

IN HEALD WE TRUST

TxDOT's executive director wants to keep good employees and run the agency like a business.

How's he doing?

By Lisa Trow
Public Information Office

Who said it's lonely at the top? Not Wes Heald. TxDOT's 18th leader has found "the top" — actually the second floor of the Art Deco fortress that houses the state's fourth largest agency — a very busy place.

The reasons: meetings, meetings and more meetings. And mail. Mail from the districts and divisions, mail from elected leaders, mail from the citizens the agency serves.

"It kind of overwhelms you," said Heald, 61, who assumed the agency's top post last March.

This busyness has contributed to what Heald said has been the biggest disappointment of his first year — not getting out more to visit the districts and divisions — but also to its greatest reward.

Heald has used his time to advance his plan for the agency, which is, simply, to run it like a good business. His mission: "I want to leave TxDOT as a leader among state agencies and in providing quality transportation for the state of Texas."

Good businesses are run by good managers, Heald said.

"The biggest contribution I'll make to TxDOT is providing good leadership," he said. "Nothing gives me more pleasure than to see young people grow and develop and move up in the ranks of TxDOT."

In his first year, Heald reorganized the duties and oversight responsibilities of top administrators of the divisions to make operations more efficient.

In the short term, Heald has been interested in fostering good relations between districts and divisions in the hopes of reducing the type of "turf protection" that impedes progress. "I'm going to keep work-



ing on that until I feel like we're working well together," he said.

Heald also wants to see the agency meet its construction letting goals and to renew the agency's focus on core functions, such as maintenance.

"You can never get too complacent about improvements," Heald said.

Heald regards complacency as a creeping disease that could threaten the gains the agency has made and strives to maintain. If his managers and employees allow themselves to slip into complacency, the agency could become a bloated and insensitive behemoth, too ungainly to meet its current mission, the efficient and environmentally responsible movement of goods and people.

Heald is poised to pick perhaps the ultimate battle with complacency in the long term of his career as executive director. The department that has catered for decades to the needs of the motorist must face the fact that the era of mass transit has arrived. The sovereignty of the lone driver in his driving machine is fast becoming an anachronism in an age in which traffic flow has outgrown the capacity of the state's roads and high-

ways, and TxDOT can't build highways quickly enough to keep up.

"I don't think we can bail ourselves out of the (traffic) congestion," Heald said. "I think we'll have to see an increased emphasis on multimodal transportation."

Heald expects resistance to the increased use of public transportation. Texans may become convinced only when the discomfort caused by problems created by motorist traffic begins to outweigh their aversion to change.

"Life will have to become unpleasant enough for people to see the advantages (of public transportation)," Heald said. "Although highways are the primary means of transportation, we must encourage all forms of transportation to give our citizens a choice when possible."

Public transportation is a way to alleviate congestion on overcrowded arteries in urban areas. "We've got to do something about Interstate 35, especially between Georgetown and Hillsboro," Heald said. "We've got to get out of the box and do something about increasing capacity...in a relatively short period of time."

Finding innovative solutions to the state's transportation challenges requires innovative employees. Employee retention is also one of Heald's goals. He believes good employee management is an important part of a plan to retain good employees. But so are competitive salaries.

Raising the salaries of state employees is an issue the Legislature will consider this session, which began in January. The issue is of concern to most state agencies, which are losing employees to better paying positions in the private sector.

"I hope we can get salaries up so we can

■ See HEALD, Page 4

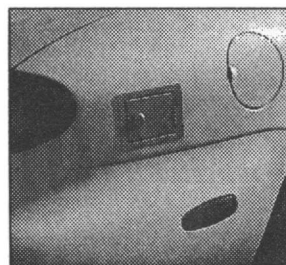
Inside



Excellence

TxDOT employees prove ingenuity and perseverance lead to award-winning performances on the job.

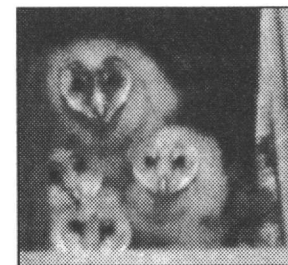
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Fueled you

TxDOT is the nationally and internationally recognized authority on the use of alternative fuels.

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Wise guys

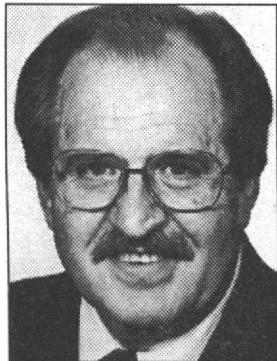
Federally protected owls pose obstacles for the Fort Worth and Lubbock districts during recent projects.

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Recycling works because it makes good business sense

In January, TxDOT joined the Federal Highway Administration, the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission, the Texas Hot Mix Association and the Associated General Contractors, as well as state and federal agencies in our second recycling conference.

This diverse audience included representatives from cities, counties and the private sector. The attendees had at least one thing in common — the desire for good roads and a clean, safe environment.



Kirby Pickett

Straight talk

TxDOT's emphasis on recycling may be relatively new, but I can personally certify that the department's use of recycled materials goes back a long way.

I remember we used what would now be called a recycled material on my first department construction project. This was on Interstate 30 in the Paris District, back in the early 1960s. Crushed slag from the old Lone Star Steel plant was used as the coarse aggregate in the concrete for pavement and structures.

But it was not used because it was a recycled product, or because it was the politically correct thing to do — it was used because it was the best material available. The slag provided a higher quality product than any natural coarse aggregate available in the area, and it could be obtained at a lower cost.

It still makes sense to use good, quality, recycled materials, particularly when those materials are available at considerable savings and can also help improve the environment.

One of the last projects I dealt with before coming to Austin involved the use of another recycled material. Waste copy machine toner was used as an asphalt additive on a hot mix project in Waco.

Like the slag, the toner was not used simply because it was a recycled product — it was used because it significantly improved the quality of the hot mix, and because it was cost effective.

Unlike the slag, the toner could not have been used when I first began working for the department. At that time, copy machines had not yet been invented.

New or old, there is no shortage of waste products. Almost 100 million tons of waste

■ See **RECYCLING**, Page 4



Autographed copy

Bill Christian, formerly Sen. Phil Gramm's special assistant for state projects, left, presents to TxDOT Executive Director Wes Heald, center, a copy of TEA 21 autographed by various members of the House and Senate authorizing committees and Sens. Gramm and Robert Byrd. Heald is accompanied by TxDOT federal legislative analysts Tonia Ramirez, second from right, and David Soileau, right. Christian's current title is administrative assistant for state affairs.

Gov. Bush appoints Houstonian to fill Wynne's commission post

AUSTIN — Gov. George W. Bush has appointed Houston businessman John W. Johnson to the Texas Transportation Commission, the governor's office announced Feb. 1.

If the selection is approved by the Senate, Johnson will replace Anne Wynne, whose transportation commission term expired this year. Johnson's term will expire Feb. 1, 2005.

Johnson, 54, is chairman and president of Permian Mud Service, Inc. and chairman of its subsidiary, Champion Technologies, Inc.

Permian Mud Service, Inc. is an oilfield service business operating in the Permian Basin and Fort Bend County areas. Chairman of the executive committee of the Southwest Bank of Texas, N.A., Johnson is also a member of the executive committee of Weatherford International, Inc.

"Johnny Johnson is a knowledgeable and experienced businessman who will bring a statewide perspective to transportation decisions," Bush said. ★

Campbell becomes ROW director

John Campbell has been selected director of the Right of Way Division effective Feb. 1, announced Wes Heald, executive director of the Texas Department of Transportation.

As director, Campbell will oversee the department's efforts in acquiring right of way for highway construction and providing relocation assistance and payments. The division also works closely with the districts in controlling outdoor advertising along highways and coordinating utility adjustments.

Campbell, 39, is a 10-year veteran of TxDOT, working first in the Dallas District, where he was the right of way utility coordinator. One of the largest projects he worked on during this time was the U.S. 75 (North

Central Expressway) reconstruction.

