



Michael Amador, TRV

**Dallas attorney David M. Laney announced he was stepping down as Transportation Commissioner at the Commission's March 30 meeting. Laney will remain on the commission to serve out his term.**

'We've covered quite a distance in five years'

## Laney steps down

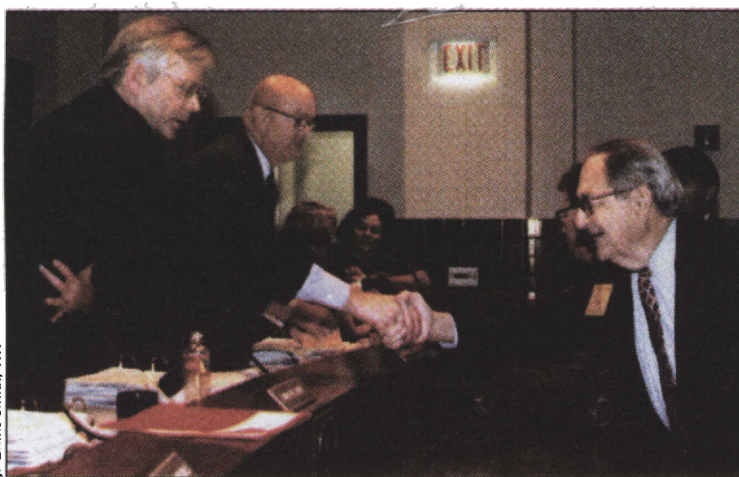
By **Eloise Lundgren**  
Public Information Office

**W**hat opened as a routine monthly meeting of the Texas Transportation Commission March 30 quickly became anything but ordinary.

Dallas attorney David M. Laney, in an announcement that came as a surprise to many, stepped down as chairman of the commission after five years at the helm of one of Texas' largest state agencies. Laney will continue to serve on the three-member board until his term ends in February 2001.

Laney also announced that Gov. George W. Bush had appointed TTC member John W. Johnson of Houston as the new Transportation Commissioner, effective April 27, for a term at the pleasure of the governor.

"David Laney has done a fine job of making the Texas Department of Transportation more effective in addressing our state's critical transportation needs," Bush said in a news release. "He worked with other officials to get Texas a better return on our tax dollars, and he helped create a program to



J. Criffis Smith, TRV

**David M. Laney, far left, shakes hands with former U.S. Rep. Jake Pickle after announcing that he will step down as Transportation Commissioner.**

address transportation needs along our border with Mexico.

"Johnny Johnson is a knowledgeable and experienced businessman who will continue the progress we have made in building an efficient system of moving people and

goods," Bush said.

Laney also had high praise for his successor as well as for Commission member Robert L. Nichols of Jacksonville.

"I look forward to supporting Johnny as both Robert and Johnny have so generously and effectively supported me," he said. "These are two extraordinary public servants whose judgment, intellect and commitment to Texas I have come to respect immensely."

Laney said that after three legislative sessions and a "seemingly infinite number of meetings, rules, minute orders, ribbon cuttings and travels to every nook and cranny of the state, we've covered quite a distance in five years.

"For a guy who was born and grew up in

■ See LANEY, Page 4

## Straight Talk

# Building a workplace that will endure

The more things change, the more they stay the same. The 1980s were heady, difficult times. And so, here we are 20 years later — in heady, difficult times.

Twenty years ago, as Mark Goode took over the engineer-director reins of the State Highway Department, he inherited a heavy mantle from his mentor, Luther DeBerry. Goode's tenure beginning in 1980 was marked by the biggest and fastest growth in the department's history — work doubled in about two years with no substantial increase in employees.



**Mike Behrens**

Despite successes, Goode faced serious problems — among them, an aging work force. Most top managers and engineers were in their 50s and 60s. That's when TxDOT began an aggressive program to train up-and-coming employees to fill the ranks that would some day be vacated by retirees.

When Goode retired and Raymond E. Stotzer Jr. stepped into the director's job, the staffing problems became more critical. In an effort to reduce the state's payroll, the Legislature offered early retirement incentives to state employees.

Between November 1986 and May 1987, nearly 1,000 TxDOT employees took advan-

tage of the deal. The average length of service for these departing employees was 29 years; thus, TxDOT lost 28,445 years of department knowledge and experience almost all at once. At the same time, the state's economy was burdened by the banking industry's collapse and a general economic downturn. As jobs in the private sector dried up, the department was able to restock its work force.

Here we are 20 years later, and we're facing an even more serious but familiar staffing problem. The public sector has been adding more employees, but competition for these workers is the tightest it has been in recent years. Samuel M. Ehrenhalt, a senior fellow at the Rockefeller Institute of Government, has studied aging state and local government work forces across the nation. According to an article in the March issue of *Governing* magazine, he estimates that 42 percent of the 15.7 million people working for state and local governments last year were between 45 and 64 years old. That means that two-fifths of government employees nationwide will be eligible to retire within the next 15 years.

This tremendous brain drain is certainly a real problem at TxDOT. You can blame it on several factors:

■ **Fewer younger people:** The pool of potential job candidates — young men and women between 25 to 44 years old — is shrinking as older baby boomers are facing retirement. Nationally, the number of workers is expected to drop 3 million between

1998 and 2008, while workers 55 to 64 will increase by more than 7 million.

■ **White-hot economy:** Private industry is luring younger workers to high-paying jobs. For example, in Austin, state professional, technical and managerial positions are the least competitive with the booming job market. The State Auditor's Office reported in 1998 that information technology and computer professionals have a nearly 20 percent turnover. In other words, these employees tend to job-hop. The departures of key personnel affect productivity and morale, and the loss of information technology experts undermines efficiency, said Gary Anderson, Texas Public Employee's Association executive director in the March issue in the group's official magazine.

■ **Bigger workload:** A recent funding boost in TxDOT construction projects means more work and a bigger need for engineers, designers, builders, inspectors and their support staffs. There's simply a lot of work to do, and the staff can only do so much in a given amount of time.

■ **Outside considerations:** About 60 percent of TxDOT's plans, specifications and estimates are handled by outside consultants, but our employees still have a tremendous load to manage. Using outside consultants in some cases creates more work. We have more than 400 companies on our consultant list. We must have in-house expertise — checks and balances — to choose good consultants,

■ See JOBS, Page 4

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## Calendar

#### MAY

- 2 Board of Directors Meeting, Austin, TTA
- 3-4 Bid Letting, Austin, CST
- 3-5 NIGP Seminar: Intermediate Public Procurement, Dallas, GSD
- 4 Project Management and Project Delivery for TxDOT Projects, Tyler, DES
- 4-5 NIGP Seminar: CPPB/CPPO Review, San Antonio, GSD
- 10 NIGP Seminar: How to Write RFPs, Austin, GSD
- 11-12 NIGP Seminar: Contracting for Services, Austin, GSD
- 17-19 NIGP Seminar: Public Procurement Management, Austin, GSD
- 19 NIGP Seminar: CPPB/CPPO Exam, San Antonio, GSD
- 25 Commission Meeting, Austin
- 29 Memorial Day (holiday)

#### JUNE

- 1-2 2000 Transportation Planning Conference, Houston, TPP
- 5-8 Research Management Committee Meeting, Houston, CST
- 5-9 16th Annual Internal Audit Conference, Austin, AUD
- 6-7 Bid Letting, Austin, CST
- 7-9 NIGP Seminar: General Public Procurement, Austin, GSD
- 14-16 NIGP Seminar: Intermediate Public Procurement, Austin, GSD
- 19 Emancipation Day (holiday)
- 20-22 2000 Traffic Operations Conference, Austin, TRF
- 24 NIGP Seminar: CPPB/CPPO Review, Dallas, GSD
- 25 NIGP Seminar: CPPB/CPPO Exam, Dallas, GSD
- 29 Commission Meeting, Austin

#### JULY

- 4 Independence Day (holiday)
- 10-14 DE/DD/OD Meeting, Austin, ADM
- 11-12 Bid Letting, Austin, CST
- 18 NIGP Seminar: Electronic Procurement, Opportunities, Process and Tools, Houston, GSD
- 19 NIGP Seminar: How to Process and Evaluate Bids, Houston, GSD
- 20-21 NIGP Seminar: Alternate Dispute Resolution, Houston, GSD
- 27 Commission Meeting, Lubbock

#### AUGUST

- 1-3 Texas Ports Waterways Conference, Beaumont, TPP
- 3-4 Bid Letting, Austin, CST
- 15 Board of Directors Meeting, Austin, TTA
- 27 LBJ's Birthday (holiday)
- 31 Commission Meeting, Austin

### Got news?

Did your district newsletter run a story you think other TxDOT employees would enjoy reading? Do you know of a co-worker with an interesting hobby? We want your story ideas. To contribute, contact your district public information officer. He or she can pass it along to us.

Or you can contact Editor Lisa Trow by phone at (512) 463-8609 or via GroupWise at LTROW.

**A Day In The Life**

# Amarillo's PIO is anything but typical

Co-workers praise Tonya Detten's work as district's goodwill ambassador

Quintessential is an adjective used to describe something as being in the purest, most highly concentrated state or the most typical example.

You might think of Joe DiMaggio as the quintessential baseball player or George Jones as the quintessential country western singer or TxDOT as the quintessential state DOT. Anyway, you get the picture.

When I decided it was time to feature a public information officer in this column, I knew it would be a difficult task having to choose from among the many extremely competent PIOs throughout the state. I wanted this outstanding practitioner of the fine, but frequently unappreciated, art of communication to be the definitive PIO. He

or she would have to be truly representative, the poster child for PIOs, if you will. It was imperative for this individual to conjure up immediately the image of a professional public information officer.



**Eloise Lundgren**

Understand I'm not talking about someone who just writes news releases or gives talking-head interviews to

television reporters; I'm talking about the consummate, complete communicator. And that is someone who realizes that practicing this profession means employing a variety of tools to inform the many target audiences that are our customers.

Finally, after a great deal of careful consideration and soul-searching, the answer was clear. TxDOT's quintessential PIO is the Amarillo District's very own Tonya Detten.

While somewhat of a newcomer to this agency, Tonya brings a fresh perspective that perfectly complements TxDOT's commitment to excellence in transportation, making her seem like a veteran of many years.

"I think I've got the best job in Amarillo," Detten told me. "Coming to work at TxDOT was a natural progression for me in my career."

In her first year at West Texas State University (now West Texas A&M), Detten got a job as a disc jockey at a local radio station. She moved quickly into reporting.

"Radio, in my opinion, is the best medium," she said. "It was my first love, and the only reason I changed to television was because it paid more."

It wasn't long before an Amarillo television station recruited her to do weekend reporting and news editing during the week.

"I ended up doing every single job in the newsroom except shooting video," Detten said. "I reported, produced, did a morning show, cut-ins (five-minute news segments). It was a tough job."

"That experience is probably why reporters find me easy to work with," she said. "I



Photo courtesy of the Amarillo District

**Amarillo District PIO Tonya Detten, left, works as a mentor to student Liliانا Arana. Detten's district engineer says she is the consummate public information officer.**

know what they go through to get a news story — been there, done that."

But with the birth of her first baby, Detten's paradigm shifted. "He impacted my life so significantly," Detten explained.

"Suddenly, I realized how unforgiving my work schedule was and how self-serving the television news game really is," she continued. "And the money wasn't that great."

So she accepted a job as the communications director for the Texas Plains Girl Scouts Council, a move that would allow her to grow professionally.

Although Detten initially took a cut in pay, she more than made up for that in getting opportunities to hone her public relations skills. "I put together a newsletter, something I had never done before, coming from a broadcast background rather than print," she said.

"I also put together an annual report, coordinated several special events and learned how to work with volunteers, which is an education unto itself," she said with a chuckle.

