



# RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

As the response to COVID-19 created immense challenges and change across the state, TxDOT employees stayed true to their mission of Connecting You With Texas.



# Hurricane season planning needs everyone

JAMES BASS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**T**his year's Atlantic hurricane season began June 1, and it's already begun as an interesting season. Even before the official start, two storms, Tropical Storms Arthur and Bertha, created some challenges for the East Coast in May. And Tropical Storm Cristobal swept in the first weekend of June, striking parts of Louisiana.



As I write this, no storm is threatening Texas. But by Nov. 30 — the end of the season — the Atlantic basin could host three to six major storms with winds of 111 mph or higher. With three storms, all within a matter of weeks, very early in the season, this may be an active one. And given our operational challenges caused by COVID-19 — limited travel and a very limited ability to meet in person to make planning arrangements — we have our work cut out for us.

But we are ready. We'll follow an established plan to push equipment, resources and crews out to impacted districts within hours after a storm makes landfall, and when it is safe to do so.

Every district will assist in this plan with some acting as pre-staging areas, others supplying crews to impacted districts post-landfall, and other districts backfilling resources. Critical to this plan, of course, is the support of all of TxDOT, with an emphasis on our districts and the Maintenance, Fleet Operations, Support Services, and Occupational Safety divisions.

Of course, our plan to weather this storm season isn't complete without arming Texans with information to keep their families safe. On [txdot.gov](http://txdot.gov), we've posted evacuation route maps and other valuable information, and [DriveTexas.org](http://DriveTexas.org) will help motorists navigate roadways around the state.

That responsibility for safety extends to our own families as well. The National Weather Service has several resources to help you plan.

While we're hoping for an uneventful hurricane season for Texas, should one threaten our coastline, TxDOT is ready. Make sure your family is as well.

Take care, and thanks for supporting your neighbors. ■

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



TN MAGAZINE  
July-August 2020

DIRECTOR OF  
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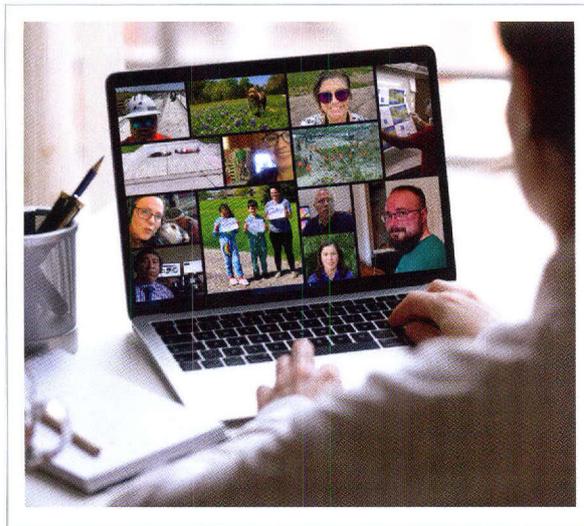
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## 8

### ON THE COVER

TxDOT employees share their experiences about work environments and other changes brought on by the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### FEATURED STORIES

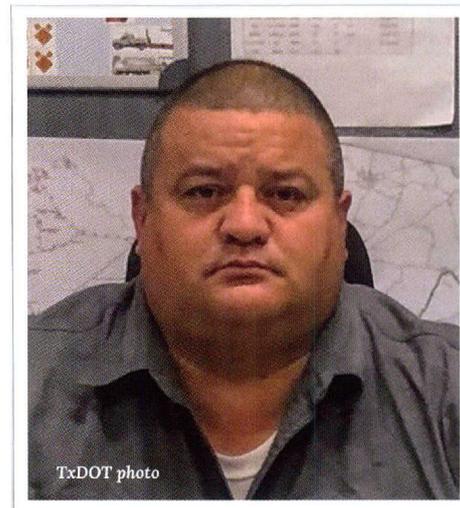
- 10** Truck Parking Study Hits Timely Mark
- 14** 40 Years of Congress Avenue Bridge Bats
- 16** Returning to the Road: Safety Doesn't Stop

### NEWS AND NOTES

- 5** Ransomware Attack
- 5** Career Conversations Explained
- 12** Beauty of Roadside Flora
- 13** Teleworking Trenches
- 18** Training in the Virtual World
- 19** Post-WWII Bridges Tell Story
- 24** Talent Acquisition Team
- 25** Revealing Excavations in Starr and Anderson Counties
- 26** Disinfectant Safety
- 31** TxDOTCONNECT Adds Functionality

### TN TRADITIONS

- 4** Shining Stars
- 20** Journey to Wellness
- 21** Where Am I?
- 21** TxDOT Calendar
- 22** News: All Across TxDOT
- 27** Employee Q&A
- 28** Milestones and Memoriam
- 31** TxDOT Chimes In



## 6 I Am A... Maintenance Supervisor



# SHINING STARS



Across the state, TxDOT employees go above and beyond.

## TxDOT worker turns rescuer in blaze

### TYLER DISTRICT

**I**n January, Rusk County Maintenance Supervisor Mark Fletcher of the Tyler District found himself saving a family from a burning mobile home.

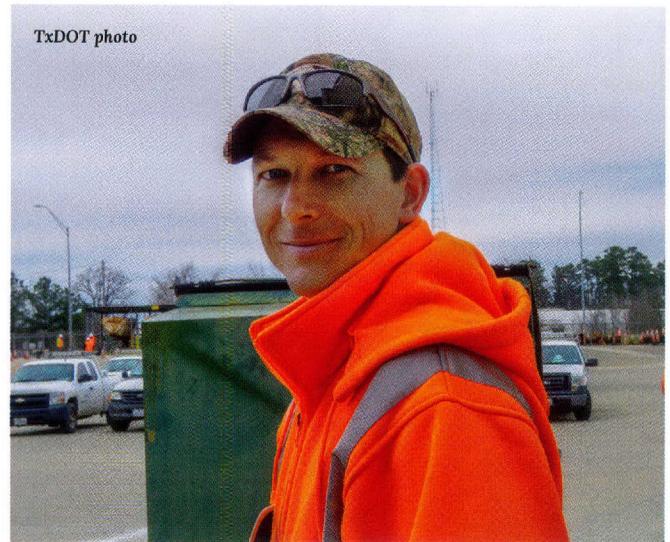
Fletcher was returning from work in the evening when he spotted a distant glow and realized that a nearby mobile home was on fire. He instinctively jumped into action. He pulled up with strobe lights flashing brightly, grabbed the fire extinguisher from the toolbox on his TxDOT pickup and ran to the porch ready for battle.

At the front door, he was met by 36-year-old Melissa Redden and her 13-month-old daughter, Charlee. She came to the door because she saw Fletcher's truck lights. Until that moment, she hadn't realized the home was on fire.

Fletcher yelled at Redden to get out as the flames started to surround the doorframe and move up to the roof. Redden screamed that her dog was still inside. Fletcher scrambled through the burning doorway and found the dog in the kitchen. But it wouldn't budge. He scooped up the nearly 90-pound animal, readied the fire extinguisher and ran from the house spraying the flames as he exited through the door.

Fletcher then emptied the fire extinguisher on the door frame, but the roof was already on fire. He found a water hose and ladder nearby and hoisted himself up the ladder on the side of the house and started drenching it.

"By the time the fire department got there, I had the fire contained," Fletcher said. "They were able to save the home except for the front door and a portion of the living room. I just basically went off instinct and sheer will to do whatever was needed to help. As fast as the flames were growing, it would have been a total loss if I had not stopped and acted since we were so far out in the country."



*In January, Mark Fletcher of the Tyler District found himself saving a family from a burning house.*

Fletcher said he is very proud to represent the department but doesn't consider himself a hero.

"I was just glad that I stopped and didn't just blow it off as if it was none of my business," he said. "For that reason, the family didn't lose any personal belongings. As I drive by it now, I just think how lucky I was to have been there at that exact moment. I would do it again in a heartbeat."

The homeowners were certainly glad he was there.

"Our home caught on fire last night," Melissa Redden posted on Facebook. "Thankfully, Charlee and I got out just in time through the flames and I want to thank the nice man, Mark Fletcher, who was driving by and stopped to help. Thanks to him for saving my dog and putting out the whole fire before the fire department arrived! Forever grateful for you!"

Send information or any thank-you emails, letters or calls you or your co-workers receive to [AskTxDOT@TxDOT.gov](mailto:AskTxDOT@TxDOT.gov) so we can recognize TxDOT employee achievements. ■

# BETTER TOGETHER:

## CAREER CONVERSATIONS AND THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

**T**he Human Resources Division has career resources for staff, such as Career Conversations and the Career Development Program.

### Career Conversations

Historically, the Career Development Program recommended regular career conversations between supervisors and employees to discuss career growth. However, the term Career Conversations now refers to the new performance evaluation model implemented in March.

This model ensures alignment between annual work performance and agency goals, incorporating continuous feedback to employees and supporting short-term development.



*Hannah Beavers (left) and Kristi Garcia with the Human Resources Division help employees meet the TxDOT mission. Even social distancing — shown in this composite photo — can't stop them from helping employees pursue their careers.*

### Career Development Program

The Career Development Program promotes long-term development. It prepares employees to compete for desired positions and retain institutional knowledge. One out of three TxDOT employees will be eligible to retire by 2021, so it's more important than ever to develop new leaders within the agency.

The second half of the 2020 performance cycle is a great time to revisit short- and long-term goals. Here are ideas for getting started:

- Employees should talk to their supervisor about their career interests.
  - Use the Career Interest Form to prepare for a one-on-one meeting with a supervisor.
  - Enroll in DEV136: Communicate Your Career Value.
  - Explore the "For Employees" page on the Human Resources Division's Career Development webpages on Crossroads.
- Supervisors should brush up on career coaching skills.
  - Enroll in DEV135: Supervisor Strategies for Career Development.
  - Explore the "For Supervisors" page on the Career Development webpages on Crossroads.

For more information, contact 512-416-2700 or [development@txdot.gov](mailto:development@txdot.gov). ■

# TxDOT RALLIES IN RESPONSE TO RANSOMWARE ATTACK

**A**s TxDOT employees know, on May 14, there was unauthorized access to the agency's network in a ransomware event. TxDOT immediately took steps to isolate the incident and shut down further unauthorized access. In addition, the agency promptly began working with federal law enforcement.

Network operations were restored for employees by June. But what really happened behind the scenes of the agency's ransomware attack? Expertise and institutional knowledge from every corner of the agency were summoned, along with technical experts in both the public and private sectors. Through it all, the focus in the Information Technology Division was protecting our data, getting employees up and working, and ensuring our network is safer than ever before. ■

# I AM A... MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR

## LUFKIN DISTRICT

**D**anny Luna, supervisor for the Houston County Maintenance Office, began his career with TxDOT in December 1999 at the age of 19. A native of Nacogdoches, he began his career in his hometown's maintenance office as a temporary maintenance hand. He worked his way up through the agency as a maintenance tech, maintenance inspector, construction inspector and assistant supervisor. After working as a maintenance supervisor in Trinity County and in the Maintenance Division in Austin, he became the section supervisor for the Houston County Maintenance Office.