Campbell moved to Austin in 1993 to supervise the utility section of the Right of Way Division. A year later, he was selected to head the engineering section.

Before joining the department, Campbell served in the private sector as a utility construction manager and project engineer for two Dallas companies.

Campbell graduated from Texas A&M University with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. He also has a master's degree in business administration from the University of Texas at Dallas. ★

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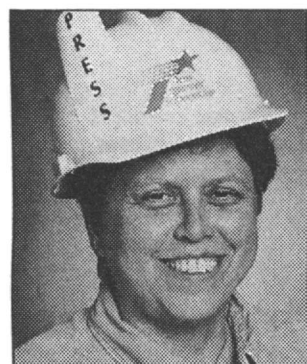
These are the 'good old days'

Atlanta District safety coordinator says awareness of issues has improved

Ever since I was a child, I can remember adults talking about how good things used to be — you know, "the good old days."

I don't like to admit it, because I'd have to admit I'm getting old, but now I often find myself telling some young person I've cornered about "the good old days."

But for some folks, like Tommy Clayton, Atlanta District safety coordinator, "the good old days" are not past tense, they're present. They're the "good new days."



Eloise Lundgren

A Day in the Life

safety."

The Occupational Safety Division was the Insurance Division back then, concentrating on vehicle liability insurance.

"Safety coordinators were hired in each district to train employees," Clayton said, "so I was hired April 15, 1970, in the Atlanta District to test driving skills and check eyesight and hand coordination of employees in compliance with TxDOT's fleet safety program."

When Clayton first came on board, it was normal to see a district average anywhere from 25 to 40 vehicle accidents a year.

"And in those days, we didn't report fender benders," he said, "so probably the rate was really a lot higher."

But compare that statistic to 1997 when the Atlanta District had only 12 minor vehicle accidents and six disabling injuries. Obviously, safety has come a long way.

What has happened to make these "the good new days"?

Several things, Clayton is quick to point out, like holding supervisors accountable for their employees' safety, setting safety goals, establishing safety committees, holding safety meetings, publicly recognizing employees with good safety records and being blessed with the Occupational Safety Division.

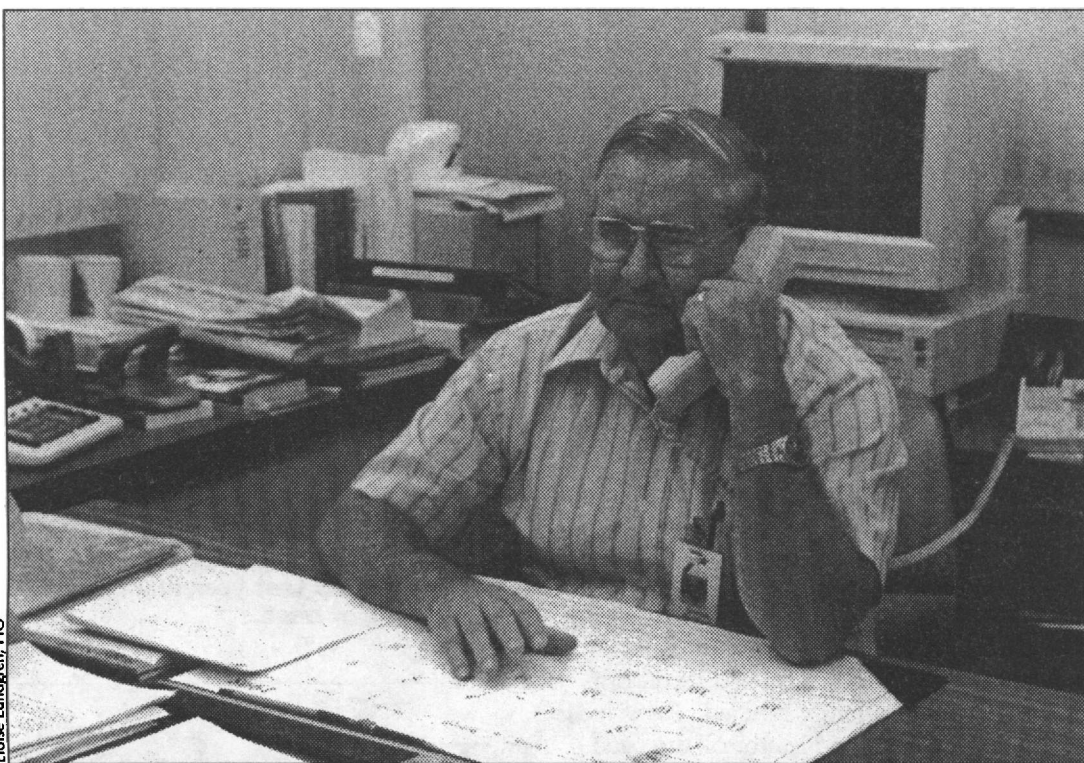
Clayton is convinced that things really started improving when Ed Sims became the OCC director.

"Ed used to be our field representative," he said. "It was always a pleasure to work with Ed. Now, at the division level, he, along with Jerral Wyer, have both done outstanding jobs in making everyone, particularly the administration, more safety conscious."

The division, under Sims' direction, is more proactive, according to Clayton, providing district safety coordinators useful and

"In the early 70s, probably through the early 80s, we had the mindset that safety was something we were required by law to do," he remembered, "but we were in a reactive state.

There was no emphasis on being safety conscious; you kind of bluffed your way through



Atlanta District safety coordinator Tommy Clayton credits OCC Director Ed Sims with making positive changes that have made TxDOT a safer place to work.

effective tools that enable them to increase their employees' awareness.

"The division sets safety goals for each district and then we, in turn, set goals for each unit in our respective districts," Clayton said. "Division personnel perform safety audits of districts every other year, and they provide coordinators with excellent safety information we can use to educate our employees."

"People actually think about safety now," he continued. "They're more safety-oriented. The safety record for the entire state has improved year after year and it's not because of us safety coordinators; it's the employees who have made the difference.

"Now is the best time at TxDOT to be in the safety business," Clayton emphasized.

Incentives like the annual safety conference, truck rodeo and district safety awards banquets go a long way toward putting safety awareness on employees' radar screens.

But to have a good program, Clayton firmly believes, an organization has to train its leaders first; then they will train their employees. And you get leaders interested when you put safety in terms they understand, Clayton has learned from experience.

"Money and people get their (leadership) attention," he said. "When you point out things like the lower the accident rate, the lower your vehicle insurance policy premiums will be, and an injured employee means time away from work and time is money, supervisors listen.

"They learn fast that employees won't be safety conscious if their supervisors aren't," he said. "I tell all supervisors, to have a strong safety program, you have to preach it, you have to act it and you have to get your employees' confidence."

Clayton is proud to direct attention to the Atlanta District's actions that promote safety awareness.

"Gene Adams (former Atlanta district

engineer) really believes in safety," he said, "and that makes my job easier as well as enjoyable. It's kind of an Atlanta philosophy because Mr. Jester (retired Atlanta District engineer) was concerned about safety, too."

Atlanta has the reputation of having the most "proactive" safety committee throughout the department, according to Clayton.

"I attribute that largely to our chairman, James Joslin (district construction engineer), who is proactive and completely involved in all aspects of our safety program," he stressed. "James has served as a member of the safety committee for eight years. He once agreed to chair the committee temporarily. Well, he's been the 'temporary' chairman for five years."

Clayton is convinced the more you involve employees in a program, the more inclined they are to be believers.

"Maybe I'm a little different than other coordinators," he acknowledged, "in that I don't conduct safety meetings; I have employees take turns doing that."

Each month, the Atlanta District safety committee selects specific topics to be emphasized. Sections set a date for their meetings, and Clayton provides information to the employees who are going to be briefing their units. This way, employees get the facts on a variety of safety-related issues: hazardous materials, fire prevention, industrial hygiene, proper personal protections, back injuries, work zone safety, eye protections, defensive driving, to name a few.

The district's annual safety awards banquet is first class, in Clayton's opinion.