But as luck would have it, a friend showed Detten an application for the PIO position at the Amarillo District and she decided to apply.

"Here I was," she remembered, "obviously pregnant (with her second child) and Billy Parks (then-Amarillo district engineer) hired me anyway. It didn't bother him that I was pregnant."

"We had instant rapport," she continued. "The interview lasted more than two hours."

According to Detten, another indication of the kind of support she would come to expect from Parks was when, on her third day at work, he sent her to the Transportation Conference.

"I heard stories from so many people about how many years of working for the agency passed before they were able to attend the Transportation Conference," she said. "I really appreciated Billy's support and confidence in me so early on that he would invest the time and money to let me attend such an

important TxDOT event."

Parks, who is now the Corpus Christi district engineer, has on more than one occasion waxed eloquently to me about the high regard in which he holds Detten. To summarize, he thinks she tacked the nail that hung the moon.

Her new DE, Mark Tomlinson, feels the same.

"I don't want to embarrass Tonya," he told me, "but I tend to gush about her. In my mind, she is the consummate public information professional. She is excellent at every aspect of her job, and is a great representative for the

department.

"She has earned the respect of our media representatives, the public and our employees, and that is of tremendous benefit to the district," he continued. "She is very involved in the various aspects of our work, particularly in project development, and our engineers listen when Tonya has an opinion."

Tomlinson emphasized that Detten was an invaluable part of his staff and was proud of her outstanding efforts on behalf of the Amarillo District.

"On top of all that," he said, "Tonya is just a wonderful person to work with and always fun to be around."

You can't get a better endorsement than that.

Expending the bulk of her energy on promoting TxDOT to both internal and external audiences, Detten fills her days with answering media inquiries; setting up interviews, media briefings and news conferences; putting together special events like bridge dedications, ribbon cuttings and Commission meetings; giving speeches to civic clubs; posting information for the media and the general public on the Web site; publishing a quarterly district newsletter; submitting stories to Transportation News; and teaching employees how to communicate more effectively with the media and citizens.

She's also a certified TxDOT facilitator and a member of the Amarillo District Project Safety Review Team, which looks at traffic control on construction projects.

"I particularly enjoy talking to new employees and visiting with our people in the various maintenance offices on how to deal with reporters," she said. "I don't need to be the one on camera or quoted in the newspaper all the time. The public needs to hear, and wants to hear, from the employees who are actually doing the work."

"My job is to prepare our employees so they say and do the right thing out in public," she explained. "They make the best ambassadors for TxDOT."



J. Griffis Smith, TRV

Commission members Robert L. Nichols, left, David M. Laney, center, and newly appointed Transportation Commissioner John W. Johnson, right, discuss Laney's retirement as Commissioner after the announcement was made in March.

## LANEY

Continued from Page 1

Texas, I have always had a deep affection for this state, but never with the depth of understanding that the last five years have afforded me," he said.

Referencing the speech he made at his first Transportation Conference in 1995, Laney recalled that he had stirred up some controversy with his remarks focusing on competition, performance and a new direction for TxDOT.

"I said then that I hoped I could look back some years hence and say I contributed in some small part to what TxDOT employees would accomplish in the years to come," he said. "Well, the first five of those 'years to come' have now come and gone," Laney continued, "and looking back, it feels pretty good to be able to say with some confidence that I have contributed."

Laney categorized his term as chairman as one filled with more wins than losses. "I stepped into a role of steering and, with the help of many of you, reshaping what I would characterize as an agency that in many ways had slipped its moorings and drifted off course," he said. "There have been accomplishments all along the way that I am proud of — accomplishments none of which I could have achieved alone."

"To those of you who have worked so closely with me during the past five years and those of you who have provided various types of support directly and indirectly, I want to take this opportunity to thank you all," he said.

"And to those of you who think you're finally and forever done with me, think again. I'm not hanging up the spurs until 2001 and until then, they'll still be sharp enough to draw blood," he quipped to a chorus of laughter from the audience of TxDOT staff, state and local elected officials, and delegations of citizens from throughout Texas.

Laney reserved a sizable amount of his praise for his executive assistant, Mary Anne Griss, and his secretary, Karen Stone.

Referring to Griss as "the very best good soldier who lived up to her commitment," Laney thanked her for her

assistance and support during a time that "wasn't always easy, wasn't always fun and sure wasn't something she bargained for. In many cases, especially during the first two years when I was throwing elbows with aliens from the prior planet, Mary Anne was treated by many of her colleagues as if she had sidled up to Satan incarnate," he said.

"And I cannot fail to mention Karen," he said, "who has shouldered extraordinary loads with the sunniest of dispositions for me and now for the other two Commission members as well."

Calling her "definitely my better half," Laney thanked his wife, Eleanor, for her patience, support and understanding, which made it easy for him, he said, to honor his commitment to TxDOT.

Johnson, who will officially take over the gavel at the April 27 Commission meeting that will be held in Houston, thanked Laney for his service.

"When I was growing up, there was a basketball player who was known for his large feet," Johnson said. "He wore a size 17 triple E or something like that. That's how large David Laney's shoes appear, but I look forward to the challenge and opportunity to continue and advance what David has started."

"Obviously, that is not something that can be done alone," he continued, "but with the help and support of the men and women of TxDOT, we can make sure that Texas remains the beacon state in transportation."

Chairman and president of Permian Mud Service, Inc., and chairman of its subsidiary, Champion Technologies, Inc., both in Houston, Johnson also serves as chairman of the executive committee of the Southwest Bank of Texas, N.A.; member of the Charter School Task Force; and member of the Governor's Business Council. He is past board chairman of the St. John's School.

Johnson currently serves on the board of trustees of Vanderbilt University where he earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. ★

## JOBS

Continued from Page 2

analyze their work for quality and assure they are using sound engineering practices. That's why we have to have well-trained TxDOT employees to maintain a solid core of knowledge in all phases of transportation and transportation engineering.

We have been fortunate in that when employees come to work at TxDOT for a year or two, they find the work rewarding. The department also offers a family environment and camaraderie, often the reasons why they stay a good while.

In February, while I was attending the Transportation Commission meeting in El Paso, I talked to an employee who had been with TxDOT for about eight years. He was a military veteran who had worked for more than 20 years in the private sector before coming to work at TxDOT.

He told me this was the best place he had ever worked. In his other jobs, he said he never felt like he fit in. On Sundays, he would dread the next day. He told me, "Now, I actually look forward to going to work on Monday morning."

What made a difference to him was TxDOT's sense of community. "It seems like everyone just clings together and helps each other out," he said.

That's a little bit away from engineering, but this attitude has helped TxDOT be what it is today. Still, we have challenging staffing issues to face in coming years. ★

*Mike Behrens is assistant executive director for engineering operations at the Texas Department of Transportation.*

## DETTEN

Continued from Page 3

That is certainly true of Detten. When she's not telling TxDOT's story, she's involved in looking for ways to better her community. She's a member of the Highland Park school board, a small school district that serves rural Amarillo and Potter County and a tutor in the Help One Student To Succeed (HOSTS) program.

"I tutor one student in math for about an hour once a week," she said. "I do it on my lunch hour."

She's also on the board for the Catholic Family Service, a nonprofit social service agency that provides a variety of services to those in need.

"My involvement with that organization is a direct result of my participation in Leadership Amarillo/Canyon," she said. "That's another lunch hour meeting, but only once a month."

She's also active in her church, and she's the president of the Center City Business and Professional Women's Club. And if she's got any time to spare, she helps her husband, Steve, with the family farm.

"We raise cattle and crops," she said, "and we have a couple of horses. The farm's been in my husband's family for many years, but now it's pretty much his responsibility to run."

Steve has another life, too; he's a fireman. Making their lives complete are their two sons, Phillip, 5, and Steven II, 7. "We named them after our fathers," Detten said. "Phillip's not much interested in farming, but Steven seems to have taken a real shine to it. He is always begging his dad to let him help."

Detten admitted she's gotten fairly proficient with a shotgun and a rifle. I have this colorful image of her sitting astride a horse, riding the fence line and shooting snakes and other varmints. I don't know of any other PIOs who tote guns.

Billy Parks told me Detten was a pistol. I didn't know he meant that literally. ★

# 'Father of Interstate' in Hall of Honor

Texas Transportation Institute inducts Frank Turner posthumously

By **Eloise Lundgren**  
Public Information Office

The Texas Transportation Institute inducted the "Father of the Interstate Highway System" into the Texas Transportation Hall of Honor posthumously last month at Texas A&M University in College Station.

Francis C. "Frank" Turner, who died in October 1999, is the first individual to be recognized for distinguished accomplishments in the field of transportation. A 1929 graduate of Texas A&M, Turner spent 43 years with the Bureau of Public Roads, now known as the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), culminating with his appointment as Federal Highway Administrator in 1969.

"Frank Turner changed all our lives," said Dr. Herb Richardson, TTI director, at the formal ceremony in the main conference room of the Gilchrist Building. "You can't say that about many people."

In addition to overseeing the creation and construction of the Interstate Highway System, Turner also supervised the building of the Alaskan Highway during World War II and the rebuilding of the Philippine highway system following the war. His name was recently included in prestigious lists such as "Ten People Who Changed the Way You Live" (*American Heritage Magazine*), and "25 Makers of the American Century" (*U.S. News and World Report*).

Other speakers who praised Turner for his contributions to transportation in America included Dr. Dennis Christiansen, TTI deputy director; Billy Higgins, American Association of State Highway and



The sons and daughter of Frank Turner, known in transportation circles as 'the Father of the Interstate Highway System,' view a plaque commemorating their father's work at his posthumous dedication in TTI's Hall of Honor.

Transportation Officials (AASHTO); Jack Wilkes, FHWA director of engineering; Denny Judycki, FHWA director of research, development and technology; Ray Barnhart, former FHWA administrator; Mark Goode, former Texas Department of Transportation engineer-director; and Mike Behrens, TxDOT assistant executive director for engineering operations.

Several members of Turner's family attended the ceremony. His three children unveiled the plaque that will be displayed in the Hall of Honor and announced that they are donating all of Turner's papers to Texas A&M.

According to Christiansen, TTI was looking for a way to honor formally and permanently individuals who have made significant

contributions to the development and operation of Texas' transportation system.

"Texas is recognized as having one of the finest multi-modal transportation systems in the world," Christiansen said. "The creation and operation of this system is the result of unusual vision and leadership by a relatively small number of exceptional individuals."

"We felt like the beginning of the new century was a good time to do this," he explained. "And this new building provides a fine facility to honor these transportation leaders in a first-class manner."

A five-person committee will be responsible for directing the Texas Transportation Hall of

Honor and determining which individuals should be inducted. The committee, chaired by Christiansen, is comprised of Goode; Houston attorney Hugh McCulley; engineering consultant and former TxDOT deputy executive director Bob Cuellar; and Fort Worth Transit's John Bartosowicz.

Any individual making a contribution to the Texas transportation system since statehood (1845) is eligible for consideration. Anyone may submit nominations to TTI. Additional information may be obtained by contacting Christiansen, TTI/CE Tower, Administration, College Station, Texas 77843-3135, or by phone (409) 845-1537. ★

## UT survey shows improvement in communication

By **Sara Barker**  
Human Resources Division

A recent biennial survey of state agencies yielded few surprises about worker attitudes at TxDOT: Employees believe they are doing quality work for less than adequate salaries.

But there is also plenty of good news, according to the scientific survey. Employees think internal communication has improved within the agency, and they are generally satisfied with their jobs.

TxDOT participated in the University of Texas Survey of Organizational Excellence again this year. Sponsored by the University of Texas School of Social Work, the SOE is conducted every two years to coincide with the state's budgetary cycle.