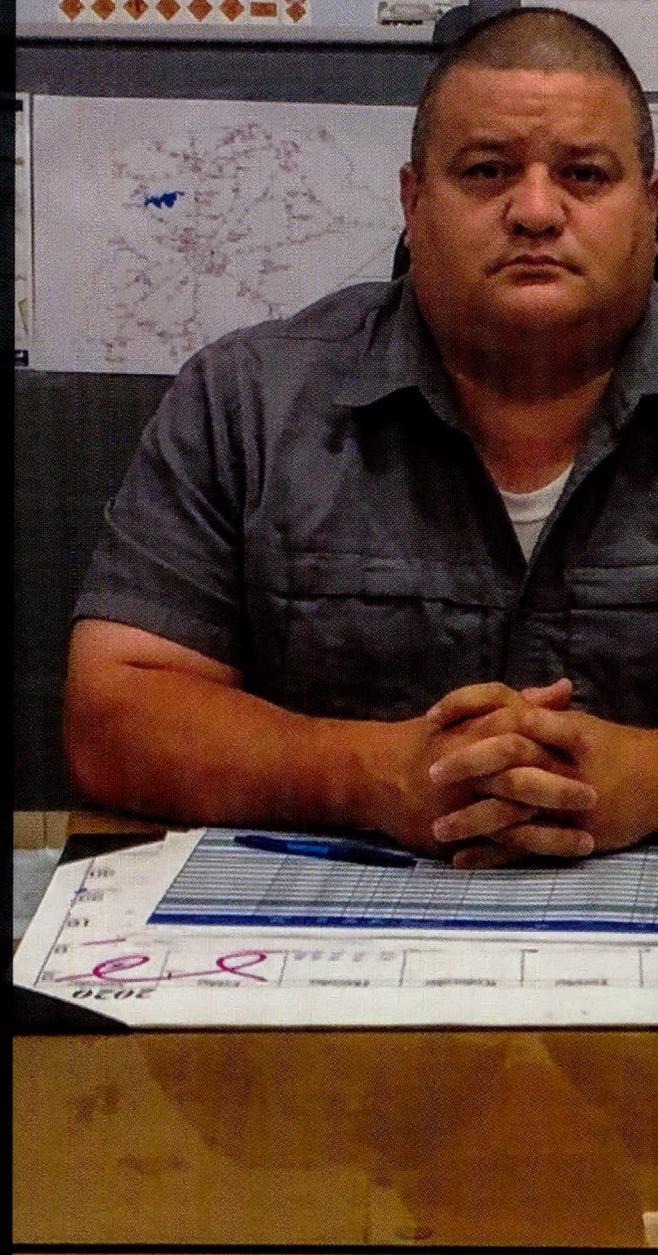
Luna lives in the Pennington area with his wife, Shelley, and their two sons, Ryan and Braxton. Ryan graduated from Groveton High School in 2020. Braxton is a sophomore. Luna enjoys spending time with his family, hunting, fishing, making sausage and cooking.

### **DESCRIBE WHAT YOU DO ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS AS A MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR.**

Daily, I give the work detail, inspect the roads in Houston County, handle complaints, maintain the budget, oversee maintenance contracts, maintain my four-year plan and handle any emergencies that arise. I also oversee all preventive maintenance for equipment. Every morning we discuss the traffic control plan we will be using that day. We also conduct a tailgate safety meeting after the work detail. At the end of the day we do a recap and discuss the positive and negative things that happened throughout the day. Safety is a primary concern and focus for our office and we adhere to all TxDOT safety protocol.

### **WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST REWARDING ABOUT BEING A MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR?**

I really enjoy interacting with my employees. We have a great team and a positive office atmosphere. I enjoy seeing maintenance jobs reach completion and the improvements in the roadways in my county.



“

I really enjoy interacting with my employees. We have a great team and a positive office atmosphere.

”

## DANNY LUNA

### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE?

I do my best to be fair and straightforward with each of my employees. I try to be understanding, but following the policies set forth by HR is a priority. I lead by example, and I wouldn't ask my guys to do anything that I wouldn't be willing to do.

### HOW HAVE YOU HAD TO ADAPT IN YOUR JOB AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 SITUATION?

I take everyone's temperature each morning. We divide the detail into two groups and we maintain the social distance of 6 feet. Another adjustment has been ensuring only one person per vehicle. My office manager has been telecommuting and that is a big adjustment for everyone. As always, my team has adapted to the changes well and our productivity has not slowed down.

Danny Luna

EDITOR'S NOTE: We would like to thank Danny for following good social distancing measures and capturing his own photograph for this article. ■

TxDOT photo

# RISING TO THE CHALLENGE:

## TxDOT FAMILY CONTINUES TO DELIVER

**D**espite the many changes due to COVID-19, the TxDOT family continued to deliver on TxDOT's mission. Whether at their home office or out in the field, many employees shared how they were rising to the challenge. Here are just a few of the many stories that continue to come in.



### **Rickey Dailey,** CORPUS CHRISTI DISTRICT

TxDOT's Port Aransas ferry operations has adopted a new method for conducting safety meetings for each shift. The senior captain uses a bullhorn to pass along the day's work instructions and safety advice as the crew practices social distancing. ■



### **Alejandra "Hanna" De Hoyos,** OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY DIVISION

Being outdoors helps me clear my mind and release any stress or anxiety I am dealing with during this difficult time. One Sunday, I drove by myself to Enchanted Rock and hiked to the summit to clear my mind. I kept my social distance from others. While I was there, I meditated and felt a sense of relief and joy. ■



### **Cammie Keenon,** PHARR DISTRICT

I take my laptop outside to work at least one hour every day. The fresh air and sunshine does wonders for improving mental health and productivity! ■



**Jodie Kelly,**  
**BROWNWOOD DISTRICT**

I've been "Rising to the Challenge" by using my extra time at home to make masks for my family here in Brownwood, and donating those masks to my daughter in Denver, who works in healthcare. They were a big hit with everyone at the hospital where she works and the first box of 20 masks I sent were given away in 10 minutes. So, I sent another 24 and those have been given away, too. I'm glad I could help in a small way! ■



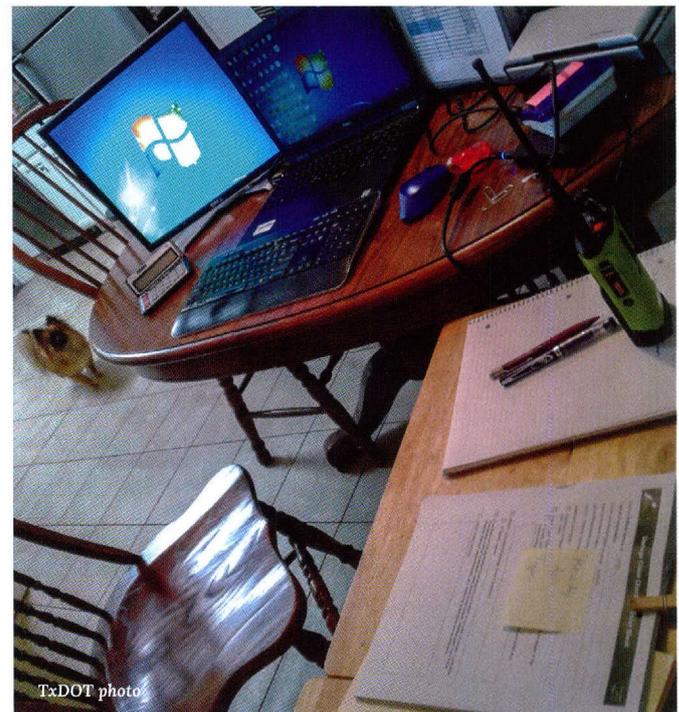
**Kim Greener,** **LUBBOCK DISTRICT**

My number one challenge has been missing our people. I am used to hearing chatter in the halls, seeing colleagues at the water fountain and hearing other's needs and challenges. I love to help and offer solutions and, right now, I just do not feel as connected to people's challenges and how we might assist them. So, I started a weekly "How is it going? Anything you want to share?" WebEx with the office personnel and district HQ. We've had great turnout, which tells me that others are missing that same connection. ■



**Gabriel and Amanda Longoria,**  
**CORPUS CHRISTI DISTRICT**

Some homes contain more than one TxDOT employee, who are both teleworking. Gabriel and Amanda Longoria set up their shared workspace in the living room of their Corpus Christi home so they can both stay connected to the kids and help with homeschooling. Gabriel is the Corpus Christi District's design engineer and Amanda is a transportation engineer with the district's Transportation Planning and Development. ■



**Linda Englert,** **HOUSTON DISTRICT**

My husband, David, works for Siemens. David has been sitting across the table from me under the watchful eyes of our dog, Sebastian, who's always looking for a handout. Sorry, puppy. No food at this table. Only work. ■

# Truck parking study hits timely mark in pandemic

**W**ith only one month until the completion of the long-awaited statewide truck parking study, things looked like smooth sailing for Freight Systems Branch Manager Sherry Pifer with Transportation Planning and Programming. But the best-laid plans often go awry. In this case, an economic shutdown in the face of a global pandemic left Pifer scrambling to adjust.

“Because it was my first project here at TxDOT, I wanted it to go perfectly. This is about the biggest monkey wrench there is,” Pifer said.

Pifer started her career at TxDOT in October 2018. Immediately, she started leading the statewide truck parking study which looked at the trucking industry in Texas to tackle statewide truck parking needs and safety issues.

TxDOT photo

“I advocate for trucks and truck drivers because they’re often underappreciated,” said Pifer. “I knew I was working on a project that would bring value to not only drivers and the industry, but also to Texas because of the safety aspect.”

After nearly 18 months of work on the project, the study was 30 days away from the final due date. Then everyone on the project started working from home to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

“At first, I thought this couldn’t have happened at a worse time,” Pifer said.

It was a tough transition. They canceled multiple in-person meetings and went virtual.

Going entirely virtual was especially tough with a 150-page document and a 28-page executive summary. Pifer had several 13-hour workdays and she quickly got a monitor so she wouldn’t have to look at a laptop screen.

“I reviewed the whole thing on my computer. It can be hard staring at your computer screen for 150 pages,” she said.

However, her team adjusted quickly. Pifer said her team exchanged a lot of calls, texts and emails over the next few weeks. For her, at least, working from home helps lessen distractions.

“In hindsight, I think it gave me more time to focus on it,” Pifer said.