"We usually have it in February or the middle of March at the Marshall civic center," he said. "It's well worth the time and effort. Recognizing employees who have worked a year or more without sustaining injuries or having traffic accidents is a terrific incentive.

■ See CLAYTON, Page 16

RECYCLING

Continued from Page 2

is generated each year in Texas. That's a lot of opportunity to recycle.

And TxDOT is taking advantage of many of these opportunities. We are using crushed concrete, reclaimed asphalt pavement (RAP), fly ash, scrap tire rubber and glass, as well as some more unusual materials, like crushed ceramic toilets and roofing shingles.

The key words are "quality" and "economy." If the recycled products we use are not long lasting, this will simply lead to premature failure and unnecessary additional recycling. If they are not cost effective, they probably will not be used in the first place. But if they do meet our criteria of quality and economy, it benefits both the department and the environment — a true win-win situation.

TxDOT's recycling efforts are important not only in construction and maintenance, but in other areas as well. Many of these products became readily available only within the past few years.

In facility renovations, carpet made from recycled soda pop bottles is used, and doors and frames are frequently re-used. Recycled antifreeze and re-refined motor oil are used in TxDOT's vehicle fleet, as are recapped tires. Both the products available and the possibilities are almost unlimited.

We are all aware that TxDOT is also a producer. In the last four years, our department recycled more than 3.6 million pounds of white office paper. That saved a lot of trees. Other products we recycle are cardboard, newspaper, telephone books, toner cartridges and toner bottles.

Using recycled materials or recycling "waste" products is no longer considered to be something unusual, but instead is simply a way for those of us in TxDOT to do our jobs better. Both ends of the recycling effort — using recycled materials and recycling the waste we produce — are present throughout TxDOT. Because of this, the department has a major influence on recycling efforts throughout Texas.

Our recycling program would not be possible without the efforts of our employees. I thank you for making the conscious effort to recycle and doing what is right for both the department and our environment.

Kirby Pickett is deputy executive director for the Texas Department of Transportation.

HEALD

Continued from Page 1

stop the loss of good employees," Heald said. "We're doing everything we can to convince the Legislature we're losing too many great people."

He's unable to make any assurances. "I'm new to the legislative game from the executive director's perspective."

Working within a stone's throw of the seat of state government may have given Heald a fresh perspective on the Legislature, but working at headquarters has offered few real surprises, said Heald, who still considers Brownwood home.

"The 14,000 employees are the real heroes as they are helping to accomplish our mission by way of the TxDOT vision."★



The Tyler Longriders want you

The Tyler Longriders is among the groups that participate in the Don't Mess With Texas Trash-Off, TxDOT's statewide anti-litter campaign. The 14th annual event is scheduled April 10. Adopt-a-Highway groups and Keep Texas Beautiful volunteers will participate. Last year, more than 100,000 volunteers picked up about 6.8 million gallons of trash.

PTN conference, bus roadeo April 24-28 in San Antonio

By Chante Bergmann
Public Information Office

Put 400 bus drivers, public transportation planners, vendors and government officials in a hotel in San Antonio and what do you get? The 1999 Texas Public Transportation Conference.

"We are trying to bring all of the components of the Texas transit industry together for this premiere event," said conference coordinator Vickie Vitek.

The conference will be held April 24-28 at the Omni San Antonio. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)/Public Transportation Division will co-host the conference on behalf of the public transportation industry in Texas.

PTN director Margot Massey, who has attended her share of past conferences, is looking forward to this year's, she said.

"The Texas Transit industry is a large, diverse group. This is our one opportunity to meet as an industry and discuss common goals and challenges we face."

This year marks the 25th year that the Friends of Texas Transit Award will be given. This award recognizes individuals for outstanding service in the development of transit in Texas.

"This award is very special because it is very hard to pick out just one person out of a group of people who work so hard," Vitek said.

An anonymous committee selects one person who has made a significant contribution to Texas transit in the last year for this annual recognition.

The conference also features a bus roadeo competition, very similar to TxDOT's own truck roadeo, in which bus drivers are tested on their skill behind the wheel, knowledge of safety regulations and knowledge of equipment. All roadeos are conducted

according to national guidelines. VIA/San Antonio will supply all of this year's vehicles for the competition. Category winners will then get the opportunity to compete at the national convention.

"We've been planning this conference since last summer," Vitek said. "One of our main goals focuses on bus drivers and the important role they play in the transit industry. They are on the front-line with the public we serve and we need to step back and appreciate them for all of their hard work."

In appreciation of bus drivers around the state, Six Flags Fiesta Texas donated use of its facilities and two meals for the bus roadeo. Competitors will also get discounted entry into the park.

The conference provides an avenue for representatives of all facets of public transportation to meet and exchange ideas on ways to support and promote public transportation across the state, organizers said. Various "breakout" sessions are scheduled on a variety of topics.

"I am always impressed at how we consistently improve the program content. The planning group focuses on timely issues and pulls in top-caliber speakers," Massey said.

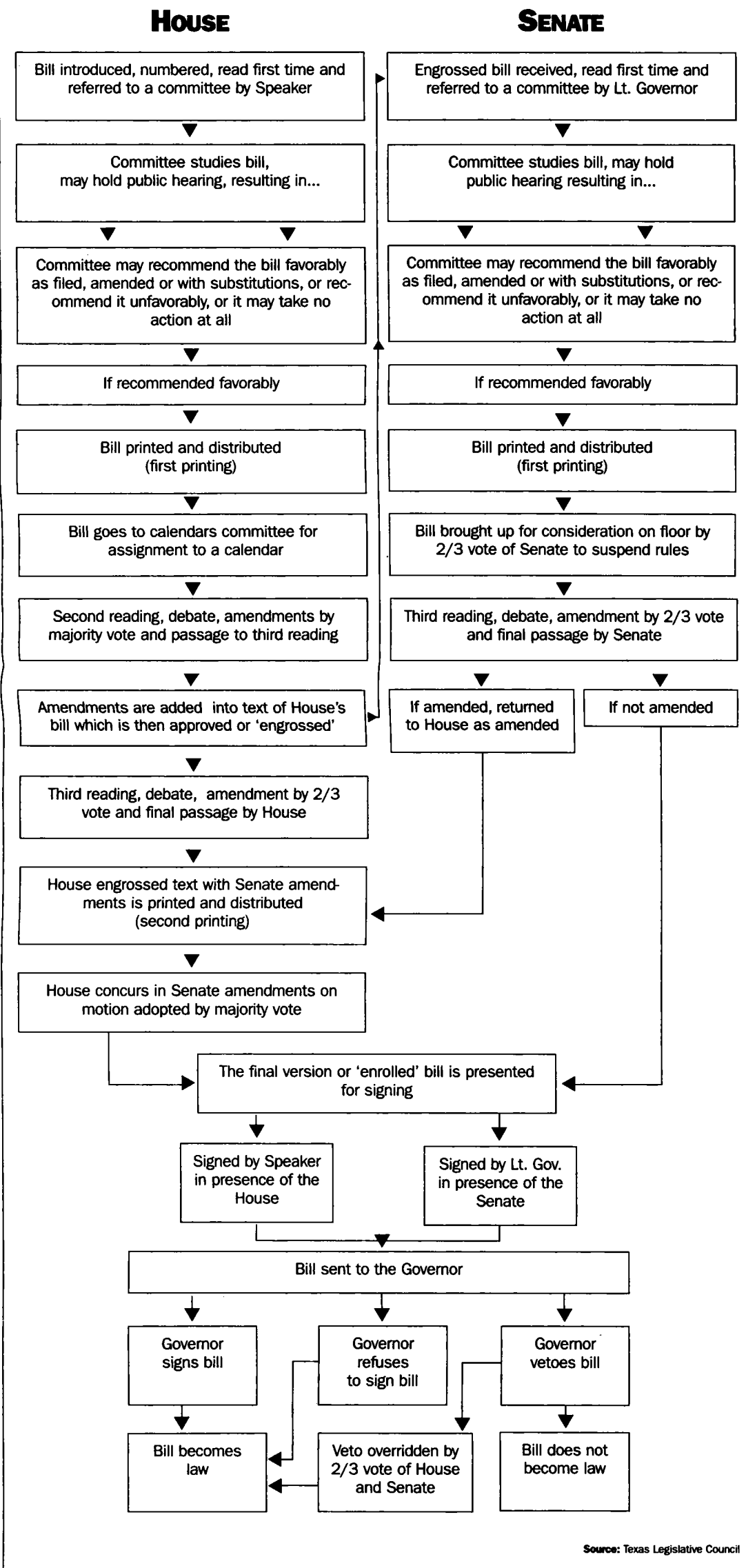
Sessions include ideas on finding new capital and stretching dollars allocated for public transportation, surviving the expected problems with the Y2K computer bug, technology beyond 2000, challenges in developing transportation, Texas mobility and professional development.