The survey offers employees the chance to share their perceptions in five categories: work team perceptions, physical work settings or accommodations, general organizational features, communication patterns, and personal demands. These five categories are composed of survey constructs designed to draw broad profiles of areas of strengths and concerns in categories such as fairness, supervisor effectiveness, empowerment and internal communication.

Survey results can be used to help TxDOT improve productivity, morale and the quality of the agency, human resources officials said.

"This survey provides us with an opportunity to gather valuable feedback from our employees," said Cathy J. Williams, assistant executive director for support services. "It allows us to identify areas that have improved and also helps us identify other areas that might require attention."

Over the four survey cycles since 1994, TxDOT has consistently scored highest in the areas of strategic orientation, satisfaction with benefits, employees' belief that TxDOT's work is of high quality and that TxDOT communicates well with external customers. Employees gave TxDOT's lowest rankings in the areas of empowerment, supervisor effectiveness, fairness and fair pay.

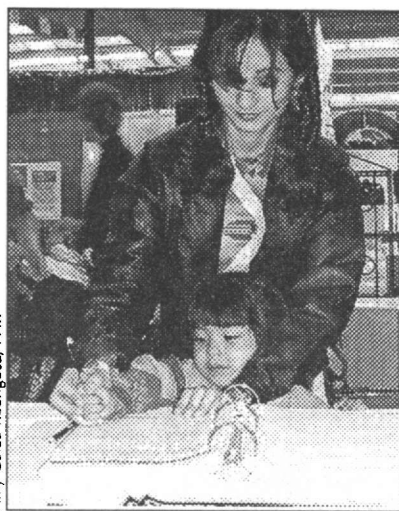
The areas of greatest improvement were internal communication, adequacy of the physical environment and job satisfaction. Since 1994, the agency score on internal communication has improved 12 percent. Employee perceptions of the adequacy of their physical environment has improved 8 percent, while job satisfaction ratings have risen by 11 percent.

An area that has shown little improvement is fair pay. In the 1994-1995 survey, fair pay was rated eighth of the 10 constructs, or the second lowest. In the three surveys conducted since 1996, fair pay has been among the five lowest scoring items: fifth lowest in 1996, third lowest in 1998 and lowest of all in the fall 1999 survey. However, 71 percent of respondents said they had received a merit increase within the last two years, compared to 54 percent of the employees in all state agencies surveyed. Promotions were received by 52 percent of TxDOT employees, compared to 36 percent in participating agencies.

Survey results for the agency as a whole and each district, division and office will be distributed to district engineers and division and office directors in May. A summary of agencywide survey results will be posted on the Human Resources Division's Intranet page later this year.

Employees' responses are strictly anonymous. Demographic information requested on the survey is returned to participating agencies as summed numbers. TxDOT receives a final statistical summary, but the surveys are never returned to the agency. ★

**FAST FACTS**



Amy Garza-Rodriguez, PHR

**A mother and child sign a pledge to use child safety seats regularly at a TxDOT booth at the recent Rio Grande Livestock Show in the Pharr District. See related story, Page 12.**

**Child Seat Safety**

- Most fatal crashes occur at speeds less than 40 mph and close to home, so constant use of safety seats is vital.
- If a child seat has been involved, don't use it; it would be difficult to know if its integrity has been preserved.
- Even though 65 percent of children are restrained in some form of safety device, there is a 30 percent significant error rate on the part of the user. It's very important to follow carefully the manufacturer's instructions.
- Car seats need to have been made after Jan. 1, 1981 to be crash-tested and approved by the federal government and meet STD 213-80 criteria.
- The safest place for any child under 12 is in the back seat. Every child should be buckled in a child safety seat, a booster seat or with a lap/shoulder belt if it fits.

Source: www.nh.ultranet.com

**DEADLIEST TORNADOES**

- In Texas since 1950 (ranked by state)
- 1. **Waco**, May 11, 1953; 150 fatalities
- 17. **Wichita Falls**, April 10, 1979; 54 fatalities
- 19. **Lubbock**, May 11, 1970 51 fatalities
- Ranking in number of tornadoes from 1950 to 1996:
- 1. **Texas**: 5,860
- 2. **Oklahoma**: 2,428
- 3. **Kansas**: 2,249
- 4. **Florida**: 2,170
- 5. **Nebraska**: 1,759
- 6. **Iowa**: 1,438
- 7. **Illinois**: 1,274
- 8. **Colorado**: 1,259
- 9. **Missouri**: 1,229
- 10. **South Dakota**: 1,194

Source: University of Michigan

# World Trade Bridge opens

## Laredo hosts celebration of \$32.8 million roadway

By **Marco Alvarado**  
Laredo District

Tractor-trailer rigs headed to Mexico can now use the new World Trade Bridge via the Texas Department of Transportation's \$32.8 million approach roadway.

TxDOT officials, including outgoing Commissioner David Laney and Assistant Executive Director Kirby Pickett, joined U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater and numerous other dignitaries at a ribbon-cutting ceremony April 14 to mark the completion of the city's fourth international bridge.

Both the bridge and the connecting roadway began accepting commercial traffic Saturday, April 15.

Construction of the roadway between Mines Road and Interstate 35 began in February 1999 and includes all drainage systems and structures.

The new highway, which is the extension of Bob Bullock Loop, consists of a four-lane controlled access thoroughfare complete with 12-foot-wide lanes and two-lane-wide frontage roads with shoulders.

Additionally, the Texas Transportation Commission awarded a \$59.7 million contract in July 1999 to Deavers Construction, Inc., of Austin for the construction of an interchange system at Bob Bullock Loop and Interstate 35.

The project includes the construction of bridges at Interstate 35 over Bob Bullock Loop, two direct connectors, and frontage roads on Bob Bullock Loop from I-35 east to McPherson Road. Plans also call for the reconstruction of existing frontage roads along I-35. The project is



Marco Alvarado, LRD

**Laredo Mayor Elizabeth G. Flores (center) and Celedon Trucking Company driver Portia Shannon (left) are joined by (from right) State Sen. Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater and State Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo, for the ribbon-cutting to mark the opening of the World Trade Bridge in Laredo on April 14.**

about 30 percent complete.

"This is a historic day for the city of Laredo and the Texas Department of Transportation," Laney said. "Laredo is among the fastest growing cities in America and we're determined to keep the wheels of commerce in high gear by funding vital projects such as these."

"Together, the extension of Bob Bullock Loop and the Milo Interchange represent a \$92.5 million investment in border trade transportation," Pickett said. "It takes all the transportation players — citizens, contractors, legislators, our

department, and federal resources — to build these kinds of projects that will keep Laredo and the State of Texas an international trade partner."

Others in attendance at the opening ceremony included Laredo Mayor Elizabeth G. Flores, Nuevo Laredo Mayor Horacio Garza Garza, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Deputy Secretary Saul N. Ramirez Jr., State Sen. Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo; State Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo, and State Rep. Tracy O. King, D-Uvalde.

### I'm living 'The Good Life'

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Retired from where? (district/division/office and section) \_\_\_\_\_

When? (month/year) \_\_\_\_\_ At what age? (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

After how many years of service? \_\_\_\_\_

Recent activities \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone number (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Hometown \_\_\_\_\_

### Retirees wanted

Transportation News is ready to resume its monthly column on the activities of the agency's retirees thanks to the efforts of a handful of subscribers who responded to an earlier plea for 'Good Life' cards and other correspondence. We still need retirees' news in order to keep the column going. Information cards like the one at left are available at district offices.

Thanks!  
— Lisa Trow, editor



Michael Peters, FTW

**Fort Worth District employee Linda Provencio ties a ribbon to a car antenna in memory of maintenance technician Clyde Pitman who was died last month in a work zone accident. Provencio, who recently transferred from the El Paso District, is a maintenance office employee.**

# FTW employees grieve for co-worker

## Maintenance tech Clyde Pitman dies after being hurt in work zone accident

**By Patricia K. Benoit**  
Public Information Office

**G**rieving Fort Worth District employees have worn arm bands and dedicated their blood drive this month to maintenance technician Clyde Pitman who died from injuries he suffered in an April 12 traffic accident at his Interstate 20 work site.

Pitman, 50, and two other TxDOT employees were setting up a pothole operation on the eastbound shoulder of I-20 near the Anglin crossover exit in Fort Worth when the driver of a Ford Explorer veered into the work zone and struck him.

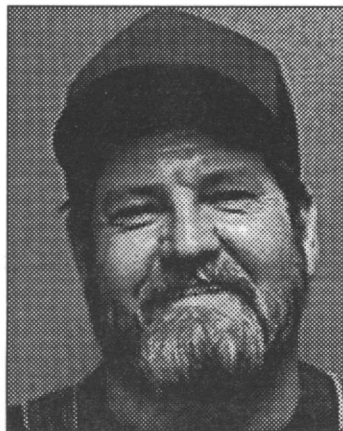
Pitman died of his injuries the following morning.

The Southeast Tarrant County Maintenance Section had employed Pitman, who lived in Mingus in Palo Pinto County, for eight months.

His wife and three children and four adult stepchildren survive him.

District administrators immediately responded with what employees said was "overwhelming support," including visits from counselors; a memorial fund for Pitman's family; silent prayers; orange and black ribbons for display in memory of Pitman and to promote work zone safety; led employees in silent prayers for Pitman and his family; and countless phone calls and other expressions of support.

"The support from the district during this tragedy was overwhelming. I do not know who all helped out and what all was done but it helped take the edge off of the situation,"



**Pitman**

received the news that Clyde had passed. There was deep sadness and disbelief when they gave us the news. It was hard to believe that someone you were talking to just hours before was gone," Jones said.

He described Pitman as "laid back," helpful and cheerful at work.

Other co-workers agreed.

"Clyde was the type of person that would give the shirt off his back to anybody, whether he knew you or not," said Cissy Reyna, contract manager. "He liked to joke around and tell you how to do things. He only worked in Arlington for eight months, but he fit in just right with us and everyone here liked him. Clyde will not be forgotten."

Pitman's death is the first TxDOT work site fatality since 1999 and comes just a week after National Work Zone Safety Awareness Week, a national campaign sponsored by the

said Scott Jones, assistant maintenance supervisor in the Southeast Tarrant County Maintenance Section.

"I was at the hospital with his wife, Cynthia, and several employees when we

American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA) and the Federal Highway Administration.

"The entire TxDOT family is deeply saddened by this terrible tragedy," said Wes Heald, TxDOT executive director. "Our thoughts and prayers are with Mr. Pitman's wife and children. The safety of our employees and the traveling public is our top concern."

Two other district employees, Rodney Bush, 31, a maintenance technician who has worked for TxDOT for seven years, and Tommy Smith, 38, a maintenance technician with two years of service, were injured.

Cards of condolences to the family and co-workers may be mailed to the Fort Worth District PIO Office, P.O. Box 6868, Fort Worth, TX 76115. PIO will forward them.

A memorial fund has been established for his children. Make checks payable to the Pitman Memorial Fund and mail them to: Pitman Memorial Fund  
c/o Highway District 2 Credit Union  
P.O. Box 330932  
Fort Worth, TX 76133-0932

*Jodi Hodges of the Fort Worth District contributed to this report.*

# Wrath of the tornado

## Fort Worth cleans up after deadly storm

Story and photos by Jodi Hodges  
Fort Worth District

It was not a matter of if, but when a tornado would hit Fort Worth with deadly destruction. Luck ran out for Fort Worth the evening of March 28, when two tornadoes struck the area, killing five and injuring a dozen more.

Meteorologists for several years have said that Fort Worth was an anomaly. For 150 years, Fort Worth has lain in the perfect spot to be hit by tornadoes, but it had been the only major American city without a single tornado fatality, according to the National Severe Storms Laboratory — until now.