The team held two virtual dry-runs of the four-hour presentation before presenting it to the Texas Freight Advisory Committee. Finally, they got it completed and presented it to the public.

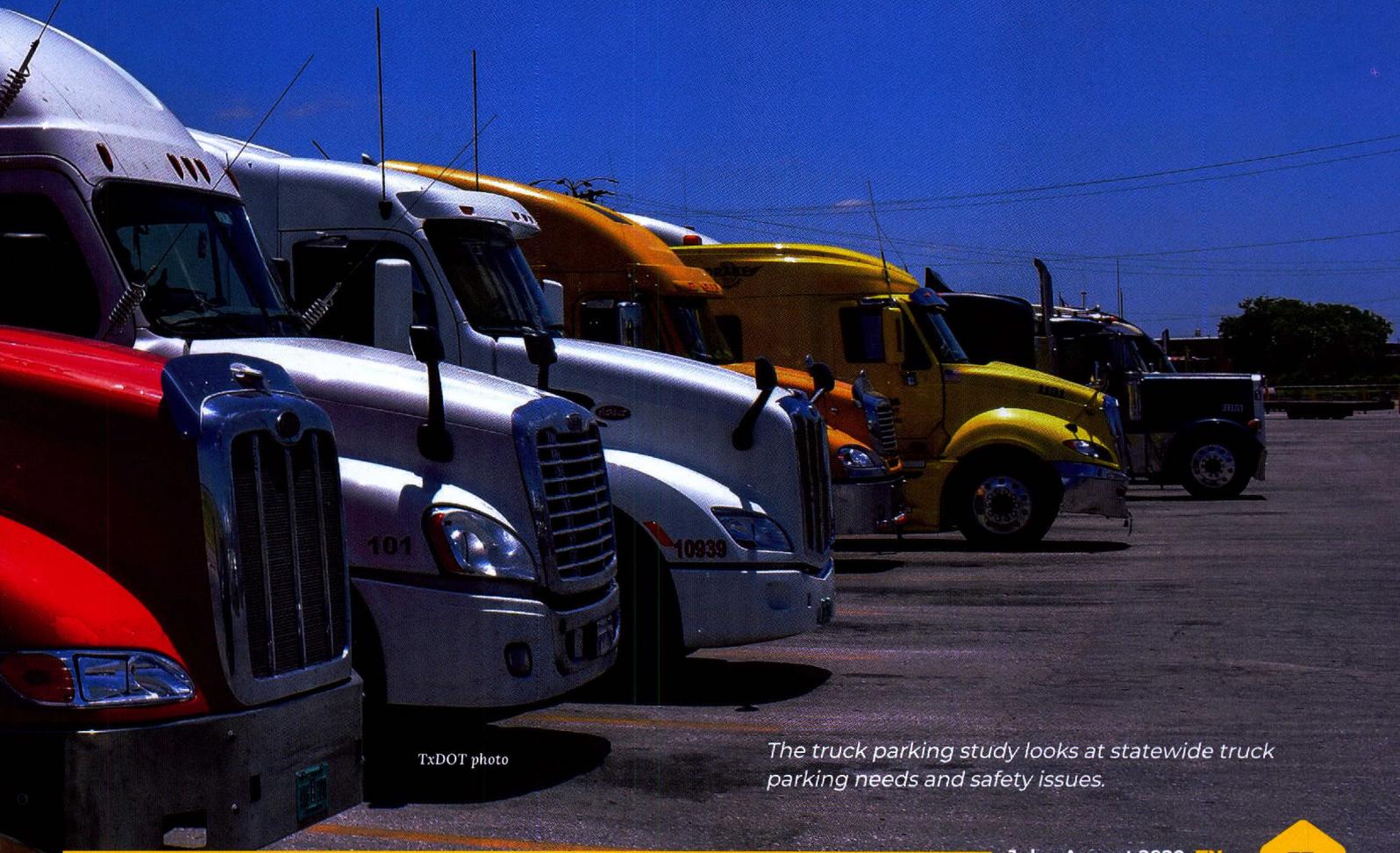
“This is a hot topic all over the country. Especially now, with truck drivers receiving a lot of attention for the sacrifices they are making during the pandemic. They’re sacrificing their time from their families and even their lives,” Pifer said.

Pifer said the study included multiple recommendations to improve capacity and increase safety for both truck drivers and the traveling public. Some benefit the drivers’ health and comfort, like enhanced vending machines with healthier foods and even toothpaste or cold medicine.

She said freight is such an afterthought at times, but now she hopes that will change.

“I think we’ll see that the plan reinforces what’s happening right now, and reinforces the recommendations we made for ways we can increase capacity and improve upon amenities,” Pifer said.

View the full report on [txdot.gov](http://txdot.gov). ■



TxDOT photo

*The truck parking study looks at statewide truck parking needs and safety issues.*

# BEYOND THE WILDFLOWERS

## TxDOT'S VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

**A**s bright colors sprout all over roadsides throughout the state in the spring, TxDOT's Vegetation Management Director Dennis Markwardt looks beyond the flowers.

Markwardt has been with TxDOT for 32 years and – quite literally – wrote the book on wildflowers. He helped create a manual that gives guidance to crews across the state.

"I look at this list [of wildflowers] and I can think of about 50 more flowers I'd like to put in there. And we will, eventually," Markwardt said.

The Vegetation Management Section of the Maintenance Division tackles a variety of issues that pop up. In fact, Markwardt says that might be the best part of the job. One day he's working on seeding and the next there might be beavers or bat issues he must address. He also has a team that travels statewide to help crews prepare for winter weather calls.

However, he's become an expert in wildflowers. While the casual observer may just see a normal roadside, it comes to life through Markwardt's eyes.

"I don't look at just the bluebonnets because, even though the bluebonnets are putting on a great show, if you start looking around you start seeing all the species diversity. I mean there are gaillardias and coreopsis. You've got all kinds of clover and vetch. You've got all kinds of species in there," Markwardt said.

Markwardt said he's not just looking at the flowers. He's looking at the grass and all the other species of plants. With just a quick glance, he can tell if the area had a lot of rain, if it was mowed improperly and what it may look like in months or even a couple of years.

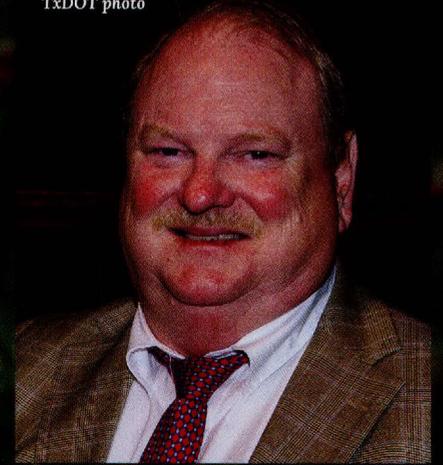
While he does know a lot about wildflowers, there is one question he struggles with: his favorite flower.

"Oh, that's a difficult question. Probably my favorite is the phlox. A great stand of phlox is just so beautiful," Markwardt said. "But in summer, when it's really hot, I love the Texas bluebells.

"I guess if you really boil it down, I have to say bluebonnets are my favorite because you know what? It represents this state. A bluebonnet makes people think of Texas."

That passion is why he and his team take such pride in maintaining the beauty of Texas roadsides. It can be dirty and grueling work at times, but it's worth it to see those fields of blue. ■

TxDOT photo



*Dennis Markwardt wrote the book on wildflowers.*

# TELEWORKING TRENCHES: MANAGING REMOTELY

**L**ike many TxDOT employees, Julie Rogers, contract specialist with the Abilene District, found herself wearing many hats when teleworking was made mandatory for office workers in March. She was working from home, managing three employees and taking care of her family. Rogers is second generation TxDOT family; her parents both retired from the agency. Her husband, Matt, also works at the Abilene District as a pavement coordinator. Below is a little bit about her experience with teleworking, which is probably similar to many employees during this time.

## **Who is in your household during quarantine?**

My husband, Matt, and my two sons, Rylan and Hunter. Rylan recently graduated from Baird High School and has been accepted to McMurry University. Hunter will be a junior.

## **How are you staying organized and multitasking while working remotely?**

It was a little challenging at first working from home with my whole family present! However, once I got my own little work area set up, it was easier to stay organized and focused. TxDOT's Information Technology Division has provided the tools we need to stay connected with co-workers and collaborate with each other.

I have my own room and can shut the door during meetings or when presenting information. That cuts down on background noise and distractions. In fact, I'm starting to enjoy working from home. It's nice not having to commute to work and my car gets three weeks to the gallon. But I will still be ready when the office opens back up.



*Julie Rogers with the Abilene District has had to balance work, supervising employees and family while working from home during the stay-at-home orders in response to COVID-19: (l to r) Hunter, Matt, Rylan and Julie Rogers.*

## **How does your family handle stress during this time?**

We get outside as much as possible. Matt and I try to walk or exercise during our lunch hour. When we can't get outside, we play family board games.

Rylan works out so he can stay conditioned for the sports he plays. Hunter does yard work, throws the baseball around and plays video games online with friends. On the weekends, we try to get out of the house and get some fresh air.

## **Most families have made many changes during this time. What changes will you continue or keep once the pandemic is over?**

I think the habit of washing our hands for 20 seconds is here to stay. We will also respect social distancing while out in public areas.

We have been isolating ourselves from family and friends during this time. This will gradually change once the pandemic is over. We are so ready to see our family and friends to celebrate birthdays, graduations and all the special events we have missed during this time. ■

# Austin celebrates 40 years of bats under Congress Avenue

*Crowds that gather every year to watch the bats bring millions of dollars to the Austin economy. Photo from 2013.*

**T**he bats under Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin have become a marvel for tourists, engineers and economists alike. At first, though, they were a frightful surprise for many in the city.

Memorial Day of 2020 marked 40 years since the rehabilitation of the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin. Originally completed in 1910, the bridge needed some upgrades decades later.

In 1980, TxDOT completed the new, rehabilitated bridge. However, the rehabilitation also brought unexpected visitors.