This is the second year the conference will have a Texas Bus Maintenance Forum for maintenance employees and supervisors. An on-site vehicle exhibit and vendor display will give conventioners the chance to inspect new vehicles and products and learn about new public transportation services and ideas. ★

TEXAS LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

basic steps

The diagram below displays the sequential flow of a bill from the time it is introduced in the House of Representatives to final passage and submission to the Governor. A bill introduced in the Senate would follow the same procedure, but in reverse.



Source: Texas Legislative Council

ETHICAL QUESTIONS

Let LAO cross the Great Divide

By Jennifer Soldano
Office of General Counsel

Suddenly parking near the Capitol goes from being difficult to impossible. The expressions of pedestrians crossing Congress Avenue now reflect terror or delight, depending on whether their bills are killed or passed, in addition to the usual vehicle-inspired fear. The Texas Legislature has arrived.

Some of us have a view of the 11th Street Great Divide that separates the Main Office from the Capitol. We remain safe and snug in our offices while the Legislative Affairs Office (LAO) employees and administration cross the Great Divide to gather and report information.

Those with an office view should not be seeing employees braving that crosswalk in order to attempt to influence legislation. Both the Government Code and a rider to the general appropriations act prohibit using appropriated funds to influence legislation. "Appropriated funds" includes funds that are paid to an employee while the employee is working on the clock for the department. In addition, even if an employee is off the state clock, he or she may not use official authority or influence to achieve a political purpose.

It is a criminal offense for an employee to disclose information acquired on the job to acquire or help another person acquire a pecuniary interest in any property, transaction, or enterprise affected by the information. It is also an offense to use such information to harm another. In both cases, the Government Code provides that a state employee is subject to immediate termination of employment.

The department is also prohibited from using appropriated money to attempt to influence the passage or defeat of a legislative measure. This does not mean that legislators cannot be provided information if they ask for it. The department may respond to such a request and provide public information. So what does an employee do when a legislator calls? Tell the legislator that you will have someone from LAO return the call. Be glad you can shift the legislator to LAO because you have other things to do. Besides, why would you want to risk having to cross the Great Divide? ★

Follow the bouncing bill...

You can track the progress of your favorite bill on-line by accessing the Texas Legislature's home page: <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us>

The easiest way to track a bill is by using the bill's legislative number. To find the number, use the search function in the left column of the home page. You can search for a bill using the subject, a key word, author name, etc. Your search should turn up a list of bills and their numbers. Find yours. Go back to the home page and use the search function to call up the bill by number. To do this, click on **By Number**; then type in the number in the field provided. Select **Actions** before you click **Submit**. The results should show the current status of the bill. **Note:** The progress of a proposal to increase salaries for state employees cannot be tracked over the Internet. It will be considered as part of the Appropriations Act passed in May.

Fast facts

WHAT'S AN IDEA WORTH?

TxDOT employees are idea people. So says the Texas Incentive and Productivity Commission, which has recognized the agency as one of three contributing ideas that save Texas taxpayers money. This distinction has put TxDOT in competition nationally with agencies in other states.

■ Most suggestions from an agency

Texas Workforce Commission

1,512 suggestions
204 approved
\$34,401 awarded

Texas Department of Criminal Justice

1,290 suggestions
76 approved
\$55,829 awarded

* Texas Department of Transportation

789 suggestions
30 approved
\$21,964 awarded

■ Most suggestions per suggester

Pete Bolsvert, Texas Workforce Commission

48 suggestions

* Carl Porath, TxDOT (Dallas District)

45 suggestions

■ Highest per agency dollars certified

Texas Workforce Commission

\$1,758,224

Texas Department of Criminal Justice

\$1,757,935

*TxDOT

\$1,073,619

■ Most suggestions approved per suggester

Pete Bolsvert, Texas Workforce Commission

7 suggestions

Blanche Elliot, Workforce Commission

5 suggestions

Donna Gerhart, Workforce Commission

5 suggestions

Stuart Greenfield, Workforce Commission

5 suggestions

Lorenzo Ochoa, Department of Health

5 suggestions

Source: Texas Incentive and Productivity Commission

ROAD WARRIORS

How big a problem is road rage? Between Jan. 1, 1990 and Sept. 1, 1996 the following national statistics were compiled:

■ **Number of incidents of road rage:** 10,037

■ **Number of road rage deaths:** 218

■ **Number of road rage injuries:** 12,610

■ **Number of times aggressive drivers have plowed their vehicles intentionally into crowds:** 22

■ **Standard weapons used in road rage cases:** guns, knives, clubs

Source: Chicago Tribune



Mary Beth Kilgore, ABL

Chili reception

Donny Smith, maintenance crew chief in the Abilene District's sign and centerline shop, stirs a pot of chili during the annual Chile Super Bowl Cook-off last fall in Buffalo Gap. All proceeds from the cook-off were contributed to the Ben Richey Boys Ranch in Abilene. Smith cooked 3,480 pounds of chili, dished out 5,568 servings and made \$15,000 for the boys ranch.

TxDOT engineers: childhood curiosity spurred career choice

By Chante Bergmann
Public Information Office

What would life be like without bridges, roadways or even gasoline to run your car?

At the heart of the Texas Department of Transportation there are more than 900 engineers who maintain, build and plan transportation systems.

During the week of Feb. 21-27 engineers around the United States took part in National Engineers Week. The goal of generating public interest in engineering was coupled with this year's theme, "Engineering: Turning Ideas into Reality." Engineers hope that by motivating children to excel in math and science, they will get a taste of engineering and develop an interest in the field.

As a child, M. Kim Soucek, engineering assistant in the Snyder area office, was curious about how things worked. "I wanted to understand how cars worked, how electricity was created and changed into a light that I could switch on and off, and what happened when people drilled for oil. From science, the need to figure things out for myself and to provide solutions that aren't immediately obvious led me to engineering."

Other engineers agreed their curious natures drew them to the field. Many received their first taste of engineering as children when they stopped to wonder how a bridge was designed or built.

"I have always been intrigued with roadway and bridge construction," said Chuck Steed, engineer assistant in the Childress design office. "I was amazed not only with the design of a particular structure, but also with the steps taken to construct it and the efficiency of which it operated when completed."

TxDOT engineers share a heightened interest in science and math as well as a strong desire to solve problems. "What

attracted me to the engineering profession was the opportunity to solve practical problems, not just evaluate them from a theoretical viewpoint," said Stan Hall, advanced project development engineer in the Dallas District. "The future of engineering is very bright, and the challenges engineers will face are exciting."

Following in the footsteps of her grandfather, father, three uncles and three brothers, Veronica Chanez of the El Paso District pursued an engineering career in Mexico. At the time engineering was not considered a feminine thing to do. She earned her civil engineering degree in 1990, only two years before the first woman area engineer was installed at TxDOT.

"I love the engineering field because it involves so many different areas—construction, design, the environment and more," Chanez said.

Engineers agree that one of the greatest benefits of the job is watching a project they worked on function as it was intended. Josephine Boado, engineer assistant in the Dallas District, is no stranger to that feeling. "The greatest satisfaction I get from working at TxDOT is being able to see the 'fruits of my labor' when I drive down a newly constructed highway or when I see a bridge deck being poured."