After the bustle of evening rush hour traffic, a tornado developed west of Fort Worth in the suburb of River Oaks. The tornado, ranked an F2 storm by meteorologists, then began its path of destruction into downtown Fort Worth. Though the



Debris littered Fort Worth and Arlington in the aftermath of the March 28 tornado.

tornado dissipated somewhat, it formed again and touched down in south Arlington about 30 minutes later.

Although TxDOT crews were quickly on the scene to clean up after the deadly storm, at least one TxDOT employee found herself a potential victim of it.

Dallas District right of way agent Aleeta Connelly was inside the Calvary Cathedral Church in a Bible class when the tornado struck.

High winds shattered the windows of her 1999 KIA and stripped it of its bumper and spoiler, but Connelly was uninjured.

"You wonder sometimes what you would do if you ever saw a tornado. When I saw that tornado coming our way, I was in amazement — the destruction, the dark and rolling cloud. I never thought it would look that bad," Connelly said. "Electric transformers started popping. The lights went out, and all of us started running to the closet in the stairwell. Since it was dark, we couldn't see, so we started grabbing people's hands and pulling them into the closet. Debris came down the stairwell and injured some peo-

■ See **STORM**, Next page



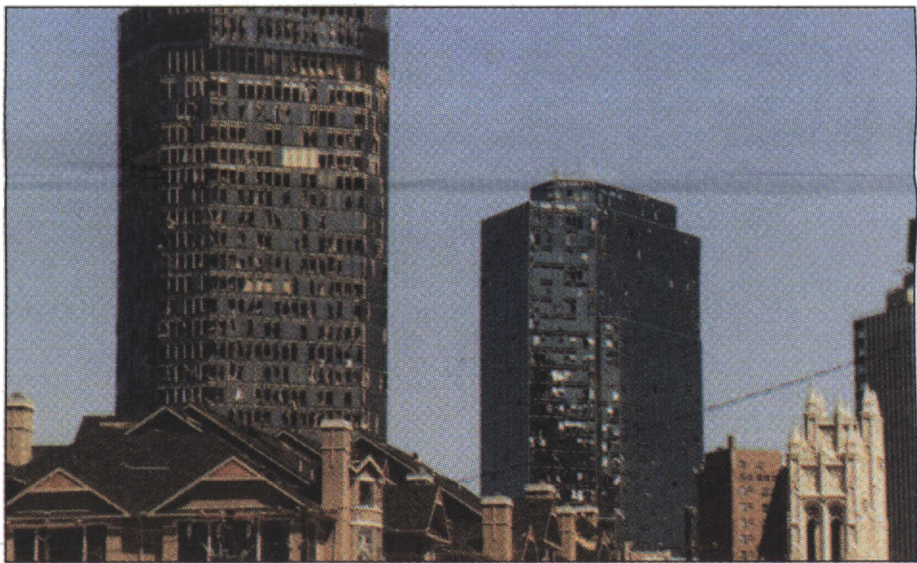
# WRATH OF THE TORNADO



Fort Worth District crews assist in the cleanup of the Calvary Cathedral Church and Cash America building.



Broken glass hangs from a skyscraper.



Fort Worth's skyline is marred by damage from the March 28 tornado.

## STORM

Continued from Previous page

ple who couldn't make it inside." Cleanup began immediately. Fort Worth District maintenance and construction crews worked throughout the first night after the storm to assist in cleanup and to help manage traffic. TxDOT spent more than \$60,000 in employee salaries and equipment during the three 13-hour days to assist the cities in their efforts.

"Police were using all of their manpower to block exits and direct traffic. TxDOT could do that so the police could do their job elsewhere," said Assistant South Tarrant County Area Engineer Albert Durant. "TxDOT closed the exits from Interstates 30 and 35W and directed traffic away from the damaged downtown businesses so cleanup could begin."

Crews also fought flash flooding and hail and handled accidents on area freeways that night. Two 14,000-pound freeway sign



James Cockrell directs traffic around closed streets.

bridges were removed due to damage from the tornado. Winds were so strong that five 18-wheelers overturned on Tarrant County freeways.

The swath of damage to homes, businesses and churches in Tarrant County was likened to a war zone with upwards of \$15 million in damages. Glass shards crunched under onlookers' feet. Office furniture was stuck into cars and lying on the streets along with crushed computers. Rain-soaked curtains flapped in the wind of shattered windows.

File folders and paper were strewn across the city.

The morning after the storm, daylight revealed a militarylike exercise to clean up the area. The damaged communities were divided into quadrants where workers were assigned to restore order in Fort Worth and surrounding communities.

Fort Worth District employees, along with the Texas Forest Service and the U.S. military removed debris and countless fallen trees.

"It was amazing to see all of the TxDOT trucks running everywhere. River Oaks doesn't have trucks like you do, and TxDOT shows up to help with their equipment. It was a godsend," said River Oaks Mayor Jack Adkison.

Connelly and others at her congregation are grateful to have survived the tornado, despite the destruction of their church.

"Everyone really appreciated TxDOT's efforts to clean up the debris around the building," Connelly said. "There is no doom and gloom here!" ★

## "I apologize for the messy office, I apologize if I appear unorganized, and I apologize if I look dead."

— Office Manager Mary Alice Brown

# West Texas battles tornadoes, floods

By Patsy Rainwater-Maddux  
San Angelo District

West Texas weather is frequently the lead story in the *San Angelo Standard Times*.

Unfortunately, headlines during the first months of the new millennium have mentioned the word "drought" numerous times in the local newspaper.

In fact, throughout the years rain has always been of special interest to the residents of the 15 counties in the San Angelo District.

In 1910 the earlier publishers of the *Standard Times* began a tradition that features General Rainz, a rooster that is featured as part of the newspaper's nameplate. As the tradition goes, following a substantial rainfall in West Texas, General Rainz appears again on the front page, crowing next to the news story that reports at least one-half inch of rain.

Beginning March 22, General Rainz could have reported as much comp time as the 11 employees at the Sterling/Glasscock Maintenance Section.

As the employees were ending their work day, office manager Mary Alice Brown received what she thought was a routine call from Kenneth Schniers from the Garden City maintenance office, located 32 miles from Sterling City on Texas 158.

During the call, Schniers told Brown that "something just hit the roof of the building." That "something" was the beginning of a storm that generated 358 hours of compensatory time for the 11 employees over a two-day period. Most of these employees worked 36 hours, staffing the phone and radios, flagging motorists to avoid water-covered roads from 8 inches of rain and dodging tornadoes and hail stones that were described as "chunks of ice."

While early reports included 15 confirmed tornadoes, Supervisor Shorty Radde said that number was actually 22.

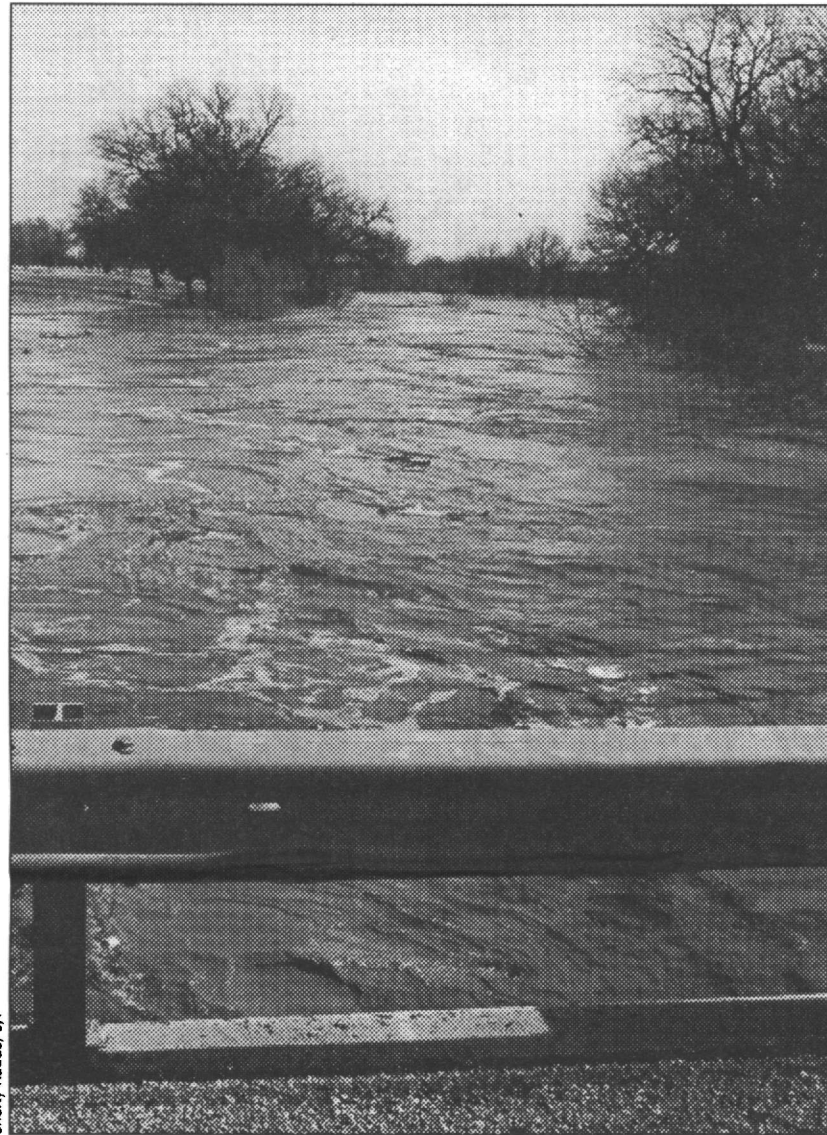
Maintenance techs Alberto Estrada and Guillermo Resendez and assistant supervisor Joe Rodriguez experienced three of these tornadoes at one time.

The three employees, in two different vehicles, turned around on US 87 to avoid two tornadoes approaching them. While Rodriguez followed the two techs in his pickup, he radioed his co-workers to see if they could speed up the six-yard dump truck so they could stay ahead of two tornadoes trailing them. Estrada and Resendez radioed back to Rodriguez, "What about the tornado in front of us?"

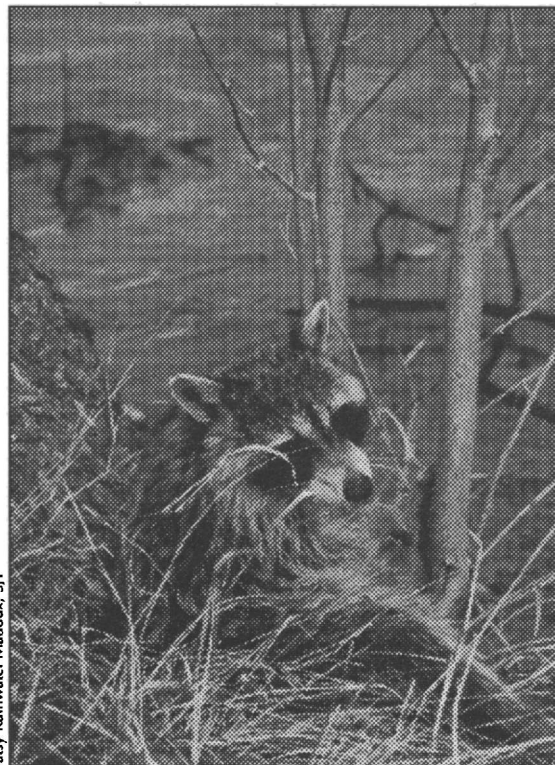
All three employees escaped injury and damage to their vehicles.

At the Garden City shop, maintenance techs Filie Arizola, Jeff Fitzgerald and Daniel Martinez literally dove into a grease pit when they heard the sounds of tornadoes approaching them.