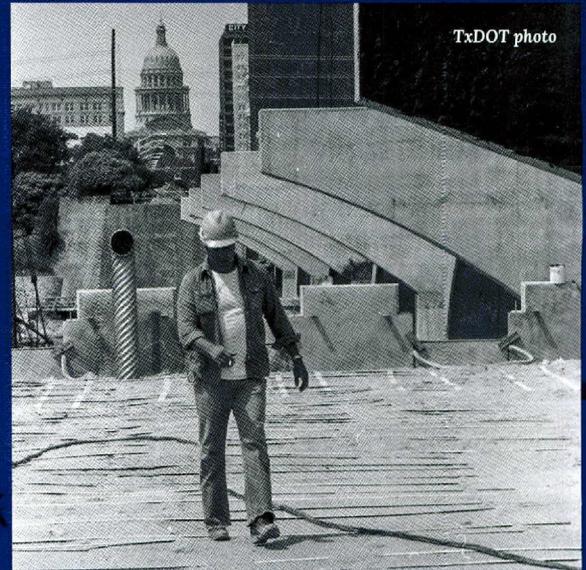
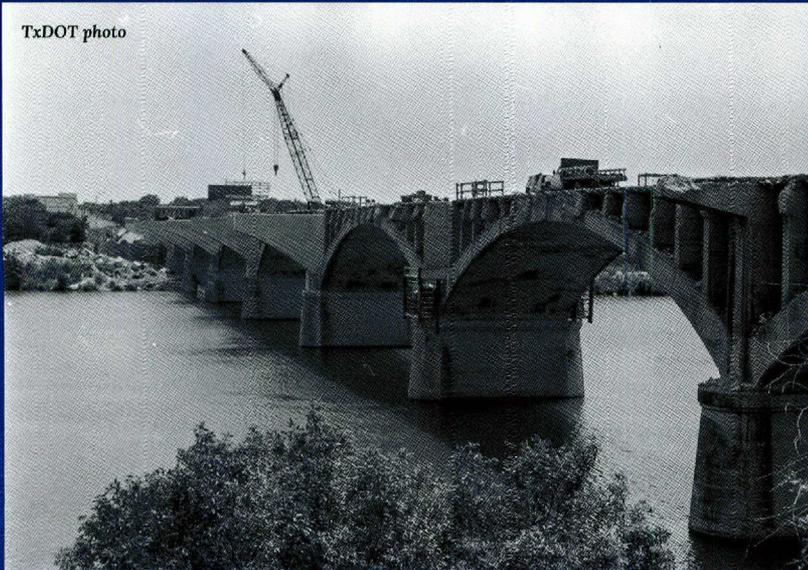
“Shortly after the bridge was built, the bats started to move in. And it created hysteria, quite frankly,” said Mark Bloschok, a professional engineer formerly with TxDOT.

Bloschok worked on the rehabilitation project and remembers how people throughout the city were nervous about the colony of Mexican free-tailed bats. So, he wanted to learn more about them. Fortunately, an expert several states away heard about the situation.

“Austin was a real thorn in my side because it was making international news saying that hundreds of thousands of rabid bats are attacking the citizens and invading the city,” Dr. Merlin Tuttle said.

Tuttle decided to move to Austin, where he would later found Merlin Tuttle’s Bat Conservation.

TxDOT photo



*Construction to rehabilitate the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin 40 years ago had an unexpected outcome: thousands of Mexican free-tailed bats found a perfect home in the crevices underneath it.*

*New box beams added to the Congress Avenue Bridge in 1980 made it an ideal habitat for bats.*

"I decided this was the perfect opportunity for me to demonstrate the safety and value of bats," Tuttle said.

Tuttle explains it was the new box beams on the bridge that attracted the bats. These concrete beams provide little half-inch gaps between each other where bats can nestle and hide from predators during the day. The bats can also crawl up and down depending on how hot or cold it gets inside.

"They're probably doing better in those crevices than they ever did in the original caves they lived in," Tuttle said.

When most people think of bats, the image that comes to mind is fairy-tale stories of their blood-sucking Transylvania relatives, vampire bats. In contrast, Tuttle wanted to explain to the public that bats can be a real benefit to society. They're not only safe around humans, they also eat millions of mosquitoes and other bugs. This not only helps

homeowners in their backyards but farmers who would otherwise spend money on protecting crops.

Bloschok and Tuttle worked together to educate the public. Bloschok said at first it was like trying to steer a battleship in the ocean; it took a while. Slowly, though, people started to come around to their new furry friends.

Now, 40 years later, TxDOT engineers use similar designs to the Congress Avenue Bridge to purposefully bring bats to different bridges across the state.

In Austin, the crowds that gather every year bring millions of dollars to the local economy. The public has come to love its new neighbors thanks to TxDOT fully embracing these surprise visitors.

"This is a real example of not just eco-tourism but from an engineering standpoint, we're very pleased because you're getting multiple uses out of this bridge," Bloschok said. "To me as an old engineer about ready to retire, it's very gratifying." ■

# RETURNING TO THE ROAD: Lighter traffic doesn't mean safety stops

**O**ne question vexing traffic safety experts is why, when fewer miles were being driven due to widespread shelter-in-place directives, there were increased fatalities? According to recent estimates from the National Safety Council, emptier roads saw a year-over-year 14% jump in fatality rates in the first three months of 2020, while the number of miles driven went down 18.6% compared to the same period last year. For the month of March, the mileage death rate per 100 million vehicle miles driven was up to 1.22 compared to 1.07 in 2019.

While some states experienced drastically higher roadway deaths, Texas saw a 6% increase. Connecticut had a massive 42% increase, while Texas neighbors Louisiana and Oklahoma had 23% and 9% increases, respectively. New York, the country's first COVID-19 epicenter, had a 17% increase.

**"While our Texas crash reports still require analysis, anecdotal reports indicate speeding increased significantly with less traffic on the roads."**

**MICHAEL CHACON**  
TXDOT'S TRAFFIC SAFETY DIVISION DIRECTOR

Some states, however, did have sizeable decreases, including Hawaii (-32%), Idaho (-28%), Iowa (-13%), Maryland (-13%), Michigan (-12%) and Oregon (-24%). These figures are for all roadways, public and private, including driveways.

“Disturbingly, we have open lanes of traffic and an apparent open season on reckless driving,” said Lorraine M. Martin, president and CEO of the National Safety Council. “Right now, in the midst of a global pandemic and crisis, we should take it as our civic duty to drive safely. If we won’t do it for ourselves, we should do it for our first responders, our law enforcement and our healthcare workers, who are rightly focused on coronavirus patients and should not be overwhelmed by preventable car crashes.”

Michael Chacon, director of TxDOT’s Traffic Safety Division said, “While our Texas crash reports still require analysis, anecdotal reports indicate speeding increased significantly with less traffic on the roads.”

The situation is likely to be compounded as workers who have not been driving for months return to the roads. An *LA Times* article in May reported that many drivers are feeling as uncertain as beginners behind the wheel as they resume their commutes.

As workers return to duties and traffic increases, TxDOT and the National Safety Council have some advice on how to avoid becoming a statistic.

- If you’re out of the habit of driving, take a few moments to prepare yourself for the trip ahead, making sure you have all the personal protective equipment you’ll need at your destination before you begin to drive. Use extra caution when backing out.
- Obey speed limits, even if roads are clear and traffic is light.
- Do not make unnecessary lane changes, as unsafe lane changes are often a contributing factor in crashes.
- Be aware of increased pedestrian and bicycle traffic as people turn to walking and biking to get out of the house safely during quarantine. Conversely, pedestrians and bicyclists should remember that reduced traffic does not mean no traffic and be careful when crossing or walking in streets.
- Practice defensive driving. As numerous TxDOT safety campaigns emphasize: Buckle up every rider every time, plan for a sober driver or arrange alternative transportation, avoid drowsy driving, always pay attention and avoid distracted driving.
- Remember while driving to keep your eyes busy moving from mirror to mirror to the road ahead so you can watch out for others who may be more distracted due to personal hardships. ■

# TRAINING IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD

**E**ven though employees weren't meeting in person due to COVID-19, training still continued. **Amanda Allen**, local government projects coordinator with the Transportation Programs Division, gives a first-hand account of the Certified Instructor Program and its use of virtual training in the age of social distancing.

Training ranks as one of my most important responsibilities as a team member in the Local Government Projects Section of the Transportation Programs Division. LGP educates and provides guidance to local governments on federal and state program requirements through a certification program. The 12-hour course certifies individuals to serve as the point person for projects involving partnerships between TxDOT and local governments.

When teleworking became mandatory because of COVID-19, two scheduled, in-person courses had to be cancelled. LGP coordinated with Workforce Development to devise a strategy to avoid canceling any more classes.

As an adjunct instructor with Workforce Development, I have been trained on curriculum development through the Instructor Certification Program. This background knowledge allowed me to quickly transition our curriculum to a virtual delivery using the WebEx Training Center. By the end of April, we successfully delivered three virtual trainings that provided certifications to 61 participants, with six more sessions scheduled through June.

If you are considering moving your courses online, here are some things to consider:

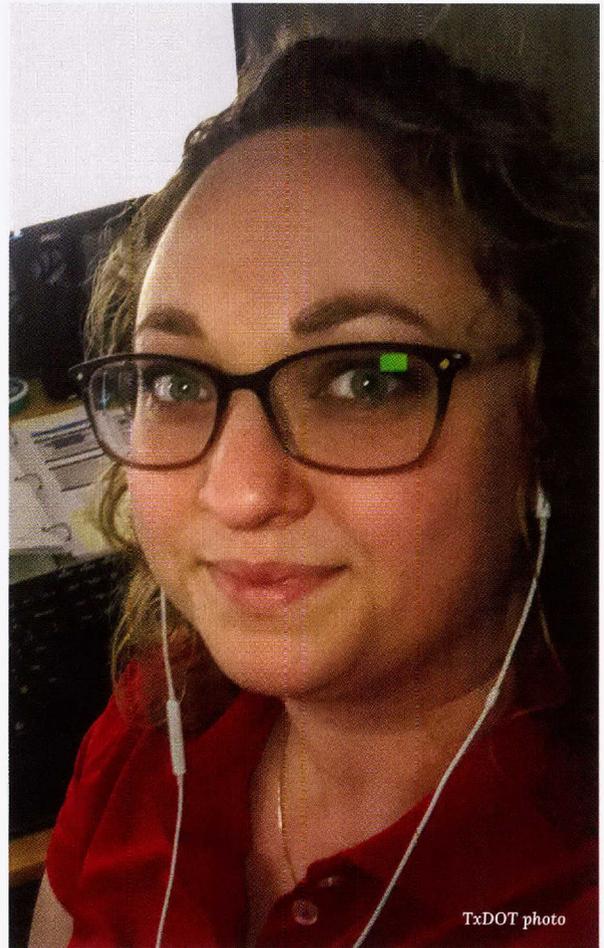
- **Technology:** Be prepared with extra time and patience to guide learners through the new virtual environment.
- **Engagement:** Taking cues from your audience can be more challenging. Consider incorporating system tools like annotations, polls and feedback icons to give participants opportunities to interact.
- **Capacity:** The recommended number of participants is 10-15 for virtual training, which could mean scheduling additional sessions.

This new environment also provides some additional benefits:

- **Safety:** Participants and instructors stay at their desk to attend and facilitate these courses, meaning less time on the road and decreasing our risk of vehicular incidents.
- **Time:** Less time traveling means more time to complete tasks and assignments.
- **Budget:** Attending courses virtually saves TxDOT money that would have otherwise gone to travel expenses.