Finding the best way to move an item efficiently and safely is the key challenge engineers face. Most people don't even realize the hard work engineers put into designing the road they drive on everyday. "Transportation makes up a large part of our everyday lives, and is often taken for granted," said Chris Reed, engineer assistant in the Childress construction office. "Whether it is driving to and from work or taking a vacation with our families, facilities need to be accommodating and safe." ★



CST Director Thomas Bohuslav accepts the JTE division award from Wes Heald.



Odessa D. E. Jose Morales accepts the JTE team award from Wes Heald. Odessa also won an AASHTO award.



Wichita Falls D. E. Joe Nelson accepts an AASHTO award from Wes Heald.



ISD Director Judy Skeen, center, and VTR Director Jerry Dike, right, accept AASHTO awards from Wes Heald.

JOURNEY TOWARD EXCELLENCE

Quality takes a front seat at competition

A highlight of January's District Engineer/Division Director/Office Director meeting was the presentation of the department's annual quality awards for 1998.

In addition to TxDOT's Journey Toward Excellence Awards, this year's presentations included AASHTO Standing Committee on Quality Team Recognition Awards and WASHTO Support Fund Program Awards, which were earned by TxDOT employees.

Journey Toward Excellence Award

The Journey Toward Excellence (JTE) Award is the department's annual quality and continuous improvement award. Modeled after the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and other state and local awards, the JTE Award has honored employees each year since 1995 for their leadership, commitment to and active participation in the department's quality process. There are three JTE Award categories: District/Division/Office; Team; and Individual. A winner is not necessarily selected in each category, but more than one winner may be selected in each category.

Each January the executive director issues a call for applications from throughout the department. Each application reports exceptional group or individual achievement. Award application examiners are the key to selection of the most outstanding of these applications. Examiners are nominated by their district engineers, division directors and office directors each year. Examiners assess and score all applications and make award recommendations to the executive director.

■ District/Division/Office Award

The former Materials and Tests Division, sponsored by Katherine Holtz, was selected winner of the 1998 JTE Award in the District/Division/Office Category. Since the former Materials and Tests Division is now the Materials Section of the Construction Division, the award was presented to Thomas Bohuslav, Construction Division director.

The award application examiners' recommendation summary included the following comments:

"Materials and Tests Division (MAT) management articulates a commitment to quality which permeates the entire division, and its application of continuous improvement processes serves as a model for any

TxDOT'S AWARD-WINNING TEAMS

- **Odessa District Material/Stock Purchasing CI Issue team:** Adan Luna, sponsor; Lennerd Byrd, leader; members: Ray Harris, Shirley Lockey, Juan Velasco, Arnulfo Valdez, K.C. Evans, Phyllis Taylor, Phyllis Bates, Tammie Folger, Gay Brooks; Facilitators: Choc Phillips, Joe Robledo
- **Registration and Title Customer Response Team ISD team members:** Melissa Chumchal, facilitator; Jonathan Catron, Tom Orton, Lorie Ledesma-Ramirez, Lesley Gresham, Henry Holguin, Rick Vosney, Debbie Quay, Todd Pederson, Gilbert Kubicek, Steve Haskett, Caye Cox, David Flathmann, David Wigington, Kevin Dickson
- **Wichita Falls District Warehouse Stock Management Team:** John Barton, leader; team members: Sammie Askins, Red Brown, Robert Cates, Fred Hill, Jody McDaniel, Leona Morgan, Chanda Norman, Louis Smith, Bob Walker, Carole Mayo, facilitator

TxDOT office to emulate. The division is committed to excellence and is devoted to its customers, taking a proactive approach in meeting customer needs. Through continuous effort and proper employment of the continuous improvement process, they have eliminated deficiencies and stayed at the fore-front of technology. Materials and Tests Division won the 1997 TQI Partnering Excellence Award for Quality, took the lead nationally in development of QC/QA specifications and launched improvement projects as a result of customer feedback."

■ Team Award

The Odessa Materials/Stock Purchasing CI Issue Team, sponsored by Adan Luna, Odessa District director of administration, was selected winner of the 1998 JTE Team Category Award. The award was presented to Jose Morales, Odessa District Engineer.

According to the award examiners, this group provided an excellent example of the application of continuous improvement principles in the diagnosis, prescription and treatment of a systemic problem in a business operation. Recommendations made by the group and approved and implemented by the Odessa District have resulted in significant improvements in all areas of warehouse operations. The group's recommendations were also directly responsible for a \$206,000 reduction in materials on hand and for reducing district spending and purchasing volume overall.

■ Individual Award

No winners were selected in this category.

AASHTO Awards

The 1998 American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Standing Committee on Quality Team Recognition Awards were also pre-

son Cindy Gendron, Mary Sikes, Ted Wilson, Tom Heaton, David Bishop, Jay Edwards, Tommy Haydon, Glenn Laxson and Justine McGrady.

VTR team members: Johnny Manns, Carolyn Coverson, Rylene Hubbard, Vanessa Henderson, Mary Coffman, Lois Meredith, Dee Stripling, Laurie Pershin, Joan Minton, Tracy Papke, Valerie Jackson, Gloria Guerrero

Wichita Falls District Warehouse Stock Management Team: John Barton, leader; team members: Sammie Askins, Red Brown, Robert Cates, Fred Hill, Jody McDaniel, Leona Morgan, Chanda Norman, Louis Smith, Bob Walker, Carole Mayo, facilitator

sented. The AASHTO Standing Committee on Quality established a program in 1996 to recognize teams of transportation employees who represent the highest standards of quality, service and performance. The program also highlights high-performance teams that are worthy of being imitated because of the results they produce for their customers.

This recognition program includes three levels of achievement — Level I: Trailblazer; Level II: Pathfinder; and Level III: Exemplary Partner. Each level represents an increase in the skills, talents, enthusiasm and loyalty of those teams who go above and beyond the call of duty to improve the products and services of transportation departments across the nation.

Independent qualified examiners evaluate all applications and return written feedback to each applicant. Winners of the Exemplary Partner level are recognized at the annual AASHTO conference.

The Continuous Improvement Branch nominated all three 1998 JTE Team Category applicants for the AASHTO Team Recognition Award, and all three won the highest level, Level III Exemplary Partner Award. These awards were presented to TxDOT at the AASHTO annual conference in Boston in November. This is a significant achievement and recognizes TxDOT's most important asset — its employees, working together to improve processes and systems. Winners of the award were as follows:

Odessa District Materials/Stock Purchasing CI Issue Team: Recommendations made by this group and implemented by Odessa District resulted in significant improvements in all areas of warehouse operations.

VTR/ISD Registration and Title System Customer Response Team: This group, spon-

■ See QUALITY, Page 14

What makes TxDOT run?

The agency leads the nation in the use of vehicles powered by **ALTERNATIVE FUELS**

Story by
Linda Ribble

More than 8,000 Texas Department of Transportation employees promote cleaner air in Texas and build confidence in alternative fuel by driving the Texas Department of Transportation's fleet of 5,140 vehicles powered by propane and compressed natural gas.

Since the Alternative Fuel Vehicle Program began in 1991, TxDOT has converted gasoline-powered passenger cars, pickups, dump trucks and truck-mounted equipment to run on either compressed natural gas or propane. In doing so, TxDOT has increased the use of alternative fuels from 20,000 gallons in fiscal 1992 to 3.4 million gallons in fiscal 1998. Some districts use alternative fuels 80 percent of the time.

"Outside the federal program, we have the largest Alternative Fuel Vehicle Program in the world," said Don Lewis, the General Services Division's fleet manager. "We are nationally and internationally recognized as a leader in the industry."

TxDOT's use of alternative fuels began in 1990 when 13 fleet vehicles were converted in anticipation of a mandated from the state Legislature. At the time, about 6,000 of TxDOT's 9,400 vehicles were eligible for conversion.