Fitzgerald said he lay under the old grease



Shorty Radde, SJT



Patsy Rainwater-Maddux, SJT

**Heavy rain flooded several areas in the San Angelo District. (top photo) West Texas wildlife like this raccoon was also stranded by rising water. (bottom photo)**

rack four different times for protection against the tornadoes.

Like the other road hands, Wayne Halfmann and Gary Maricle stayed busy

helping to close roads. As a result of the storm Texas 158, Texas 137, Farm-to-Market 2401 and Farm-to-Market 33 were closed to protect motorists from flood conditions.

"About 99 percent of the time motorists were understanding," said Schniers, who was separated from the other employees by the flooded highway. During that 36-hour period, he shared water from his truck, Cokes and candy bars with appreciative motorists.

But not all motorists were cooperative, even when flaggers explained that tornadoes had been spotted in the area, Rodriguez said. One motorist disobeyed the warning, heading toward the storm.

"The driver turned around, though," Rodriguez said, explaining that the

pickup returned — without headlights or any glass in the windshield.

By Thursday evening, all the employees were ready to call it day, which had begun Wednesday morning.

That "day" was even longer for Schniers. He had to take an 80-mile detour because of the flooded highway south of Midland and Big Spring to travel to his home in St. Lawrence, which is typically an 18-mile drive.

While road hands worked with motorists along the drenched highways, Brown spent most of her time on the phone with the National Weather Service from Midland and the area Department of Public Safety offices to communicate tornado sightings.

"We didn't even have time to make coffee," Brown said. But she did make time to call to her husband and request a toothbrush, a change of clothes and deodorant. Before her 36 hours on the job ended, she also took care of routine business, helping a new employee with paperwork.

Brown remembers apologizing to the new employee, Tim Sims.

"I apologize for the messy office, I apologize if I appear unorganized, and I apologize if I look dead," Brown said. ★



Kevin Sulliman, TRV

Members of the Texas Transportation Commission join TxDOT officials to cut the ribbon officially opening the Texas Travel Information Center in Anthony. The center greets visitors coming into Texas on Interstate 10 from New Mexico.

# Anthony site of newly constructed Texas Travel Information Center

By Linda Levitt  
Travel Division

With its red tile roofs, limestone walls and native plants, the new Texas Travel Information Center at Anthony offers a warm Texas greeting to motorists entering the state on Interstate 10 from New Mexico.

Transportation Commission members and local dignitaries including state and local elected officials cut the ribbon to open the new center on Feb 23.

"We are enjoying our beautiful new facility," said Lucia Cordova, manager of the information center. "The staff has already begun giving presentations to visitors and school groups in our newly created video viewing room. Visitors are incredibly complimentary and comment often on the beauty of the center."

At 7,275 square feet, the new information center features a larger parking area, larger lobby, and additional restrooms. The spacious, light interior is designed with oak woodwork, granite floors, limestone walls and an exposed truss. Red tile roofs, limestone and other construction materials were selected to fit a Southwestern vernacular design motif. Eight picnic arbors reflect the design of the building.

The center was designed by Alvidrez and Associates of El Paso. Contractor on the project was Urban Associates Inc., also of El Paso. Landscape architects Alexander Boedy Associates used indigenous plants on the center grounds, including Mexican oregano, coreopsis, skull cap and blue sage surrounding the building. In addition to the environmental advantages of xeriscaping, the plants selected provide visitors with an array of species they may see in the desert.

TxDOT's 12 Texas Travel Information Centers are located at major points of entry to the state and at the Capitol Complex Visitor Center in Austin. Professional travel counselors greet visitors, provide



Kevin Sulliman, TRV

Ed Wueste, assistant executive director for Border Trade Transportation, left, and TxDOT Executive Director Wes Heald, right, attend the recent opening of a new travel information center in Anthony.

them with routing and road condition information, distribute travel literature and maps, and issue oversize/overweight permits and temporary licenses.

Counselors serve as goodwill ambassadors for Texas and are often the first Texans to greet visitors. In 1999, the Travel Information Center at Anthony served more than 150,000 visitors.

During the Texas Centennial celebration in 1936, information centers were established to greet visitors at major points of entry to the state, including Canutillo. In 1961, the information center was relocated to Anthony, where a 2,145 square foot facility was constructed. That facility will be demolished to accommodate new interstate highway construction.

As the capital improvement plan for the Texas Travel Information Centers comes to a close, four more dedications are scheduled, beginning with the Travel Information Center at Orange on May 12. Travel counselors have already moved into the spacious new facility at Orange. ★

## BEAMING

Dallas District project becomes birthday gift for TxDOT enthusiast

By Montrose Cunningham  
Dallas District

When highways are closed for construction, the average motorist finds another route. Rarely is anyone drawn to a TxDOT work zone.

But Gary Grant, project manager of construction of the Texas 183/161 Interchange in Irving, found just such a person.

After hearing her father **See letter, page 15**

express interest in the project, part of which involved hanging steel beams over the highway, Dallas resident Beth Ann O'Neill decided to give her father an unusual birthday gift.

She and her siblings decided to get a hotel room for their parents near the project so their father could watch construction.

O'Neill contacted Grant to find out when they would be doing major work. Grant, a TxDOT employee for more than 20 years, said he was surprised by the request.

"He was really interested in seeing how we hung the steel beams that went over the traffic lanes," Grant said. "So I kept in contact with her so I could let her know when we would be doing that work and even suggested some hotels that would have the best view."

The first time the work was canceled because of inclement weather. The second time, O'Neill's father couldn't make it, but a lot of other people did.

"There were a lot of people that pulled into the empty field near the site to watch us hang the beams," Grant said.

Persistence paid off, however. O'Neill's father was finally able to make it.

"Unfortunately I was so busy that day I didn't even get a chance to meet him," said Grant. "But Ms. O'Neill wrote a letter to (District Engineer) Jay Nelson expressing her appreciation for my help."

Although Grant appreciates the praise, he said, helping residents is just another part of his job.

"I know the work we do on the roadway is very hard on the traveling public," he said. "I like to help people and if I can take a step further to make someone happy and have them look upon the department favorably then I will." ★

## TxDot Roundup

### Transportation officials to meet at Houston conference May 20

Public and private sector transportation professionals will gather in Houston on May 30 - June 2 for the 2000 Transportation Planning Conference, hosted by the Texas Department of Transportation and the Transportation Planning and Programming Division.

Federal, state and local experts on subjects such as highway, transit, funding, environmental and Metropolitan Planning Organization issues will be available to participants. Topics include the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, Census Transportation Planning Package and Partners in Transportation, including the Access to Jobs, Enhancements and Economically Disadvantaged Counties programs.

Registration fees until May 15 are \$125, and may be paid by check, money order, or credit card. After May 15, the fee is \$150. For further information, contact conference co-chairs Tim Juarez, (512) 486-5026, or Michelle Conkle, (512) 486-5023, both of TxDOT's TPP. For exhibitor information, contact exhibit coordinator Sharon Perdue, (979) 862-376, of Texas A&M University.

— Linda Ribble, PIO

### TxDOT wins excellence award for its state recycling program

AUSTIN — TxDOT's Recycling Program has been honored with a Texas Environmental Excellence Award in the state's most prestigious environmental competition.

The Texas Environmental Excellence Awards emphasize the importance of environmental stewardship by recognizing pollution prevention and recycling projects in Texas that are innovative, effective, and outstanding.

This year's finalists were selected from more than 200 applications. Judges used seven award criteria including innovation, benefits, measurability, education, cooperative efforts, technicality, and program exceptionality to determine the finalists and winners.

The Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) initiated the Governor's Awards for Environmental Excellence in 1993 to honor the state's most outstanding waste reduction and pollution prevention projects.

While more than 100 winners have won the award over the last eight years, TxDOT is the first major state agency to win.

TxDOT's award winning application described the recycling staff's previous five-year statewide initiatives to promote recycling in all offices and the use of recycled materials in road construction and maintenance. The application also detailed significant TxDOT accomplishments including more than \$300 million in green product purchases and more than 4 million tons (8 billion pounds) of material diverted from landfills.

Representatives of TxDOT's Recycling Program, including Howard "Mickey" Cochran, Rebecca Davio, Shawn Devereaux, Sam Reyes and Tony Tijerina, will accept the award in a ceremony May 2 with Gov. George W. Bush.

"This award is a reflection of how TxDOT employees have responded to recycling," said Davio, manager of the recycling and recycled products program. "We're proud of the innovative and synergistic partnerships that have occurred within and outside of TxDOT. This award actually belongs to every TxDOT employee who has been participating and contributing to the success of the recycling program."

— Tony Tijerina, ENV

### State employees to compete in bowling tourney June 24-25

AUSTIN — Registration is under way for the 39th Annual State Employees Bowling Tournament on June 24-25 at Dart Bowl.

All state employees and their relatives are eligible to bowl in the tournament, which is sponsored by the Texas Public Employees Association.

The event comprises four events: doubles, singles and team divisions, and an all-events category. In each division event, participants bowl three games. The highest score with the handicap (90 percent of 220 for women; 85 percent for 220 for men) for all nine games wins the all-events category. Registration fees are \$40 per person; \$12 per division event; and \$4 for the all-events category.

Last year's first-place team took home \$272. Last year's doubles winner took home \$162 and last year's single winner took \$98. The all-event winner, Scotty Sprinkle, a TxDOT retiree of the Fort Worth District, took home \$105.

Past competitions between TPEA chapters frequently left the Fort Worth or Houston chapters with a trophy for highest membership participation. The deadline for tournament registration is May 31. To register, contact Elmer Entrop via telephone at (512) 926-1809 or via mail at 7306 Bucknell Drive, Austin, TX 78723.

— Linda Ribble, PIO

### TxDOT stresses traffic safety at recent local livestock show

MERCEDES, Texas — When most people think of livestock shows, cattle, rodeos, carnivals and funnel cakes come to mind. But not for TxDOT employees. TxDOT thinks traffic safety.

For the past four years, the Pharr District has sponsored an exhibit booth at the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show to promote the use of seat belts and child safety seats and stress their importance in preventing serious injuries. This year was no different.

The Pharr District joined forces with the McAllen Fire Department and the Rio Grande Valley Safe Kids Coalition to get the message out to Rio Grande Valley residents at the 61st Annual Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show held March 15-19.

District employees showed traffic safety videos and distributed brochures. Livestock show visitors also picked up notepads, book covers and pens promoting seat belt and child safety seat use.

An estimated 5,000 pledges were made, many of them stating they "always do buckle-up" and others promising to "try harder."

"The livestock show is an ideal place where our target audience gathers in mass quantities," said Gilbert Trevino, traffic safety specialist for the Pharr District.

A recent traffic safety statistics from the Coalition for Vehicle Choice (CVC) suggests highway safety has improved dramatically over the last 20 years, even though total travel has continued to increase. One reason for the increase in highway safety is the continuing impact of safety campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s, campaigns such as the Buckle-Up, America Seat Belt Initiative. According to a 1998 from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration report, Texas is at 75 percent of seat belt use.

About 150,000 attended the five-day livestock show, said Sara Dainley of the RGV Livestock Show Office.

— Amy L. Garza-Rodriguez, PHR

## In Memoriam

### Retirees

#### Ablene District

Rodney L. Bell, Maintenance Technician II, retired in 1976, died Feb. 7, 2000.

Billy G. Pylant, Engineering Specialist I, retired in 1991, died Jan. 9, 2000.

James G. Smart Jr., Maintenance Construction Supervisor III, retired in 1986, died Jan. 8, 2000.

#### Atlanta District

John A. Cariker, Engineering Technician IV, retired in 1982, died Dec. 15, 2000.

#### Austin District

Clyde C. Dungan, Skilled Laborer, retired in 1968,

died Dec. 28, 1999.