We can take comfort in knowing our employees aren't afraid to roll up their sleeves and work as a team to find a solution. In this case, that solution was to go virtual.

Find more tips for virtual training on the Human Resources Division's Training Resources page on Crossroads. ■



*Amanda Allen helped implement virtual training in the age of social distancing.*

# EVERYDAY BRIDGES

## ARE A THROWBACK TO THE POST-WAR MODERN AGE



**O**verpasses along our highways are an everyday occurrence to the average driver. But did you know that these abundant structures represent one of the most rapid expansions in transportation for the nation? Texas led the way, of course. TxDOT's Beyond The Road campaign tells the story about how TxDOT led the nation in bridge building after World War II.

During this time, the Texas Highway Department, as TxDOT was then called, built an average of two new bridges a day for 20 years following the end of the war. The agency was responding to the strong post-war Texas economy.

How did we do it? We accomplished this through a mix of engineering innovation and pioneering material development that made bridges stronger, and quicker and cheaper to build. Engineers pioneered the use of pre-stressed concrete, which was easy to make and much cheaper than steel. Welders who honed their skills in the war were busy welding connections for bridges instead of using rivets.

In addition, bridge designers created two new bridge types: the pan-formed girder bridge and the Farm System slab bridge. The department deployed these standard designs across the state, forming the backbone of our farm-to-market road system. New bridges crossed into Mexico to aid trade, and some of the state's longest bridges ever built replaced ferries.

Today, Texas boasts more than 20,000 bridges from the post-war era between 1945 and 1965. Most of them are at least 50 years old, so TxDOT created an inventory of them as part of the historic preservation process.

Historians at TxDOT found that about 100 of the bridges are significant enough in design and innovation that they are considered part of the environmental process.

Historian Rebekah Dobrasko led a TxDOT partnership with the Texas Historical Commission and the Historic Bridge Foundation to create videos, infographics, short highlights and a history of these bridges to tell

**“Today, Texas boasts more than 20,000 bridges from the post-war era between 1945 and 1965.”**

their story. The outreach products serve as mitigation for the eventual replacement of two-thirds of the 100 historic bridges.

“We engage people in historic bridges by using fun facts. For instance, some bridges have cushions, like a sofa! They're made of neoprene, which is also used to make wet suits for scuba diving,” said Dobrasko. “The pads are a low-cost solution that allow the parts to move without cracking. Texas engineers were the first to use neoprene pads in this way.”

In addition to sharing the department's accomplishments in bridge construction, the mitigation and outreach will speed project delivery and historic preservation review for bridges that should be replaced due to traffic needs, narrow widths or damage.

For more on TxDOT's historic bridge program, visit [txdot.gov](http://txdot.gov), keyword “Beyond The Road.” ■

# Book club supports intellectual wellness

**L**ike eating well and getting exercise, expanding your intellectual wellness is part of a holistic lifestyle. Developing your intellectual wellness encourages a love of learning – no matter the stage of life you are in. We need to explore new ideas and experiences to become more well-rounded. Mentally-stimulating activities, such as reading, expand our knowledge and skills.

In Austin, employees from different divisions participate in the department-sponsored Bound to Read book club to promote their intellectual wellness.

**Four notable benefits of reading include:**

- Improving brain connectivity: Research shows that reading literally changes your mind. As you read, the network of circuits and signals in the brain get stronger.
- Reducing stress and lowering blood pressure: Engaging in six minutes of sustained reading each day can reduce your stress levels by 68% and lower your blood pressure.
- Helping to prevent age-related cognitive decline: The National Institute on Aging recommends reading books and magazines to help the brain become more adaptable and to help compensate for age-related brain changes.
- Contributing to a longer life: One study published in *Innovation in Aging* in 2017 followed 3,635 adults over a 12-year period and found that those who read books lived two years longer than those who either didn't read or who read other forms of media.

Reading is not only intellectually stimulating, but book clubs can bring people together.



*The Austin Bound to Read book club discusses books while social distancing. (l to r) Top row: Maria Hanke, Erica Chan and Angela Kissel. Bottom row: Kelsey Peduzzi, Megan Lowary and Brad Matejowsky. Bottom right corner: Arlin Alvarez with newborn Anaisa.*

“My favorite thing about being in the book club is discussing new books with other TxDOT employees that I may not have met otherwise,” said Kelsey Peduzzi, special projects coordinator with the Right of Way Division.

Book clubs offer the chance to gain new friendships as well as new perspectives on literature and culture. Book club members can exchange thoughts and challenge concepts when discussing a book.

“The TxDOT book club has given me the opportunity to interact with co-workers I might not have otherwise met through regular TxDOT business,” said Megan Lowary, financial reports branch manager with the Financial Management Division. “We have had some great discussions, and our interpretations of the books are sometimes vastly different based on our diverse personal experiences. I’ve liked both of the books we have read so far, even though they were from genres I normally wouldn’t choose for myself.”

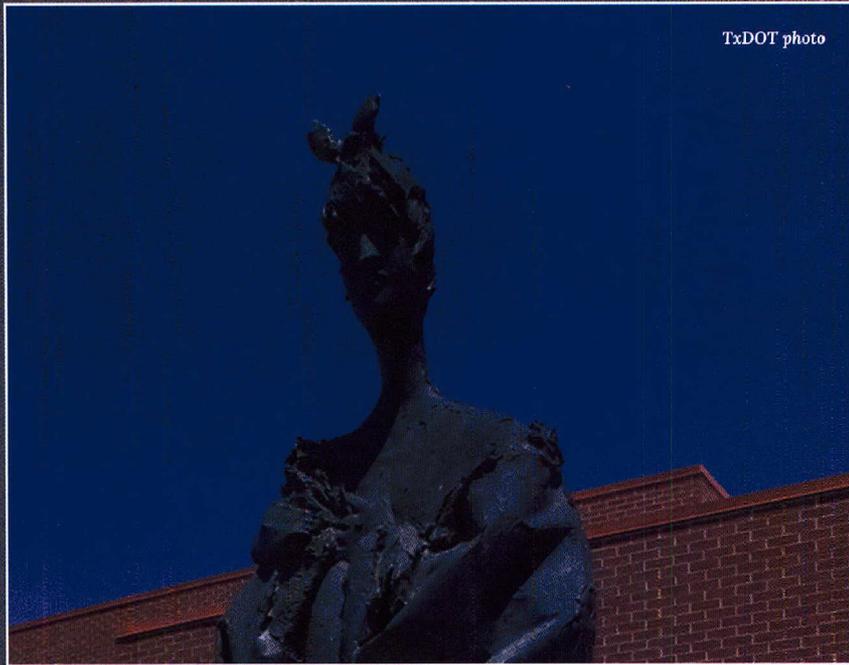
If you’re in Austin, consider participating in the Bound to Read book club! Contact TxDOT’s statewide Wellness Program Administrators, Arlin Alvarez, [arlin.alvarez@txdot.gov](mailto:arlin.alvarez@txdot.gov), or Gina Akin, [gina.akin@txdot.gov](mailto:gina.akin@txdot.gov), for more information. District employees should reach out to their Human Resources district wellness coordinator to get one started in their district. ■



**Contact your local Wellness Program Coordinator to learn about the wellness program and start your journey today!**

## WHERE AM I?

Here is a photo depicting an identifiable landmark you may have seen in your travels around Texas. If you think you know what this is a photo of or know where it was taken, send an email to [TNideas@txdot.gov](mailto:TNideas@txdot.gov). Deadline for submissions is July 10.



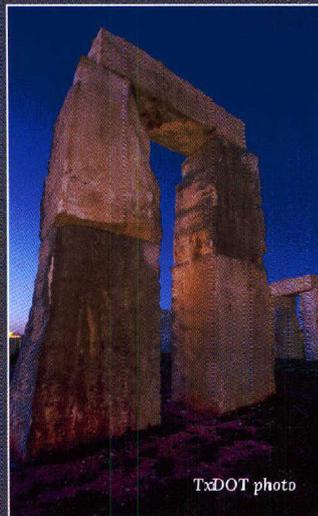
TxDOT photo

## Identified:

Congratulations to our first identifier Scott Serafin (AUS).

Last edition's photo featured the Stonehenge replica on the campus of The University of Texas of the Permian Basin in Odessa in Ector County. The stone blocks, similar in size, shape and appearance to the ancient Stonehenge in southwestern England, were unveiled in 2004. Readers who identified the photo as Stonehenge II in Ingram have also been recognized since the landmarks are so similar.

Others correctly identifying the photo were Don Deitch (SAT), Joan Henderson (TRV), Chris Cowen (BRY), Rick Salazar (MNT), Darren McDaniel (TPD), Lorena Martinez (TRV), Lyndol Irby (TRV), Mark Fisher (ENV), James Stevenson (MNT), Bradley Peikert (BRY), Cindy Broyles (LFK), Bradley Pylant (ABL), Nancy Leggio (DAL), Lanny Wadle (FIN), Pierce Robson (BRY), Erick Wildestorm (ROW), David Henke (SAT), Joseph Hagler (LFK), Lennerd Bryd (ODA), Meredith Worthen (ENV), Jacky Hill (LFK), Maurice Maness (BRY), Jebadiah Clawson (ABL) and TP Holt (WAC). ■



TxDOT photo

## UPCOMING TxDOT EVENTS

**July 3**

**DAY BEFORE  
INDEPENDENCE DAY**  
(Minimal staff required)

**July 4 (Saturday)**

**INDEPENDENCE DAY**  
(All agencies closed)

**July 30**

**TEXAS TRANSPORTATION  
COMMISSION MEETING**

**August 27**

**LBJ'S BIRTHDAY**  
(Minimal staff required)

**August 27**

**TEXAS TRANSPORTATION  
COMMISSION MEETING**

# All Across TxDOT

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

EDITOR'S NOTE: TN has a new News feature combining TxDOT Talk Around the State and 5 Things You Need to Know Right Now. All the great content about events, people and news is still here. Check it out!

### LUBBOCK DISTRICT

## Virtual adoption makes dream come true



Rusty and Whitley Smith with daughter Khailynn.

After years of waiting to become parents, Special Projects Coordinator Rusty Smith of the Lubbock District and his wife Whitley were not about to let a worldwide pandemic keep them from adopting 15-month old Khailynn.

On April 3, the Smiths, Judge Kelley Tesch, staff from Child Protective Services and other organizations, family and friends logged onto the Zoom web service for a virtual adoption ceremony to make Khailynn officially part of their family.

As stay-at-home orders in mid-March limited gatherings to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Smiths worried it would affect their adoption plans.

"We knew the adoption was supposed to take place in late March in a traditional court setting," said Rusty Smith. "About a week into working from home, I called our lawyer to ask what was going on – to see if it was still happening. There was a lot of uncertainty. When Judge Tesch suggested a virtual adoption, we didn't hesitate."