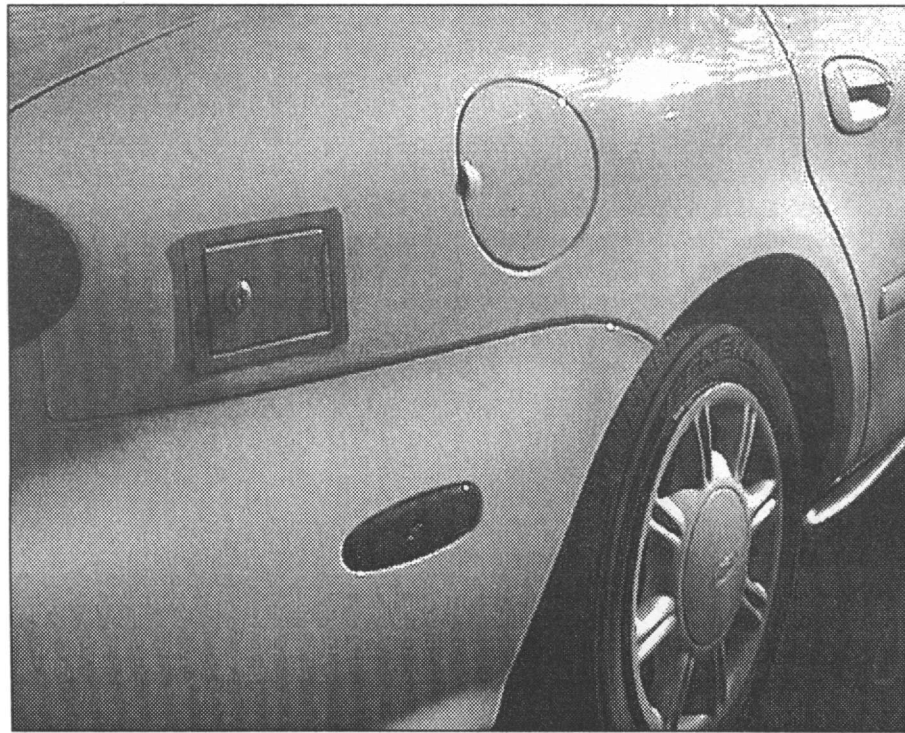
When public skepticism spawned doubts that alternative fuel-powered vehicles produce fewer emissions than gasoline-powered ones, TxDOT ran tests on emissions produced by converted fleet vehicles. Results prove the use of alternative fuels can reduce emissions. The same tests also identified two types of conversion kits among the vehicles as defective. The kits were replaced.

Only about 1,000 of the eligible vehicles remain unconverted because conversion kits are not available. The market is rapidly evolving to keep up increasingly stringent emission requirements.

"Technology is just not there yet to convert the remaining vehicles," said Glenn Hagler, GSD's equipment purchasing manager.

The use of propane and compressed natural gas boosts the state's economy by generating tax dollars. Fuel sources are readily available in Texas, so jobs are created and dependence on foreign oil is reduced, Lewis said.

TxDOT also earns Energy Policy Act (EPACT) credits issued by the U.S. Department of Energy for using alternative fuels. The credits may be used to meet require-



TxDOT operates a fleet of 5,000 vehicles that run not on gasoline, but on alternative fuels such as compressed natural gas and propane. Some districts use these cars 80 percent of the time.

Photo courtesy GSD

"Inside the burning vehicle, my first thought was 'This thing's gonna blow,'" Williams said. "But the tank was not the problem. I wasn't worried about the tank blowing up because of the impact. I've always

heard that it takes a pretty good hit to puncture the tank. My concern was the fire getting to the tank, causing it to blow."

Safety devices on an alternative-fuel system are designed to stop the flow of escaping fuel in case of ruptured lines. In this crash, however, a crimp in the fuel line prevented the safety device from being activated. The main shut-off valve on the propane tank was located beneath the rear of the vehicle.

Propane escaped onto the engine, where it ignited and burned. Although there was a fire under the hood, neither the gasoline nor propane tank ruptured, which is an often-stated fear of employees uneasy with operating vehicles powered by alternative fuels.

After the crash, Price, Williams and Wineland agree they have no fear of driving vehicles using alternative fuels. They received the department's Extra-Mile Award in 1996. The award is presented annually to employees for courageous action above and beyond the call of ordinary duty, and is reserved for heroic actions on behalf of the traveling public or fellow employees.

The Alternative Fuel Vehicle Program has come a long way in educating operators about alternative fuel systems. Lewis recalls one particular incident in the initial days of the program.

"An employee operating an AFV had only driven a short distance before the vehicle ran out of fuel and stopped. Instead of flipping the switch to use the other fuel line, the employee left the vehicle with the door open and keys in the ignition, walked a quarter of a mile, phoned in and said, 'Come get it!'"

Engineering Technician Bradley Eubank, of the San Antonio District's New Braunfels warehouse, has some good advice for operators of TxDOT alternative fuel vehicles. "Take pride in your vehicle and make sure all lines and connections are in good condition. That's something you should do every day to quell any fears of driving or fueling the vehicle."

For further information, contact Don Lewis at 512) 416-2085 or your district or division/office training coordinator. ★

The yellow-striped road leads to TxDOT

Returning Paris District employees discover there's no place like home

Dorothy Gale was right. Oz may glitter, but for some TxDOT veterans, there's no place like home.

Although some state employees are leaving the organization for higher salaries in the private sector, not all of them live happily ever after. For some, the yellow stripes lead back to the Texas Department of Transportation.

Two Paris District employees, Public Information Officer Audrey Andrews and Greenville Area Engineer John Yant, recently returned to TxDOT when they found their forays into the private sector less than satisfying.

"I can remember my last day as if it were yesterday. At a time when I should have been overjoyed at the thought of moving and beginning a new career, I found myself working exceptionally hard to make sure the district would be OK until a new PIO was hired, sobbing at my exit interview, moaning over leaving my extended TxDOT family, and completely overwhelmed at the thought of leaving on Friday and beginning a new job with a firm on Monday," Andrews said. "Sure, the money was great, but things like cost-of-living, sitting in traffic for hours, and kids who miss home, can make you think twice about a sudden move."

Yant, who became a consultant, found changes in his work life required some adjustment.

"I found that I missed working with the managers from TxDOT. I wore a lot of hats including writing proposals, being the project manager and other full-time responsibilities. I traveled a lot."

Andrews said she encountered few obstacles in her new job. Instead, she came to miss the challenges of her TxDOT position.

"My job changed from public information officer, where I was the mouth piece for the Paris District — dealing with the media, writing press releases, communicating with the public, facing adversity, deadlines, newsletters and demands — to a totally different side of public relations. Although I liked my job at the firm and I met some wonderful people, I found myself wanting



Andrews



Yant

more... and that was my daily involvement with people."

Andrews and Yant weren't the only ones forced to cope with a new environment. Their families also struggled with the transition.

Yant, the father of three, had a daughter still living at home. Lindsey Yant was a freshman at Paris High School and enjoyed school.

"Moving seemed like a good idea at first, but the (Dalls) metroplex schools are much bigger," he said. "We thought about pulling her out of school, but at that age, starting over didn't seem like a good idea. She makes good grades and she's the ideal young lady, why mess up a good thing?"

Andrews, a single parent, said her children were at first excited about the move.

"Funny thing about kids, they change. During the summer everything was great, but when school started and they got the real picture of the size of their school, all that fun... went out the window. When you go from a school district that has 3,400 kids to a district that has 64,000 kids, and the campus alone houses 3,400 students, that can make a big difference. The two younger children seemed to adjust, but for my 13-year-old, a smart, athletic, popular child, her identity went out the window. What a crisis! Here was a child that loved school, now she cries at night because morning comes and it's time to go to school."

Andrews began worrying about her chil-

dren while she was at work. Moving back to the Paris District seemed the logical solution.

"I had to put my priorities straight. A parable from Mom: 'If you gain all of the riches of the world, yet lose your kids to it, what have you gained?'"

Yant said he has never regretted returning to TxDOT.

"I have no regrets. I like to do different things. I like to explore. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but I treasure the experience."

Returning has reminded Yant of the value of his TxDOT job.