#### Bryan District

Delbert R. Robinson, Engineering Technician V, retired in 1986, died Jan. 3, 2000.

#### Childress District

Hoyt R. Fulenwider, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1981, died Jan. 16, 2000.

#### Corpus Christi District

Ramon Longoria, Maintenance Technician II, retired in 1993, died Jan. 8, 2000.

Martha W. Schliska, Administrative Technician IV, retired in 1982, died Feb. 4, 2000.

#### Dallas District

John W. Hawkins, Maintenance Supervisor II, retired in 1990, died Jan. 10, 2000.

#### Fort Worth District

Willie E. Fulfer, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1983, died Feb. 19, 2000.

Joseph B. Sewell, Engineering Technician V, retired in 1971, died Feb. 9, 2000.

#### Houston District

Gladys M. Boettcher, Administrative Technician IV, retired in 1989, died Feb. 20, 2000.

Paul E. Davenport, Maintenance Technician IV, retired in 1992, died Feb. 9, 2000.

Woodard L. Matthews, Engineering Technician IV, retired in 1991, died Dec. 30, 1999.

#### Wichita Falls District

Joe C. Grotte, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1982, died Feb. 11, 2000.

Clarence Powell, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1983, died Feb. 27, 2000.

#### Odessa District

Juan M. Zepeda, Maintenance Technician II, retired in 1996, died Jan. 28, 2000.

#### Pharr District

Enrique Arechiga, Engineering Technician V, retired in 1985, died Feb. 3, 2000.

#### San Angelo District

Antonio Y. Fierro, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1982, died Feb. 2, 2000.

Ricardo C. Sosa, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1990, died Dec. 28, 1999.

#### San Antonio District

Luis B. Gomez, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1976, died Jan. 9, 2000.

Jack L. Hall, Draftsman III, retired in 1976, died Jan. 29, 2000.

#### Taylor District

Aaron W. Kitchens, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1984, died Jan. 16, 2000.

#### Yoakum District

Roger Bauer, Engineering Technician IV, retired in 1997, died Feb. 2, 2000.

Lawrence R. Emerson, Program Administrator III, retired in 1996, died Jan. 27, 2000.

#### Information Services Division

Doyle R. Schmidt, retired in 1996, died Jan. 14, 2000.

# News You Can Use



## SAFETY TIPS

### ■ Beware the 'switcher flicker'

While traveling along any stretch of highway, you can observe any number of traits, both good and bad, that classify drivers. These traits include the "flicker-switcher" or the "switcher-flicker."

The flicker-switcher flicks his turn signal before he changes lanes. Since this type of driver communicates his intention in advance, you can also bet that he also takes a visual check before making the lane switch. By thinking, looking, and signaling in advance of the maneuver, he is protecting himself and other travelers on the road. Long live the flicker-switcher, and may his tribe increase!

In contrast, the switcher-flicker begins to switch lanes first and then flicks on his turn signal. He flicks from blind habit with no conscious thought about the importance of advance warning. Chances are he switches and flicks mechanically without a glance at his rearview mirror and over his left shoulder to check the blind spot to the side and rear.

The left wheels of the switcher-flicker have often traveled over the border before they have signaled the news that he is entering new territory. That's why the too-ate "flick" is sometimes followed by a startled "whoops!" punctuated by the costly crunch of metal. Down with the switcher-flicker, and may his tribe decrease!

The winking signal of the flicker-switcher is a true warning because it speaks in future tense: "I'll turn soon; take heed." The switcher-flicker signal, however, speaks in the present tense: "I'm turning" or even in past tense: "I've turned." To have any cautionary value, a message must be communicated in advance of the action contemplated. Any later signal is only a nonwarning.

You'll find other kinds of signalers creating crises in our traffic lanes: The "switcher-nonflicker," who gives no warning at all, and the always popular "flicker-no switcher" who can fake you out for miles!

— OCC's "Safety Bulletin No. 10," July 6, 1998.

Employee Assistance Program  
(800) 479-9639

# 123 DAYS OF SAFETY

## OCC urges employees to take precautions during summer work

By Jerral Wyer  
Occupational Safety Division

Each year between the months of May and August, accidents and injuries increase significantly. Many of these accidents can be attributed to the increase in roadwork and the large number of inexperienced summer employees hired by TxDOT.

All safety rules and procedures that apply to regular employees apply to summer hires, temporaries, project employees and anyone else who works for the department. New employees and summer hires are in a high-risk group for injuries and accidents because of their inexperience. It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that a safety orientation is provided, including the completion of Form 1746, Drivers' Orientation and Evaluation Certification.

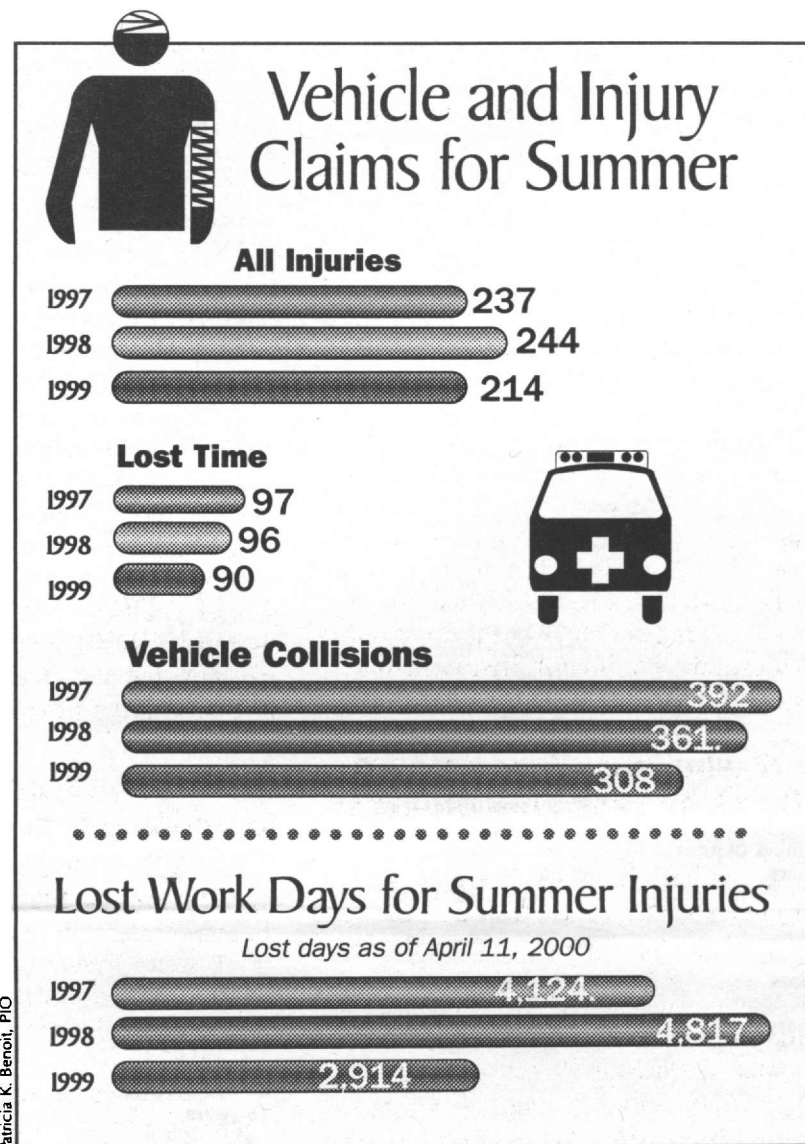
### Summer safety meetings

Employees must be briefed on safety procedures that apply to their responsibilities in the workplace. All employees must be provided with and required to use the appropriate personal protective equipment when and where necessary.

Many district safety coordinators offer a safety orientation training session for new employees, including summer hires. Safety meetings during the "123 Safe Days of Summer" campaign are essential to the safety and health of every TxDOT employee. Employees should be reminded that highway maintenance and construction work is one of the most dangerous professions anywhere. Roadway work involves a partnership between the traveling public and TxDOT employees. Unfortunately, we do not have control over the public's driving habits, alertness or attitude.

The Occupational Safety Division recommends focusing summer safety meetings on high exposure areas, accident prevention and past summer accidents and injuries. Each morning, construction supervisors, maintenance supervisors and/or crew leaders should conduct a five- to 10-minute safety review of the activities planned for that day. This meeting establishes the game plan for reducing accidents or injuries.

Full-time employees and summer hires should receive a copy



Patricia K. Benoit, PIO

of the revised *Handbook of Safe Practices*, which contains general safety rules and procedures. They should use the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD) when planning and setting up traffic control.

### OCC yearly safety campaign

To further assist the districts, divisions, special offices, and district safety coordinators to eliminate summer accidents and injuries, the Occupational Safety Division has developed a Summer Accident/Injury Prevention Campaign, "123 Safe Days of Summer." The campaign will include, but will not be limited to, the following activities and published information:

■ A safety bulletin will be sent weekly to each safety coordinator via GroupWise. They may forward this information to their supervisors or include it in safety meetings. Information will be covered from the safety and hazardous materials sections.

■ Safe driving stickers will be forwarded to each district. These stickers should be placed inside the vehicle as a reminder

to drive safely. "123 Safe Days of Summer" campaign stickers will be forwarded for employees to place on hard hats.

The *Occupational Safety News* will be provided to you on a monthly basis from May to August.

An accident reduction contest for personal injuries and vehicle accidents will be initiated. Every district will have a reduction goal to achieve during the month of May through August. Every district that meets its goal in one or more categories will be recognized at the 1999 APM Conference in November. There will be a special award for the district with the greatest percentage reduction from its previous three-year average rate for each category.

The 1999 contest winners were the Odessa District for employee injuries reduction and the Austin District for vehicle collision reduction. ★

## Service Awards

### Abilene District

**15 years**  
Richard F. Wasson  
**10 years**  
Burt M. Spraberry

### Amarillo District

**35 years**  
Phillip E. Cervantes  
**Gary D. McPherson**  
**15 years**  
Michael J. Robertson  
Roy D. Tarpley  
**10 years**  
Robin M. Frisk  
Ronald L. Johnston

### Atlanta District

**20 years**  
Timmie L. Finley  
Carl A. Peters  
**15 years**  
Richard B. Bagley  
Ronald D. Dillinger  
Cary C. Lloyd  
David L. Neal Sr.  
Nanette T. Shockley  
Thomas K. Young  
**Austin District**  
**35 years**  
Leslie D. Morris  
**30 years**  
Mary S. Carter  
Mickey E. Johnson  
**25 years**  
Bobby R. Urbanek  
**20 years**  
Susan M. Brown  
Ricky L. Wilson  
**15 years**  
Tracy L. Gainey  
Samuel R. Holguin  
David W. Klipple  
**10 years**  
Thomas J. Edmiston  
William M. Forsythe  
Richard D. Gammill

### Beaumont District

**30 years**  
Harry J. Rees  
Lynwood Walters  
**25 years**  
Mark E. Hanks  
**20 years**  
Alan D. Adams  
**15 years**  
Donna R. Jayroe  
John V. Moser  
Henry E. Sawyer Jr.  
**10 years**  
Kimberly M. Cox  
Michael D. Skiles

### Brownwood District

**35 years**  
William T. Crumley  
**20 years**  
Kevin T. Rivers

### Bryan District

**20 years**  
Daniel W. Vojtek  
**15 years**  
Michael C. Hogan  
**10 years**  
Richard A. Courtney  
Darrell W. Kolwes  
Michael D. May  
**5 years**  
David L. Brackens

### Childress District

**20 years**  
Mat R. Foster

### Corpus Christi District

**20 years**  
Arturo Martinez Jr.  
**15 years**  
Michael Esparza  
**10 years**  
Melissa A. Mudd  
**5 years**  
Billy R. Karnei