Smith said that while there was some disappointment the adoption didn't take place in-person surrounded by family and friends, the Smiths were overjoyed by the number of loved ones who joined in the Zoom ceremony to share the moment.

"We had family and friends, including TxDOT family, join us. In total, about 40 to 50 people logged in," he said.

For the adoption ceremony, the family wore identical t-shirts reading, "I stole their hearts, now I'm stealing their name."

Their virtual adoption story aired on a local television station and was picked up by other stations across the country.

"It was a surprise to see it broadcasted in places like Tennessee and Mississippi," said Smith. "I hope it brought an uplifting message during a difficult time. With so many children needing homes, maybe more folks will consider adoption or fostering." ■

### Safe Days of Summer campaign in full swing



*During the busy summer months, safety remains a priority.*

The Safe Days of Summer safety campaign began May 1. The theme this year is “It’s a matter of life.”

With the current pandemic affecting the whole world, safety is at the forefront of everyone’s minds. Safety is a matter of life, and the theme speaks to the current situation. Going into the summer months, employees must continue to practice physical distancing and frequent hand washing. Also, remember to clean and disinfect work areas to prevent the spread of disease.

TxDOT’s operations on Texas roadways continues during COVID-19, and the summer months are the busiest for maintenance and construction operations. The Safe Days of Summer campaign was developed – and continues each year – to raise the level of safety awareness. The OCC Safety Portal provides helpful information, including prevention tips for field, office and home environments. ■

## AUSTIN DISTRICT

### Bridges of Bastrop take shape

Major changes are underway in Bastrop that will help increase safety and mobility in this fast-growing area. From sunset to sunrise on May 27, crews poured the deck for the new eastbound SH 71 frontage road bridge over the Colorado River.

The bridge is just one of nine independent bridges being constructed as part of a project at SH 71 and the Colorado River. The vision for Bastrop goes beyond this one project.

“This project is part of a larger, corridor-wide effort,” said Austin District Engineer Tucker Ferguson. “About a mile east of this area, we constructed an overpass at SH 95, that has resulted in a noticeable improvement in traffic flow and we expect this project to do the same.”

The SH 71 at the Colorado River project, which kicked off last year, will extend frontage roads across the river on separate bridges and will include a new westbound exit ramp across the river, as well as a new eastbound entrance ramp at the Union Pacific Railroad.

The \$50.4 million project is expected to be complete by late 2022, weather permitting. The contractor is Capital Excavation Company. ■

### Playbook for Safely Returning to In-Office Operations provides blueprint for returning to work

In May, Executive Director James Bass provided employees with the TxDOT Playbook for Safely Returning to In-Office Operations. It is the agency’s overall plan and specific procedures to re-establish safe and appropriate in-office operations. The guidelines and steps presented in the Playbook were informed by guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state health officials and leaders. Equally important is the feedback from an employee survey, which reinforced many of the measures instituted in the Playbook. The plan is intended to keep staff safe as the agency transitions back to normal office operations.

However, TxDOT employees have shown that the business of TxDOT goes on uninterrupted, even in the face of this extraordinary event. Field employees are continuing to serve our maintenance and inspection needs. Teleworking has proven to be a valuable tool for staff to continue working effectively.

The Playbook can be found on the COVID-19 page on Crossroads. If you have any questions, please reach out to your division director or district engineer. ■

# TALENT ACQUISITION TEAM SEEKS OUT THE BEST

**S**tressing the importance of the transportation needs of the future, the Texas Transportation Commission in 2018 named retention and recruitment of “a diverse and well-prepared workforce” as one of its top priorities.

To meet this goal, the Human Resources Division has established a Talent Acquisition Team.

Talent acquisition is an ongoing strategic effort. The team’s actions focus on everything from immediate needs to long-term agency goals. The team helps find talent from entry to executive level. It also helps with employer branding, relationship management, marketing and more. At the same time, it supports TxDOT’s diversity and inclusion efforts. The team also works to provide employees with the resources to meet their own district and division needs.

With help from the Human Resources Division and other district and division staff, the team attends more than 80 college, university and high school events every year. This includes universities outside of Texas.

The team partners with workforce solutions offices and military organizations across the state to advertise our hiring needs and attend events that they sponsor. Notably, staff attends events for associations, such as the American Society of Civil Engineers, the National Society of Black Engineers, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers and the Society of Women Engineers. Recently, the team has attended virtual events to continue the recruiting effort.



*The Talent Acquisition Teams works to find talent at all levels: (l to r) Charlene Shirley, Angela Carrizales, Marvin Faulcon, Jennifer Levine and Sheila Brooks. Photo taken in June 2019.*

Although events and fairs are a great way to aid in agency goals, the team does even more. On a day-to-day basis, they may be sourcing for candidates through multiple platforms to aid in filling current positions, capturing resumes, referring applicants, creating individualized hiring plans for hiring managers, preparing on-site hiring fairs and advertising positions on job boards, websites and TxDOT’s social media pages.

At the end of the day, current employees are TxDOT’s greatest recruiting and advertising resource. The team is here to support you. Please take a moment to visit the Talent Acquisition Team page on Crossroads to learn more. Or reach out to one of the team members: [Sheila.Brooks@txdot.gov](mailto:Sheila.Brooks@txdot.gov), [Charlene.Shirley@txdot.gov](mailto:Charlene.Shirley@txdot.gov), [Angela.Carrizales@txdot.gov](mailto:Angela.Carrizales@txdot.gov), [Jlevine@txdot.gov](mailto:Jlevine@txdot.gov) or [Marvin.Faulcon@txdot.gov](mailto:Marvin.Faulcon@txdot.gov). ■



*James Bass (center on stair landing) poses with the 2019 summer hires. Photo taken in June 2019.*

# TRASH OR TREASURE

## TxDOT DIGS INTO THE PAST IN STARR AND ANDERSON COUNTIES

**Y**our coffee mug and your landfill trash: what could these two things possibly have in common?

When archeologists dig for evidence of human culture thousands of years from now, these objects may help guide their understanding of how you lived. For sites dating back hundreds or thousands of years, archeologists might unearth everything from sherds (pottery fragments) to middens (trash dumps) – all clues about those who lived before us.

Part of TxDOT's work to plan for construction includes archeological investigations that may lead to larger excavation projects. For instance, if there is an important archeological site in the path of a planned road project, TxDOT will excavate and research the site to preserve the story of the people and time. This winter, TxDOT excavated sites for two road improvement projects, one in South Texas and one in East Texas.

Plans to construct State Loop 195 between Rio Grande City and the city of Roma revealed new information about prehistoric people in South Texas. The project area contained 23 archeological sites, even though this area of the state is understudied.

TxDOT's archeology team determined that two of these sites had significant cultural information to preserve and thus excavation began. Radiocarbon dates from the lab revealed that people were living at the sites at various times between 3,550 and 300 years ago. Chris Ringstaff, TxDOT archeologist, led excavations and uncovered projectile points, other stone tools, plant and animal remains and prehistoric campsites.

The team unearthed burned rocks indicating that people used cooking fires and burned wood fragments. The archeology team said the sites were particularly notable because some of the cooking fires and piles of refuse from stone tool-making were well preserved and relatively undisturbed. TxDOT's work will continue in the lab, helping researchers understand why people came to South Texas and how they made use of the land.

In Anderson County in East Texas, TxDOT Archeology investigated the right of way for the widening of U.S. 175 between Frankston and Jacksonville. With pine trees and red clay, northeast Texas is the backdrop for a unique

Native American culture that is aboriginal to Texas: the Caddo people.

The Caddo lived in small villages and were farmers and traders. This location along U.S. 175 was originally studied in the 1930s by archeologists from the University of Texas at Austin. They discovered one of the distinctive features of the Caddo culture: a mound.

The Caddo built mounds for spiritual, ceremonial and other purposes. Often, they signify the location of ancient burials. The one near U.S. 175 dates to



*Excavations uncovered projectile points, stone tools and prehistoric campsites. Photo from February 2020.*

approximately 350 to 470 years ago, and includes post holes that marked the presence of a circular structure. Underneath was a large midden containing bone tools, pottery sherds, effigy bowls, ceramic pipes, arrow points and animal bones.

TxDOT used cadaver dogs to look for burials which must be removed and repatriated to the Caddo Nation, if found. The process of finding and addressing burials is a sensitive one that TxDOT takes seriously in consultation with tribes. However, since none were found by the dogs or discovered through other techniques, TxDOT continued its work.

The mound itself is just outside TxDOT's project area and therefore won't be studied. But TxDOT excavated in the project area next to the mound site and at a second nearby site where an associated village may be located. These excavations may provide valuable information about the day-to-day lives and culture of East Texas tribes in the 15th through 17th centuries. ■

# USING DISINFECTANTS SAFELY IN THE WORKPLACE

**A**s TxDOT begins the process of safely returning staff to the workplace, many procedures will be in place to help contain the spread of COVID-19. Increased cleaning and disinfectants will be a significant part of that effort so it is important to use them safely.

Coronaviruses, the cause of COVID-19 and other diseases, naturally die on surfaces and objects within hours to days. Normal routine cleaning with soap and water removes germs and dirt from surfaces and lowers the risk of spreading COVID-19 infection. Disinfectants kill germs on surfaces. By killing germs on a surface after cleaning, you can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

Chemical disinfectants are effective and safe tools when appropriately handled with safety measures in place. If misused, they can be hazardous and harmful to workers and the environment.

To combat the threat of biohazards in the workplace, sterilization and cleaning of the workplace and personal hygiene are very important. There are many different types of chemical agents for disinfection purposes. Despite their disinfectant and antiseptic functions, the chemical agents, if misused, may lead to incidents.

However, a full understanding of the properties of the chemical agents being used and taking appropriate precautionary measures will ensure safety and efficiency at work.

These measures include:

- Understand the properties of the sterilizing/disinfecting agents in use.
- Follow the instructions and safety measures as recommended by the product manufacturer.
- Read the Safety Data Sheets for the product being used.
- Follow the instructions and safety precautions described on the Safety Data Sheets.
- Maintain the original manufacturer's label or properly label secondary containers.
- Cover the container securely.
- Use personal protective equipment as instructions designate.
- Ask for guidance from supervisors or safety officers when in doubt.
- Understand emergency measures fully.
- **DO NOT MIX CLEANERS OR CHEMICALS.** Mixing can have dangerous consequences!

For questions or concerns regarding PPE or the Hazard Communication Program, please refer to the Occupational Safety Manual and Handbook of Safe Practices, contact the Occupational Safety Division at (512) 416-3395 or visit the Safety Portal on Crossroads. ■

## DO NOT MIX THESE CLEANING PRODUCTS



### BLEACH + VINEGAR

Bleach and vinegar mixture produces chlorine gas, which can cause coughing, breathing problems, burning and watery eyes.



