvent the wheel, it will change the way it's measured. The '95 red book uses only metric measurements. Pictured signing the book are TxDOT Executive Director Bill Burnett, FHWA Division Administrator Frank Mayer and Diane Venable, Specification Development Engineer, Design Division. See related story, page 5.

Letters

I would like to make you aware of the actions of two TxDOT employees, **Brian K. Pope and Shirley Scott**.

Approximately two months ago, my son was traveling on I-40 to the West Coast. When he stopped for gas in the Amarillo area, he left his wallet on his vehicle.

After discovering the wallet was gone and searching for it without any luck, he continued the trip knowing that the wallet and contents were probably gone for good.

On Dec. 2, much to our surprise, my son received a letter from Mr. Pope, informing us that he and Ms. Scott had found the wallet while working on I-40, and with proper description would mail it to us.

On Dec. 7, we received the wallet and contents intact, which included approximately \$170 cash. It would have been easy to keep the money and dispose of the wallet and no one would be the wiser.

I feel these employees should be commended for their honesty and integrity in the way they handled this matter. Employees such as these are not only an asset to your department, but to the community in which they live and the state of Texas.

**Sidney Harper and Tim Harper
Mount Pleasant**

Brian Pope and Shirley Scott are both engineering technicians in the Amarillo District. Pope works in the Borger Area Engineer's Office and Scott works in the Pampa Area Engineer's Office.

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On Dec. 13, 1994, I had a business trip scheduled which included travel to Waco.

Traveling from Austin, I got to Florence when my car lost power. It seemed like my accelerator became disconnected. I felt I was in a serious situation due to the heavy morning traffic and poor weather. Also, I was near where a well-publicized serial killer abducted women with car trouble.

Feeling vulnerable, I could not have been more surprised and relieved when I spotted a Texas Department of Transportation pickup truck with an orange flashing light coming to my assistance.

Benjamin May could not have been more fantastic! He not only assisted me with getting off the freeway to a safer location, he looked under the hood and in less than 30 seconds diagnosed the problem as a loose accelerator cable. He did all this while I was

having visions of having to cancel my trip to Waco and deal with a wrecker service.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. May and the outstanding customer service he provided me! His responsiveness could not have been more appreciated and his actions serve well the reputation of the Texas Department of Transportation. Please convey my thanks to Mr. May and to the Texas Department of Transportation for saving the day!

**Diane Faucher
Austin**

Benjamin May works as a construction inspector in the Georgetown Area Engineer's Office, Austin District.

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Last year about this time, I received my commercial driver's license. On a trip through Lampasas County, I broke down. I made a wrong turn onto a farm-to-market road when I should have turned on US 190 to San Saba. I turned too sharp and was bogged down with a truck weighing 90,000 pounds. In 101 degree heat, men were coming from every direction to offer their comments and help.

I believe your men were **Tom and Fabian**. I may be wrong on the first names and I am completely lost on the last names. But they know who they are. I should have written them down, but I was having a very bad day!

The tow truck could not budge my truck. These men stayed with me about 11 hours. There were at least 10 other men (who were not TxDOT employees) making smart remarks, etc. Your men made me feel safe and kept my fear and tears intact until it was over. They sweated. They were thirsty. They got hungry. Then they got cold. They never complained.

I think of your gentlemen's manner in which I was helped that day and only pray that I can pass it on when it's my turn. (They were) gentlemen in every sense of the word. Your men went beyond the call of duty, and this is one woman who won't ever forget it. I would like to say "thank you, guys," from a scared, stranded, first-time truck driver.

I drive through your town quite often without fear because if I break down, I'm sure Tom or Fabian or someone from your department will not be far away.

Thanks guys, and God bless you and keep you.

**Lynn Flores
Brady**

Tom Mann, Fabian Jimenez, Charlie Barker and Luis Herrera are maintenance technicians in the Brownwood District. Mann works for the Mills County maintenance section. Barker and Herrera work for the Lampasas County maintenance section, and Jimenez works in the Brownwood District equipment shop.

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