### Dallas District

**30 years**  
James E. Pruett  
Tom H. Watters  
**15 years**  
Wendy S. Croft  
Praxedis Garza  
James E. Harris  
Leann H. Lewis  
Kojo A. Mensah  
Johnny L. Reynolds  
Robert W. Weatherall  
**10 years**  
Donald R. Bennett  
Wilfred D. Chabot  
Raymond C. Hardemon  
**5 years**  
Susan A. Icke  
Jason H. Miller

### El Paso District

**30 years**  
Juan Y. Gonzales Jr.  
**20 years**  
Oscar G. Carrasco  
**15 years**  
Antonio Cereceres  
Samuel R. Salmon  
**10 years**  
Tomas A. Saenz  
**5 years**  
Jesus E. Valtier

### Fort Worth District

**30 years**  
James A. Logan  
Ronald W. Zinn  
**25 years**  
Gary Campos  
**20 years**  
Sandra M. Holcomb  
John W. Watkins  
**15 years**  
Albert L. Harrell  
Leroy Sinegal  
Vicki W. Weatherford  
**10 years**  
Patrick T. Haley  
Christopher Perez Jr.  
Jack E. Reeves  
**5 years**  
Terry D. Sanders

### Houston District

**35 years**  
Raj K. Syal  
**30 years**  
Reginald E. Janecek  
Lester R. West  
**20 years**  
John Knowles  
Mark H. Kröll  
Eugene A. McLendon  
Mark D. Montgomery  
**15 years**  
Joseph H. Bourdier Jr.  
Geoffery T. Chow  
Michael A. Grossman  
Daniel D. Harper  
Mary D. Harris  
Lawrence J. Heckathorn  
John D. Horelica  
Josefa R. Maghuyop  
Stephen L. Olson  
Grace H. Parker  
Michael G. Rayne  
Jeanne M. Sobnosky  
Kenneth D. Taylor  
Terrance R. Vogt  
**10 years**  
Alan Craft III  
David C. Kossa  
Mike C. Myers  
Roy Sanchez  
Jose I. Tamayo  
Thomas L. Theriot  
Thanh Binh T. Tran  
Norman M. Wigington  
**5 years**  
Reginald A. George  
William A. Greer  
Laszlo Pato

### Laredo District

**15 years**  
Luis R. Ortiz Jr.

### Lubbock District

**20 years**  
Velma S. Flippin  
**15 years**  
Terry L. Jeter  
**10 years**  
Russell N. Hayes  
**5 years**  
Penny L. Mason

### Lufkin District

**30 years**  
Joe A. Pitman  
**15 years**  
Anthony R. Teichelman  
**5 years**  
Thomas R. Loerch  
**Odessa District**  
**35 years**  
Ernesto G. Cervantes  
**30 years**  
Benny Walker Jr.

### Paris District

**30 years**  
Terry W. Petty  
**15 years**  
Nick W. Adams  
Joe T. Miller  
John E. Stinson  
**10 years**  
John A. Armstrong  
Christophe D. Bragg

### Pharr District

**5 years**  
Rolando Ortiz Jr.

### San Angelo District

**15 years**  
Daren W. Benbenek  
Darla R. Mikulik

### San Antonio District

**40 years**  
Walter E. Geiger  
**30 years**  
Gordon R. McClanahan  
Darryl A. Schneider  
**20 years**  
John K. Benson  
Ernest L. Edgehouse Jr.  
**15 years**  
Lloyd F. Mair Jr.  
Roxie A. Melton  
**10 years**  
William V. Diaz  
Barry L. Engelke  
Mary L. Rodriguez

### Tyler District

**20 years**  
Thomas L. Doss  
**15 years**  
William M. Battles  
**10 years**  
Sonja J. Swinson  
**5 years**  
Billy A. Patterson  
Daren E. Turner

### Waco District

**30 years**  
Louie F. Kolar  
**20 years**  
David L. Beard  
**15 years**  
Kevin L. Pederson  
**10 years**  
Roy R. Lopez  
Phillip L. Miller  
Jon H. Plumlee  
**5 years**  
Steven E. Parks

### Wichita Falls District

**30 years**  
Don A. Hogan  
**20 years**  
Leamon Ligon Jr.  
**15 years**  
Joe D. Anderson  
Larry C. Lott  
Charlie B. Wicker  
**10 years**  
Mary S. Groth

### Yoakum District

**30 years**  
Robert W. Jiral  
**20 years**  
Pearlie A. Bushong  
Charles M. Nobles  
**15 years**  
Larry W. Blazek  
Bob S. Eng  
James S. Stock  
**10 years**  
Frank R. Clark

### Aviation Division

**10 years**  
Clarence B. Ehly

### Construction Division

**20 years**  
Mary A. Hanson  
**10 years**  
Moon Cheol Won

### Design Division

**30 years**  
Kenneth W. Fults  
**10 years**  
Thomas C. Connolly

### Environmental Affairs Division

**15 years**  
James M. Dobbins  
**10 years**  
Julie A. Lane

### Finance Division

**15 years**  
Stephen J. Palmer  
Gail A. Quimby  
**10 years**  
William J. Fuhrman  
**5 years**  
Helen A. Gregory

### General Services Division

**15 years**  
Tammy L. Oshel  
**5 years**  
Douglas L. Martin  
**General Services Division**  
**10 years**  
Michael J. Duncan  
**5 years**  
Wayne S. Heikkila

### Information Systems Division

**20 years**  
Jay D. Tarwater  
**15 years**  
Kenneth E. Corzine  
John W. Fox  
Bertha B. Legge  
^10 years  
Rebecca L. Ivey  
Stephen R. Schmidt  
**5 years**  
Henry P. Holguin

### Motor Vehicle Division

**5 years**  
Jack L. Durham  
**15 years**  
James B. Hodges  
Dana J. Honganen

### Occupational Safety Division

**10 years**  
Tom L. Zozy

### Right of Way Division

**25 years**  
Linda S. Miers

### Traffic Operations Division

**15 years**  
Margaret A. Moore  
**5 years**  
Carlotta D. Bomar

### Transportation Planning & Programming Division

**30 years**  
Sam R. Reese III  
**15 years**  
Jeffery A. Wilhelm  
**10 years**  
Gregory O. Lancaster

### Travel Division

**10 years**  
Christine T. Jones  
**5 years**  
Sheri L. Harper

### Vehicle Titles & Registration Division

**30 years**  
Lynda E. Lutz  
**20 years**  
Sandra B. Tucker  
**5 years**  
Vanessa D. Henderson  
Nancy Rodriguez  
Kenneth G. Strain

## Retirements

### October

David L. Duke, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor II, 30 years

### January

**Houston District**  
Clarence Y. Clay, Engineering Technician III, 23 years

### February

**San Antonio District**  
Melvin G. Baker, Transportation Maintenance Specialist V, 38 years  
Juan M. Balderrama, Engineering Technician I, 30 years  
Billy J. Verstuyft, Maintenance Technician V, 34 years  
Johnnie G. Green, Jr., Electric/Air Condition Mechanic IV, 30 years

### March

**Abilene District**  
Rex V. Turner, Motor Vehicle Technician III, 28 years

### Atlanta District

Chappy D. Shelton, Material and Processing Inspector IV, 37 years

### Austin District

Dorman L. Estep, Engineering Technician II, 31 years

### Brownwood District

Ben E. Cagle, Transportation Maintenance Technician IV, 33 years

### Bryan District

James B. McCormick, Transportation Maintenance Technician IV, 33 years

### El Paso District

Roderick Olivas, Program Administrator II, 34 years

### Fort Worth District

William B. Kemp, Laboratory Supervisor II, 32 years  
Otto M. Warenskjold, Jr., Engineering Technician III, 21 years

### Houston District

Dennis J. Corliss, Motor

Vehicle Technician III, 32 years

Harold L. Heidemann, Engineering Technician V, 37 years

Edward Jaime, Galveston Ferryboat Watch Engineer II, 28 years

Eutiquio C. Perez, Galveston Marine Welder-Pipefitter III, 28 years

### Pharr District

George Barrera, Engineering Specialist IV, 34 years  
Armando Ponce, Purchaser I, 30 years

### San Antonio District

Don W. Toalson, Engineering Specialist II, 34 years

### Yoakum District

Billie J. Malatek, Transportation Maintenance Specialist I, 31 years

### Waco District

Stanley F. Curry, Transportation Maintenance Technician IV, 18 years  
James W. Henson, General

Engineer Technician III, 23 years

### Environmental Division

Daymond D. Crawford, Administrative Technician IV, 29 years

### Right of Way Division

Jackie P. Barnett, Appraiser V, 30 years

### April

**Beaumont District**  
John B. Durham, Maintenance Technician III, 32 years

Ivory Wilridge, Engineering Technician III, 31 years

### Corpus Christi District

Bobby C. Anderson, Engineering Technician I, 33 years

Pedro Hernandez, Engineering Technician III, 34 years

### El Paso District

Charles R. Shook, Engineering Specialist IV, 38 years

### Pharr District

Tommie G. Daniel, Manager IV, 18 years

### San Antonio District

Allen R. Townsend, Engineering Specialist III, 30 years

### Tyler District

Cecil G. Tawater, Engineering Technician III, 32 years  
Larry R. Tiner, Program Administrator III, 30 years

### Waco District

James C. Johnson, Transportation Maintenance Technician IV, 23 years

### Wichita Falls District

Randy L. Blodgett, Engineering Technician V, 32 years

### Yoakum District

Gilbert E. Canik, Staff Service Officer I, 41 years

Edwin J. Maresch, Engineering Technician III, 27 years  
LeRoy J. Mueller, Purchaser I, 21 years

Silvester Novak, Engineering Technician III, 30 years

### Transportation Planning and Programming Division

Chandrasiri Dehipitiya, Systems Support Specialist III, 22 years

### May

#### Abilene District

Robert E. Hallford, Transportation Maintenance Specialist V, 37 years

#### Amarillo District

E. Leon Wood, Engineering Specialist IV, 36 years

#### Fort Worth District

Rex A. Frye, Transportation Maintenance Technician II, 11 years

#### Houston District

Emma B. Macik, Engineering Technician III, 21 years

# Letters

## Military pleased with TxDOT help

*Executive Director Charles W. Heald received the following:*

I wish to bring your attention to the outstanding assistance Terrance Murray provided the 5th U.S. Army Headquarters specifically, and the U.S. Army in general.

In support of the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo, the U.S. Army Recruiting Command established a static display booth to highlight Army opportunities for today's young people. Unfortunately, an older style armored personnel carrier had been placed in the booth for display. Two senior general officers, to include the adjutant general of Texas, asked if the older armored personnel carrier could be replaced with the armored Bradley fighting vehicle. As you may well know, when generals ask for something, the decision has been made. We were in the execution mode.

Our mission, therefore, was to move a Bradley fighting vehicle from Camp Bullis to the rodeo grounds and replace the older armored personnel carrier. Furthermore, we only had 24 hours to complete the mission.

This is where Murray came into the picture. My action officer called the Texas State Area Command Headquarters for assistance. However, due to an upcoming drill weekend, the headquarters was closed. The action officer next contacted your staff directly to determine what coordination was necessary to move the oversized load. Our military sources indicated this process normally requires four to five days from request to clearance, a time delay we were unable to concede.

After hearing the situation, Murray took personal interest in solving our dilemma. He worked directly with my action officer to expedite the process. Murray went well above and beyond the normal expectations of any employee. His dedication to, and astute knowledge of the Department of Transportation procedures and, more importantly for us, his dedication and commitment to the armed forces, enabled us to move forward with the senior general officers' requests. Murray remained at his desk after the normal end of day to ensure completion of all essential coordination with the engineers for routing the heavy load. He faxed the completed clearance to us after 5 p.m. on Friday.