### BLEACH + AMMONIA

Bleach and ammonia produce a toxic gas called chloramine. It causes shortness of breath and chest pain.



### BLEACH + RUBBING ALCOHOL

Bleach and rubbing alcohol makes chloroform, which is highly toxic.



### HYDROGEN PEROXIDE + VINEGAR

This combination makes peracetic/peroxyacetic acid, which can be highly corrosive.

# Basilio Aguilar

## PHARR DISTRICT



## Basilio Aguilar

### MAINTENANCE SECTION ASSISTANT PHARR DISTRICT

Brownsville native Basilio Aguilar has worked for TxDOT for 35 years. It's been an adventure the father of five has enjoyed. He's now maintenance section assistant with the Pharr District, but says he spent most of his years as a heavy equipment operator. Aguilar believes he's left his footprint in the world by helping to build roads. He enjoys travelling those roads on his two Harley-Davidson motorcycles, a Road King and a Custom Ultra Classic.

#### **Name a hobby you spend time doing.**

I've been a member of a motorcycle group called the Spartan Cruisers for 20 years. We go on rides and perform charity work.

#### **What's the longest ride you've taken with your motorcycle group?**

Once we rode from Texas to Ohio. It took three-and-a-half days! The roadways were very different and not as good as they are in Texas.

#### **What's something that has changed for you during the pandemic?**

I am spending more time with family doing evening walks and working on my personal goals.

#### **Tell me about one of your personal goals.**

I am working on my diet and eating better now, more chicken and salad. Still, I'm not losing much weight!

#### **What's something people would be surprised to know about you?**

I don't watch a lot of television. I spend most of my time out in my garage or doing yardwork.

#### **What's your favorite sports team?**

The Dallas Cowboys. I hope they get another Super Bowl one day. A man can dream.

#### **If you could have a player from the Dallas Cowboys come to work with you, who would it be?**

Running back Emmitt Smith because I bet he'd be easy to work with in the field.

#### **What's another job you've had besides TxDOT?**

I once worked as a shrimp-boat hand in the Port of Brownsville. My job was to behead thousands of shrimp a day.

#### **What's something shocking you've experienced out on the water?**

I'd see sharks. Big sharks in the Gulf!

#### **What is your dream job?**

When I was younger, I always wanted to be a pilot. I like thinking about being high above with the clouds.

#### **What's your favorite color?**

Purple. I hope to get a purple motorcycle one day! ■

# MILESTONES

## MAY SERVICE AWARDS

### ABILENE

- 20 Daniel P. Crow  
Chad W. Teichelman
- 10 Kim Wende
- 5 Cindi Watson

### AMARILLO

- 10 David J. Garcia  
Dustin L. Lee  
Robert S. Mays  
Russell W. Wilson
- 5 Rodney G. Houck  
John Stribling

### ATLANTA

- 25 John E. Hines
- 20 Glenn R. Yowell
- 15 Jason M. Griggs  
Brandon K. Morse
- 10 William K. Hays
- 5 Jonathan C. Carter  
David W. Pippin

### AUSTIN

- 40 Ricky L. Wilson
- 15 Trent Lindig  
Malcom A. Oldaker  
Sean Wright
- 5 Josue J. Garcia  
Will B. Hamlett  
David J. Hogan  
Calvin Patschke  
Lizeth Sandoval

### AVIATION

- 10 Paul V. Slusser Jr.

### BEAUMONT

- 20 Jamie L. Caviano
- 15 James H. Omstead
- 5 Joel D. Stein  
Cecil D. Wade

### BRYAN

- 20 Christopher M. Cowen  
Trent A. Dierking
- 5 Raymond J. Jaenicke Jr.  
Jabe M. Williamson

### CHILDRESS

- 15 Kenneth E. Benton
- 5 Trinidad Cantu  
Billy D. Hightower

### CIVIL RIGHTS

- 15 Michael J. McElroy
- 10 Christopher D. Amy

### COMMUNICATIONS

- 5 Shannon McIntire  
Jennifer Wright

### CONSTRUCTION

- 10 Ryan Evans

### CORPUS CHRISTI

- 20 Woodren Pettis

- 10 Mark S. Hughes  
Nicholas K. Novosad
- 5 Joe L. Arzola  
Oscar J. Diaz

### DALLAS

- 25 Susan A. Icke
- 20 David C. Mahoney  
Rebecca D. Nance  
James P. Rivera  
Joshua C. Vasquez
- 15 Anthony R. Block  
Michael C. Thomas
- 5 Refugio Gonzales  
Stephanie J. Nantz  
Todd A. Neely  
Kristopher K. Polley

### DESIGN

- 5 Matthew Barland

### EL PASO

- 25 Jesus E. Valtier
- 20 Albert Bautista  
Javier Castillo

### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

- 35 Gail A. Quimby
- 20 Deborah J. Vinson
- 15 Lisa K. Auston
- 10 Durando A. Snider
- 5 Jeremy Gardner

### FLEET OPERATIONS

- 15 Raymond Gutierrez
- 5 Christopher Paulsen

### FORT WORTH

- 20 Faisal G. Abdel-Qader  
David D. Fowler  
Javier Salinas
- 15 Federico M. Hernandez
- 10 Jesus O. Castor III
- 5 Kelie J. Crim

### HOUSTON

- 35 John D. Horelica
- 30 Alan Craft III  
James Koch
- 25 Marco A. Cantu
- 20 Yee Cheng Chang
- 15 James R. Anderson Jr.  
David K. Earnest  
Michael A. Olivo
- 5 Oliver B. Dano  
Wanching Huang  
Matthew Parton  
Rollette H. Roldan  
Robert K. Tucker

### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- 20 Kevin J. Setoda
- 5 Graciela Alcantar

### INTERNAL AUDIT

- 5 Monica J. Parker

### LAREDO

- 15 Omar J. Costilla  
Maximiliano Torres
- 5 Samuel Rodriguez  
Santos Vera III

### LUBBOCK

- 30 Russell N. Hayes
- 20 Manuel Perez  
Michael P. Stroope
- 15 Zane R. Alexander  
Detrand D. Cooper  
Martin Garza Jr.
- 5 Donald E. Torres

### LUFKIN

- 30 Kevin L. Harbuck
- 15 Terry P. King

### MATERIALS AND TESTS

- 15 Brad A. Willemin
- 5 Kevin J. Tinley

### ODESSA

- 20 Gabriel A. Ramirez
- 15 Sammy Hinojos  
Traci L. Ray
- 5 Valerie Alvarado  
Mario Finney  
Augustin Hernandez  
Luis Rodriguez  
Salvador Salinas

### PARIS

- 20 Chad C. Ingram  
Sam J. Mims  
William F. Tubb
- 5 Cliff Varner

### PHARR

- 20 Eduardo Saenz  
Sergio Sustaita
- 15 Jennifer L. Beltran
- 5 Joel Carmona  
Juan Ruiz  
Emiliano Vega  
Lynnette Villarreal

### PROCUREMENT

- 35 Richard F. Wasson
- 30 Melissa A. Zunker
- 20 Brandy L. Halk  
Sergio E. McGregor

### PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING PROCUREMENT SERVICES

- 20 Sanjay G. Upadhyay
- 5 Tira T. Dobrozensky

### PROJECT FINANCE, DEBT AND STRATEGIC CONTRACTS

- 20 Rakhshanda Mahar
- 10 Sara M. Ulbrich
- 5 Dallas Teston

### PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

- 15 Bonnie J. Sherman

### RAIL

- 5 Aristeo Cantu

### RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

- 20 Edward N. Mattila

### RIGHT OF WAY

- 15 Twyla M. Hardin
- 5 William D. Goodman

### SAN ANTONIO

- 35 Cary C. Lloyd
- 20 Malcolm Gonzalez  
William J. Trefzer
- 15 Robert P. Hicks
- 10 Bobby G. Gonzales  
Keith T. Ploog
- 5 Nicholes Paredez  
BJ White

### SUPPORT SERVICES

- 30 Anthony B. Harper
- 15 Alvaro Venegas

### TOLL OPERATIONS

- 5 Richard D. Nelson

### TRAFFIC SAFETY

- 20 Latisha D. Beaver
- 15 Lawrence A. Krantz

### TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

- 15 Loretta B. Brown

### TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS

- 15 Aaron A. Arroyo

### TRAVEL INFORMATION

- 30 Christine T. Anderson
- 5 Andrea Lin  
Emily I. Ruiz

### TYLER

- 15 Jace D. Cooper
- 5 Wesley G. Anderson  
Randal Smith  
Joe D. Stocks

### WACO

- 20 Guy D. Grant II
- 5 Brittney Hand  
Jeffrey D. Ingham  
Brandon Reinke

### WICHITA FALLS

- 20 John B. Coats  
Casey L. Elliott  
Darin W. Reed  
Don S. Richardson
- 5 Guy Syptak

### YOAKUM

- 20 David B. Stephens
- 15 John E. Picha
- 5 Carlos Chavez  
Barbara J. Steffek



# JUNE SERVICE AWARDS

## ABILENE

- 30 Jonnie T. Hise
- 20 Gary E. Shelnuttt  
Larry D. Sneed  
Ted F. Wende
- 15 Cassie L. Caudill

## AMARILLO

- 25 Frank Figueroa
- 10 Robert A. Reining
- 5 Jesse B. Hernandez  
Aaron J. Heyd

## ATLANTA

- 20 Jamie E. Barnes  
Kamii L. Parr
- 10 Adrian Q. Allen Jr.  
Cleon D. Williams Sr.
- 5 Michael E. Martinez

## AUDIT

- 5 Franciou Niclas

## AUSTIN

- 20 Dwayne M. Halbardier  
Michelle L.  
Romage-Chambers
- 15 Michelle R. Milford  
Jonnie R. Perrine  
Kevin A. Plumlee  
Jason Rodriguez  
Jesus Valdez
- 5 Chang H. Cho  
Joshua C. Corbin  
Hilda M. Ortiz

## AVIATION

- 5 Sean Masteller

## BEAUMONT

- 20 Clifton C. Louviere Jr.
- 15 Cynthia L. Dougherty  
Robert A. Webb
- 5 James Feistel

## BRIDGE

- 5 Li Chun He

## BROWNWOOD

- 25 Pless E. Stuessy
- 5 Tommy K. Latham

## BRYAN

- 20 Jennifer M. Mascheck
- 15 Roy J. Mathis  
Dwight E. Moses  
Billy J. Winchester
- 10 Justin W. Kalisek
- 5 Davacio Freeman

## CHILDRESS

- 15 Bryan C. McClendon

## CIVIL RIGHTS

- 15 Milan D. Hawkins
- 5 Hugh D. Barwick Jr.