"It would take me a long time with a consultant to do the things I do right now for TxDOT. A consultant can't hold a candle to that. Although the money was good, it just wasn't what I wanted to do."

In returning to TxDOT, Andrews was reminded of the reason she wanted to work for the agency in the first place, she said.

"The funny thing about my situation is when I first began with TxDOT over a year ago, I polled a few of the employees asking them why they worked for the organization. Some of the reasons were the same, some different, but I did hear complaints about salary, the red tape, policies and so on. The bottom-line was that they'd spent 10, 20, and 30 years serving this organization. That says a lot."

Among the benefits of working for TxDOT are stability, integrity, "a family-first attitude, sharing of knowledge, friends and contacts you gain from the department," Andrews said.

"I've come to the conclusion that people develop their own reasons for staying. There are no formulas, and ultimately, money isn't a motivator," Andrews said. "Overall, I'd say it's because of the dedication to making a difference in our community, district, and state. It's like throwing a stone in the water, the ripples get bigger and bigger. The more each of us improve our transportation in our district, the better transportation system we have statewide." ★

Yoakum employee helps capture burglary suspect

By Pearlle Bushong
Yoakum District

Texas Department of Transportation employees are well known for their community involvement and aid to motorists in emergencies, and a Yoakum District employee did not hesitate to act when his assistance was needed to catch a burglary suspect.

Darren Florus, an engineering technician in the Yoakum District's La Grange area office, was inspecting a hot mix lay down operation inside Schulenburg's city limits when Schulenburg Police Officer Jason Strickland stopped to ask for his help.

Strickland knew he could count on Florus' help, knowing Florus serves on the city of Schulenburg's police force as a reserve officer in his spare time.

Strickland had spotted a suspected burglar, who had eluded the law for more than

six months, and he wanted Florus as a backup while he made the arrest.

As soon as the fugitive spotted the police car driven by Strickland, he took off running.

Florus took up the foot pursuit with Strickland and chased the man for almost a quarter of a mile. They saw the man running into an apartment complex where the fugitive's girlfriend reportedly lived. Strickland and Florus searched the girlfriend's apartment but could not find him.

Separating to search the whole complex, Florus found the fugitive hiding in the center of the complex and cornered him after he received a tip from a bystander. He held the fugitive there until law officers arrived to take the man into custody at gunpoint.

"Darren's quick actions helped us apprehend this man, who was wanted on two

felony warrants for burglary," Strickland said. "He is a great asset to your department and to our police force."

Schulenburg Chief of Police Lee Hoffman Jr. also praised Florus' part in apprehending the felon in a letter to Otto Kocian, TxDOT maintenance supervisor of Fayette County, and Larry Blazek, area engineer.

"In the five years I have been a reserve police officer, I have helped arrest four fugitives. A couple of the cases involved car chases instead of foot pursuit. Chasing a felon on foot quickly reminds me that I am out of shape for running long distances speedily," Florus said.

Florus, a 14-year veteran of TxDOT, added, "I enjoy police work because it is very challenging. I like patrolling the streets and helping to protect the public." ★

DOGGONE DILEMMA

Lubbock grapples with solution to save owls while containing the prairie dogs

By Penny Mason
Lubbock District

The world is going to the dogs — prairie dogs that is.

Just west of Seminole, hundreds of prairie dogs have taken up residence in a roadside park. These furry little critters dig dozens of burrows several feet deep and up to 50 feet long.

Once established, the colony continues to grow until the dogs have appropriated acres and acres of land. The little critters kill vegetation and chew up just about anything they can get their teeth into. So, when the Seminole Maintenance Section decided to spruce up the park and put in an irrigation system, they faced the problem of either eliminating or containing the prairie dogs.

Of course, the dogs can be contained. Many farmers in the area participate in federal and state prairie dog management programs. But with this particular colony, it's not the dogs that are such a problem, it's the burrowing owls.

"Supposedly, the owls occupy abandoned prairie dog burrows," said Matt Evans, dis-

trict environmental coordinator. "The owls are federally protected so if we put a program in place to contain and manage the prairie dogs, we've got to make sure we don't harm the owls."

TxDOT spent several days last month at the roadside park, digging up burrows to check for owls. Then they placed poison tablets in the burrows that weren't occupied by the birds. Another tactic was to build a visual barrier to keep the prairie dogs from spreading throughout the park.

"Our maintenance guys put up a rock wall across the park in hopes of containing the colony behind the wall," Evans said.

The program is going to take some work on the part of maintenance, Evans said, but TxDOT does have several options.

"We can attempt to eradicate all the prairie dogs in the park, or we can try to contain the dog population within proposed boundaries," he said. "Another option is to do nothing and abandon the park."

Other options include an integrated approach — attracting birds of prey that would control the prairie dogs naturally, or

creating an unsuitable habitat for the animals.

"Prairie dogs prefer flat, open terrain," Evans added. "If we grow some tall grasses or brush, it might encourage them to leave. They like a panoramic view of their surroundings."

Brownfield Area Engineer Jim Combes seems to think the landscaping might be the best solution.

"I'm working with Seminole Maintenance and the environmental people," Combes said. "We need to decide the best route based on resources and cost. And, it looks like the landscaping might be the best way to handle the situation."

Combes added that landscaping around the picnic tables — adding grass and rocks — should keep the dogs away from the area. But whatever is decided, the value of the rest area must be weighed against the cost of whatever program is put in place, Combes said.

If the world is going to the dogs, we might have to let them have it, he added. ★

Don't touch those birds!

Barn owls stall FTW billboard removal

By Jodi Hodges
Fort Worth District

Much to the surprise of Fort Worth District inspectors, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service notified them recently that a family of barn owls had made a home in a billboard scheduled to be removed this month from a project on Interstate 35W north of Fort Worth.

FWS Officer Steve Hamilton informed North Tarrant County Chief Inspector Richard Sessums that barn owls are protected by federal law, making it unlawful "for anyone to kill, capture, collect, possess, buy, sell, trade, ship, import or export any migratory/raptor bird, including feathers, parts, nests or eggs."

In other words: Don't touch those birds! The maximum fine for an individual han-

dling a barn owl is \$5,000 and up to six months in prison; for a corporation, the fine is \$10,000.

"I have to brag on Richard and TxDOT because they've been really great to work with us on this and make sure the sign isn't removed until these baby owls have feathers," Hamilton said.

Barn owls are protected because they do not reproduce in the wild as prolifically as many birds.

And, it is estimated that only one baby owl will survive life outside the nest because of the skill required to catch live food like field mice, Hamilton said.

At the moment, Champagne-Webber, Inc. is concentrating its work in other areas of



Larry Gilbreath, FTW

Federally protected barn owls nest in a billboard destined for demolition in the Fort Worth District.

the project so the removal of the sign is not delaying them. Sessums and Hamilton plan to give the babies through January to develop their feathers. If they do not have feathers by that time, Hamilton will enlist the help of a McKinney bird museum to relocate them. ★

Aggie license plate sales total \$1 million in scholarship funds

By Mike Vlesca
Vehicles, Titles and Registration

Aggies usually aren't shy when it comes to highlighting their accomplishments. And they certainly made no exceptions when their school recently reached a milestone in collegiate license plate sales.

Since June 1990, Texas motorists have bought and/or renewed more than 49,000 sets of Texas A&M license plates, raising \$1.2 million for the school's scholarship fund.

Texas A&M celebrated its million-dollar milestone in a big way. TxDOT Executive Director Wes Heald presented a ceremonial "check" to school officials in College Station. It was a sort of homecoming for Heald, who graduated from Texas A&M in 1959.

"The department is proud to be part of a

program that benefits higher education," Heald said. "There are currently 41 schools in the collegiate license plate program, and that adds up to a significant amount of financial assistance for many students out there."

The Texas Legislature created the collegiate license plate program in 1989. Lawmakers set the fee for these plates at \$30 annually in addition to the regular registration fee. Of that amount, \$25 goes to the participating school for its scholarship fund, while \$5 goes to TxDOT to administer the program.