I am happy to report the Bradley fighting vehicle was moved and in place Saturday morning prior to the spectators entering the grounds. The public had the opportunity to experience firsthand the Army's latest equipment used in defense of this great nation. We could not have completed this mission without Murray's exemplary dedication and fervent commitment.

I thank Murray and congratulate you for establishing the conditions for the success of this endeavor. Obviously, your leadership sets the climate within the department of transportation as evidenced by the superior efforts of this employee.

Furthermore, if you should ever be in San Antonio I invite you to visit our historic 5th Army Headquarters located on Fort Sam Houston in the Quadrangle. This epic headquarters was built in 1876. I would be delighted to show you around the headquarters and the adjacent grounds.

Thanks again for everything you and your

employees do for the state of Texas and the U. S. military.

**Kenneth R. Knight**  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
Chief of Staff  
San Antonio

*Terrance Murray works as an administrative technician in the Permit Section, Motor Carrier Division.*

.....

## San Marcos airport commends TxDOT

On behalf of the San Marcos Municipal Airport and the city of San Marcos, please accept our sincere appreciation for your exceptional service to our airport. The runway repair work you performed in February is absolutely vital to the safety of the local flying public. You and your highly professional work force not only accomplished everything that we asked, you did it in only half the time that we reasonably expected. This is an added bonus for us which makes your accomplishment even more impressive.

All of us at the airport consider you and your Texas Department of Transportation people to be important members of our airport community, and we are proud to have you as friends and neighbors.

**Jack Doughty**  
Airport Manager  
San Marcos

*From among the district special crews and maintenance offices, and the San Marcos, Lockhart, Bastrop and Travis South maintenance sections of the Austin District, 20 employees worked on the airport project. Edward Villalpando Jr. is a supervisor in the San Marcos Maintenance Section.*

.....

## Dallas District helps with birthday gift

Recently my father mentioned an interest in an overpass being built at Texas 161 and Texas 183 in Irving. My siblings and I determined it would be a great unusual birthday gift to put him and my mother up in a hotel with a great view of the construction. I contacted the Texas Department of Transportation and subsequently was referred to Gary Grant.

This letter is to express my siblings' and my appreciation for the cooperation and professionalism of Grant. He went out of his way to keep us informed of any and all pertinent changes regarding the construction date, hotels with the best views and even mentioned the best view should we not stay in a hotel.

He even put us in touch with a newspaper reporter who was writing a story on the construction and was interested in speaking with my father about his interest. Grant was genuinely excited to have community members interested in the engineering of the project.

Because of Grant's diligence, when we arrived the morning of Feb. 5, my father was able to satisfy a lifelong curiosity and my siblings and I were able to give a truly unique gift.

It's nice to know we have state employees that are so conscientious and helpful to Dallas' residents.

**Beth Ann O'Neill**  
Dallas

*Gary Grant is a construction inspector in the Dallas Northwest Area Office, Dallas District.*

.....

## Ferry passenger thanks employee

*Corpus Christi District Engineer, Billy Parks received the following:*

For about the past month, I used the ferry to Port Aransas several times, including at times a boat, pickup and motor home. Driving onto and off of the ferry, especially with the motor home, was not a fun task!

However, my use of the ferry was made much easier by the directions of Ramiro Dominguez, one of your employees. His directions (hand signals, etc.) were very clear and helpful.

I hope that this letter will be placed in Dominguez' personnel file.

**Leland E. Roberts**  
Manchaca

*Ramiro Dominguez works as a deck hand at the Port Aransas Ferry System, Corpus Christi District.*

.....

## Customer lauds MCD branch's service

*Supervisor Sue Cable of the Motor Carrier Division's Commercial Vehicle Operations Branch received the following:*

I just wanted to thank you for how nice and helpful you were to us. I was shocked to hear that you actually called my home to find out where my mother-in-law was. And on top of that, you let her in the door after hours and got all of our paperwork in order. You are truly one of a kind. I don't know anyone else who would go out of their way to help people like that!

Getting these tow tags, as you know, is very important to us. Without them we can't run and that means no income coming in. You were very in tune with my needs. As you probably know, most any place in the "Texas Department of ..." the workers there are rude and don't want to answer any of your questions. You were extremely helpful with all of my 101 questions, and on top of everything you were able to get our paperwork completed so that we can get our tags in Houston quickly. I know how extremely busy you and your office are. You were definitely God sent to us. I know with your attitude and personality you will go far, and you will be blessed when you are in need. Thank you again, and God Bless.

**Yolanda Martinez**  
Houston

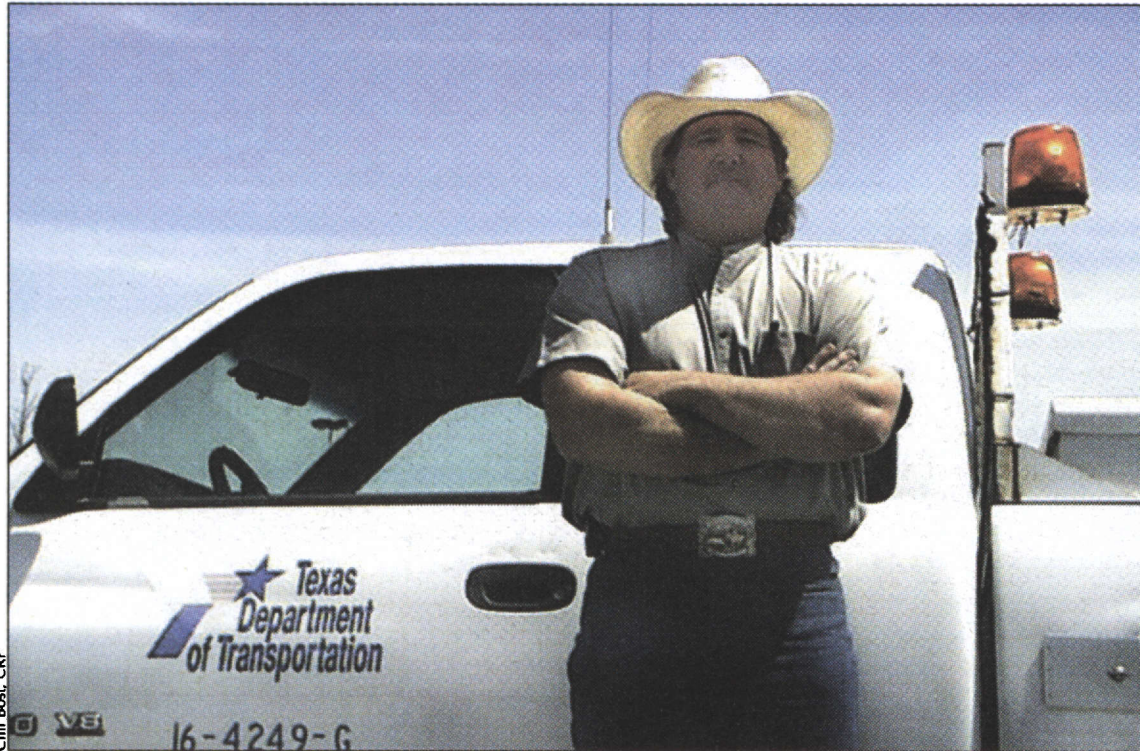
## Motorist thankful for roadside help

Recently, I was going to Vernon from Quanah. As I got to Lake Pauline Hill, I had a flat. I was sitting in my pickup wondering what to do when over the hill from the east came Maurice Farris. He pumped up my tire so I could return back to Quanah, but the tire had a huge nail in it and kept going down. We stopped three times and aired it up again. We finally got back to town, and he even went with me so I could buy a new tire, then saw I got home OK.

You cannot imagine how grateful I was. He is always helping someone out in need.

We in Quanah feel so very fortunate to have this man in our area. He does many good things to help us out, especially widows, as I am one.

**Mrs. Bill Odom**  
Quanah



**Jim Jennings, maintenance supervisor at the San Patricio County Area Office of the Corpus Christi District, helped deputies catch a kidnapper last February.**

'I don't think I had time to be scared'

## Employee thwarts kidnapper

ODEM — The look on her face was unmistakable terror.

"Anybody could tell something was wrong by the look on her face," said Jim Jennings, maintenance supervisor at the San Patricio County Area Office of the Corpus Christi District.

Jennings was returning to Sinton after attending training in Corpus Christi on Feb. 1 when he encountered a man and a woman outside a convenience store in Odem. The man held the obviously frightened woman by the arm. Once he was back in his TxDOT truck, Jennings turned on his radio and immediately heard a report from the San Patricio County Sheriff's Office, which had deputies searching for a knife-wielding man who had abducted a woman.

The license plate number and the description of the vehicle deputies were looking for matched that of the car belonging to the man and woman Jennings had seen.

The man forced the woman back into his vehicle and left the station with Jennings in pursuit, talking to deputies on his cellular phone he followed the kidnapper and his hostage.

"By then he knew everyone was looking for him. For three or four minutes in Odem we had a little cat-and-mouse game until the

deputies showed up," Jennings said. "I stayed with him until I saw two deputies force him off the road."

The man was later arrested. He had stopped in the convenience store to ditch the knife he had used in abducting the woman, Jennings later learned.

Jennings wasn't afraid during his encounter with the kidnapper, he said. "The only thing I could think of was that we had to get her (the hostage) away from him. I don't think I had time to be scared."

Jennings, like other TxDOT maintenance employees, spends a lot of his work time talking to police and sheriff's office dispatchers, so San Patricio County deputies were not surprised to have an offer of help from him.

"I deal with them daily," he said. "They call me on the radio just like I was a deputy."

Dispatchers, however, thanked Jennings for his assistance in apprehending the kidnapper. But Jennings shrugs off mention of his heroics.

"It was the right thing to do and I was raised to do the right thing," he said. "I guess I was just in the right place at the right time."★

*Cliff Bost of the Corpus Christi District contributed to this report.*

### FINAL THOUGHT

If you can drive your car on a highway, cross a river on a bridge or drink clean water from your tap, you can thank civil engineers.

The American Society of Civil Engineers has named the Top 10 Civil Engineering Achievements of the Century: airport design and development; dams, the interstate highway system; long-span bridges; rail transportation; sanitary landfills/solid waste disposal; skyscrapers; wastewater treatment; water supply and distribution; and water transportation via canals and ports.

ASCE named the Panama Canal the greatest achievement, "one of its finest moments in history, inspiring generations of engineers to continually challenge those who say, 'It can't be done.'"

ASCE also named the Panama Canal as one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World. It shares this distinction with the Channel Tunnel (England & France), CN Tower (Toronto, Canada), Empire State Building (New York, N.Y.), Golden Gate Bridge (San Francisco, Calif.), Itaipu Dam (Brazil/Paraguay), and Netherlands North Sea Protection Works.

Founded in 1852, ASCE represents more than 123,000 civil engineers worldwide and is America's oldest national engineering society.

### More Letters

*Maurice Farris is the supervisor in the Hardeman County Maintenance Office, Childress District.*

#### MCD branch offers 'efficient help'

*Robin Moten and Lydia Sabley, administrative technicians in the Motor Carrier Division's Commercial Vehicle Operations Branch, received the following:*

I wanted to thank you for your compassion and understanding with our dilemma. I did not realize the need for any further docu-

mentation after we received our Interstate Commerce Commission authority, and I certainly did not want to have to keep our truck up in Kansas until the paperwork was complete. I am very grateful for your efforts and help with getting the RS-3 form completed and sent to our drivers once you had our insurance information

Be assured, I will not make that error again! It was a pleasure to find efficient help.

**Karen S. Pooser  
Fredericksburg**

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