## COMPLIANCE

- 5 Natasha Foote  
Parsons Townsend

## CORPUS CHRISTI

- 35 George Cavazos  
John R. Kelly
- 5 Russell W. Braune  
David Luce  
Kristy M. Rodriguez

## DALLAS

- 35 Milton T. Marr
- 25 Dion O. Porath
- 20 Kent E. Rivers
- 15 Andy S. Byrd
- 5 Griselda S. Clark-El  
Craig Dearman  
Fitsumbirhan Tesfa

## EL PASO

- 5 Ervey M. Hernandez

## FLEET OPERATIONS

- 20 Robert S. Garza  
J. Inez Hernandez
- 15 Russell R. Newton
- 5 Farrah Bhatti  
Jose Garcia

## FORT WORTH

- 15 David C. Nwabuisi  
Chukwuma Osemeke
- 5 Ricardo Rico

## HOUSTON

- 35 Sharmarion E. Brown
- 30 Thanh Binh T. Doan  
Martin L. Seets
- 20 Hugo A. Alvarado  
Jaime E. Castaneda Jr.  
Ching H. Chiu  
Kimberly A. Straughter
- 15 Dustin A. Armstrong  
Joyce A. Girouard  
Azadeh Tejareh
- 5 Sheila Brooks  
Brenda Bustillos  
Jeffrey A. Clark  
William P. Fields  
Kevin J. Knudson  
Joel Porras  
Cassandra L. Rabius  
Erica G. Swenson  
Citlali Tapia

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- 20 Hanh M. Le
- 5 Rebecca Rychlik-Adams

## LAREDO

- 15 Raul Rodriguez

## LUBBOCK

- 15 Mark L. Alldredge
- 10 Andres Lopez  
Michael S. Lopez
- 5 Roel Cisneros  
Charlotte L. Smith

## LUFKIN

- 45 Verron W. Shepherd
- 10 Charles M. Brazil  
Chancey Cleaver  
Justin Harrison
- 5 Jimmy R. Thompson

## PARIS

- 5 James K. Caudill

## PHARR

- 35 Robert W. Delafuente
- 20 Arturo Lopez
- 15 Griselda Saldivar
- 5 Juan E. Davila  
Dora E. Marin Robles  
Norberto Mena

## PROCUREMENT

- 20 Cynthia K. Goodson
- 10 Herbert Miller Jr.
- 5 Amanda Marlar

## PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING PROCUREMENT SERVICES

- 20 Lewis L. Walden
- 15 Kimlinh V. Nguyen  
Jaime A. Vela Jr.
- 5 Lindsey Gomez

## PROJECT FINANCE, DEBT AND STRATEGIC CONTRACTS

- 5 Heather R. Hardaway

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

- 15 Eric Gleason

## SAN ANGELO

- 30 William R. Galbreath
- 20 Edwin S. Kloboucnik  
Bobby G. Pearson
- 15 Jerry D. Stone
- 5 Armando Sanchez II

## SAN ANTONIO

- 25 Diana L. Jordan
- 15 Armando Garcia  
Michael L. Morgan  
Rebecca L. Penshorn
- 5 James M. Aldrich  
Melissa Yvette Rosso

## SUPPORT SERVICES

- 20 Jessie Dycus  
Kyle M. Josey
- 15 Javen L. Abraham
- 5 Pradeep Ramadoss

## TRAFFIC SAFETY

- 10 Monica C. Yates

## TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS

- 10 Robert R. Porter

## TRAVEL INFORMATION

- 5 Judy E. Garcia  
Glenn Weathington

## TYLER

- 30 Willie G. Akin Jr.
- 5 Preston Friend  
Ricky Garner  
Kevin Ivy  
Daniel Payne

## WACO

- 35 Guy M. Wardlow
- 20 Sharon L. Benson  
Vanette M. Kuykendall
- 15 Justin M. Brenek  
Charles W. Smith
- 10 Chance R. Ling

## WICHITA FALLS

- 15 Cole D. Alexander
- 5 Gary D. Johnson  
Justin L. Morgan

## YOAKUM

- 25 Paul E. Reitz
- 15 Jonathan S. Rogers

# MILESTONES

## MARCH RETIREE REPORT

### ATLANTA

30 Ruston L. Turner

### BROWNWOOD

26 Jeffrey S. Primrose

### BRYAN

39 Shelton S. Webb

27 Chad M. Clossin

### CHILDRESS

27 Delbert R. Glover

13 Barbara J. Sims

### COMMUNICATIONS

21 Kenneth R. Roberts

### CORPUS CHRISTI

19 James O. Skidmore

9 Lance M. Jaimes

### DALLAS

36 Gary N. Blackman

### FLEET OPERATIONS

13 Jeffery G. Jones

### FORT WORTH

20 Timmy R. Cunningham

### HOUSTON

17 Ronnie L. Carlisle

### LUBBOCK

23 Shirley K. Jackson

15 Gerald J. Batenhorst

### LUFKIN

16 Glenn A. Minschew

### ODESSA

27 Kathryn C. Evans

### RAIL

14 Rebecca A. Miles

### RIGHT OF WAY

29 Nancy B. Owen

### SAN ANTONIO

26 Bonnie C. Longley

### TYLER

22 Steven Wayne Hall

## APRIL RETIREE REPORT

### ATLANTA

27 Ray E. Brady

### AUSTIN

30 William C. Bozeman

27 Jamie D. Witten

### BEAUMONT

27 Jody C. Pitman

8 Dennis J. Duplantis

### BRYAN

16 Mark S. Tidwell

### CHILDRESS

28 Samuel L. Doby

25 Terry L. Manuel

### EL PASO

23 Ruben Sanchez

### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

20 Guadalupe S. Hernandez

### FORT WORTH

23 Randy R. Stevens

22 Larry D. Wann

19 Ronnie J. Gilbreath

### LAREDO

23 Ricardo E. De La Parra

### PARIS

25 Cliff J. Watts

### PHARR

26 Sandra Flores

### PROCUREMENT

30 Lisa D. Hayden

### PROJECT FINANCE, DEBT & STRATEGIC CONTRACTS

19 Michael W. Midkiff

### RIGHT OF WAY

13 Mary Lynn Russell

### SAN ANGELO

28 Mark W. Halfmann

### SUPPORT SERVICES

15 Dennis R. Imel

Susan Lynn Simpson

### TYLER

20 Steven D. Campbell

## IN MEMORIAM

### BEAUMONT

#### Walter Hoover

Electronics Technician

Date of Death: 4/7/2020

Years of Service: 4

### BROWNWOOD

#### Billy Leon Taylor

Plant Maintenance Manager

Date of Death: 5/1/2020

Retired: 1994

Years of Service: 32

### LUFKIN

#### Terrilynn McDonough

Maintenance Support Technician

Date of Death: 4/7/2020

Years of Service: 10

# NEW TxDOTCONNECT FUNCTIONALITY MEANS LESS DATA ENTRY, MORE DATA

**R**ight of Way and Utilities staff can say goodbye to legacy systems and spreadsheets as they begin working in TxDOTCONNECT with the launch of new functionality. This functionality consolidates right of way and utilities project information in one system and introduces new capabilities that have advantages for all TxDOT staff and external partners.

## Working in a single system with external partners

With the new functionality, division staff can enter right-of-way project information for parcels and utility relocations into TxDOTCONNECT directly, instead of working in multiple systems and project tracking spreadsheets to manage information. External right of way and utility consultants, as well as surveyor consultants, can take a more hands-on role in TxDOTCONNECT, erasing the need for dual data entry.

## Access to data

The latest release also has improvements for other TxDOT staff because it makes right of way and utilities project information readily available in TxDOTCONNECT, instead of having to contact a right of way project manager or utility coordinator for specific project information. This new approach enhances collaboration and teamwork by readily sharing information.

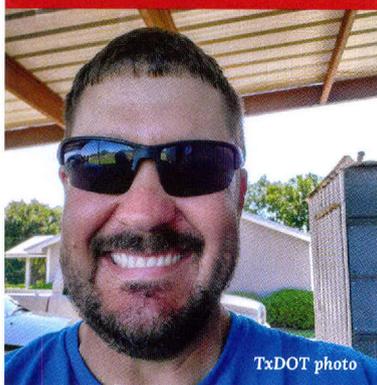
“This release allows all TxDOT staff and external partners with system access to easily locate information on their own,” said Right of Way Division Director Kyle Madsen. “However, the data is still managed by division staff, and our expertise and guidance will always be available to our co-workers and consultants.”

To learn more about TxDOTCONNECT and future planned releases, visit the TxDOTCONNECT site on Crossroads or ask a TxDOTCONNECT champion in your district or division. ■

## EMPLOYEES CHIME IN

### What was your first job as a teenager or young adult?

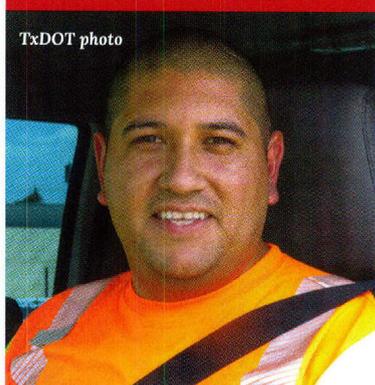
#### YOAKUM DISTRICT



**JONATHAN DUDENSING**  
MAINTENANCE SECTION SUPERVISOR

“My dad owned a construction company building homes and barns. My job was swinging a hammer, cutting lumber and working a shovel.”

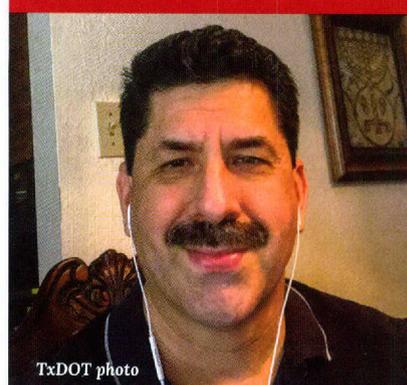
#### LAREDO DISTRICT



**JOSE MAGAÑA**  
GENERAL TRANSPORTATION TECHNICIAN

“My first job as a young adult was securing the safety of students, staff and visitors as a high school bike patrol officer.”

#### CORPUS CHRISTI DISTRICT



**DAVID CHAPA**  
CONSTRUCTION RECORDS AUDITOR

“My first job was working as a police dispatcher through a summer program with the city of Roma.”

# **Your Employee Assistance Program is here for you when you need it.**

Confidential counseling for you and your family is available 24/7. For assistance, call and ask to speak to a counselor.

**Toll Free  
800-343-3822**

**In Austin  
512-328-1144**

**EAP Teen Line  
800-334-Teen (8336)**

**Or visit  
[www.awpnow.com](http://www.awpnow.com)**