Applications for Texas A&M license plates — and all other specialty plates — are available at the local county tax assessor-collector offices. It takes about two weeks to get

a set of collegiate plates from the time the application is received by TxDOT's Vehicle Titles and Registration Division (VTR). Personalized collegiate license plates are also available for \$70 (\$40 personalized fee + \$30 collegiate plate fee). A complete list of available specialty license plates can be seen on the department's Internet site at www.dot.state.tx.us (click on "Vehicles," then click on "Special Plates Listing").

VTR is responsible for vehicle registration and titling in Texas. The process collects more than \$700 million for the state's Highway Fund annually. There are approximately 16 million vehicles registered in Texas. ★

The Graves of Winfree

19th century physician holds key to mystery of unmarked sites in Beaumont District

(Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part series on two 19th century graves discovered in the FM 1409 right of way in the Beaumont District.)

By Marc Shepherd
Beaumont District

You don't have to try very hard to get Harry Daves to talk about Chambers County history. He'll tell you everything you want to know and then some.

For 50 years Daves has kept track of the happenings in this small, mostly rural county. He's especially interested in the recently unearthed graves found along Farm-to-Market Road 1409 in Winfree.

From a folder packed with maps, deeds, and other papers, Daves pulls out a photocopied picture of a rather young looking man. "People don't realize the impact he had on this area," Daves says, pointing to the photograph of Dr. John Carman. "He had quite a spread of land."

John Carman would be the key to the mystery of the two wooden coffins along FM 1409.

It was sometime in the early 1830s that Carman had enough of Tennessee. The West was the place to be. After loading up his belongings he moved to Louisiana where he met his wife-to-be. In 1844, the Carmans left Louisiana, moved to Jasper and eventually wound their way to Chambers County where they purchased 634 acres at the Old River in Winfree. Several years later that plot of land would become the site of a large cotton farm. That same property would also

become the burial ground of Carman's grandmother, wife, and three children. Carman later sold his property and moved around Texas until he died. He was buried in San Antonio.

Meanwhile, the family graves in Winfree fell into disrepair. The property changed hands several times and the farm was eventually replaced with a trailer park. Any clue that five people had been buried there would vanish, leaving only rumors and stories. Daves, however, worked hard at uncovering the history of the Carman family. His diligence has given TxDOT some insights as to who is buried in the small graves.

According to historical records, two of John Carman's children drowned while playing in the Old River. Mary Carman was only 4 years old when the river claimed her young life. John Robert Carman was only 6 years old when he drowned. A 7-month-old daughter, Martha, is also buried on the property. Because of the size of the recently discovered graves, TxDOT and Daves believe they've discovered the graves of two of the children. No one will ever know for sure. Even the latest technology can't give them the absolute answer. While the mystery as to who is buried in those graves is, for all practical purposes, solved, the question remains as to what to do with them.

"You just can't dig them up and start building a road," Paul Smith said shaking his head. "There are some very strict laws concerning gravesites." As the District Environmental Coordinator, Smith has to make sure all those legalities are followed. According to the law, the local cemetery association

and the surviving spouse or surviving children must be contacted. However, Smith says he's going the extra mile. "We contacted all the known descendants of the Carman family and those of his wife's family who are also buried there," Smith said.

It doesn't end there. A judge must issue a court order before any of the remains can be exhumed. An anthropologist must document the site and only a mortician can remove any of the remains. According to Smith, getting permission takes time. "The entire process takes several months. "We're working as fast as we can without breaking any laws," Smith said. Once the legalities have been completed, the remains must be reburied in another graveyard. Fortunately, Harry Daves has agreed to donate the property needed to bury the remains.

If you take a drive on FM 1409 from the south, you'll cross the tranquil waters of Old River. Pull over and enjoy the scenery. Read the historical marker near the river describing a part of Texas history. Think back to a time when life was a bit different. Look to the north and visualize a plantation home belonging to Dr. John Carman and his family. That home is gone. An army of huge oaks and pines has replaced the cotton fields that once blanketed the landscape. Stare at the east bank and try to picture the past. Then look at a small mound of dirt that's recently been turned over by a 'dozer. If you look real close you can see a cone marking the spot where two tiny graves have been discovered. The fate of those buried along FM 1409 now rests in the hands of the attorneys and the court system. ★

Ice makes winter storm treacherous

Amarillo District crews spend Super Bowl weekend on dangerous highways

By Tonya Dettten
Amarillo District

It was one time when TxDOT crews would have been glad to have seen just snow. But it was ice that first created problems on roadways in the Amarillo District over Super Bowl weekend.

A winter storm that blew through the Panhandle on Jan. 29 started out with a driving 40-mph wind carrying ice pellets as big as grape seeds. It didn't take long for ice to collect on trees, car windshields, and area highways.

"The snow drifts were 7 and 8 foot tall in some areas," said Joe Don Prather, Potter County maintenance supervisor. "And the ice underneath it ranged from 6 to 10 inches thick. It was a mess."

Several TxDOT maintenance crews worked around the clock from Thursday, Jan. 28 through Sunday, Jan. 31. By Saturday night, the National Guard was called out to help rescue stranded motorists. District Engineer Mark Tomlinson spent 17 hours at the DPS command center coordinating snow removal and road closures between TxDOT, DPS and the National Guard.

"The National Guard helped us block roads," Prather said. "I needed all of my employees on snow plows and motor graders. I couldn't afford to let them sit at a barricade all night. I even hired two contract motor graders to help. If it weren't for National Guard and Amarillo Emergency Services volunteers, we couldn't have kept traffic from breaking the barricades."

The National Guard used Humvees to take food, blankets and fuel to truckers stranded on Interstate 40.

"I was very surprised to see that we were still out there Sunday morning," said Kelli Navarrette, office manager. "The snow was melted on roads in town, but the rural areas were still snow packed and impassable. I answered much more complaint calls than usual because of it."

"Town driving was clear," Prather added. "But outside the city limits the difference was like daylight and dark. There was a strip of rural highway that received much heavier moisture — both ice and snow. We had to close the roads to prevent wrecks and to allow our plows to continue working."

I-40 and US 87/287 were both closed

from Friday evening to Sunday morning. The two highways are popular truck routes and truck stops throughout the Panhandle were filled to capacity. A mall parking lot on the west side of Amarillo was entirely full of trucks. By Sunday morning, traffic was lined up for five miles waiting for the highway to open.

The storm also knocked out power to three TxDOT maintenance offices for nearly four days. Snow removal crews worked with small generators to operate the phone system and the fuel pumps. Highway Condition Reports were called in to another office to be updated.

This winter storm was the first for Lezlie Stewart, who has worked for TxDOT for only three months. "It was really hard at first keeping up with the guys who were changing their snow plow blades. When the power went out, I lost everything but the radio, the phones and the fuel pump," Stewart said.

"I didn't have heat for part of the time, too so I was bundled up in a down coat and several layers of clothing." ★

Volunteer work heads list for retirees

There may be a few retirees wondering why I haven't gotten around to including their names in this column.

I have not forgotten you or lost your card. The response I received when this column began was so overwhelming, I just haven't gotten around to everyone yet. I am still writing about retirees who sent in cards and letters in May.

I ask for your patience and promise to include everyone who has written to me.

One of my biggest fears about including the information sent to me is that so much can change within this span of time. That is what I faced in preparing this month's column.

I received a card last May from **Isidore Kravcek** from the **Pharr District**. He wrote that a stroke has confined him to a nursing home. Isidore retired in 1980 after almost 29 years of service.



Helen Havelka

The Good Life

In checking with the district, I was informed that he passed away in December. I was fortunate to have received this information before the column ran. I am afraid I may not be so fortunate the next time.

Last May, I received a card from **William Ray**, who retired in 1970 from the **Childress District**. The 30-year veteran wrote that he was working in the yard, watching television and enjoying life with family and friends.

I checked on the 93-year-old former maintenance supervisor, and his wife tells me arthritis has slowed his pace in the past few months. Best wishes, William.

Neal Montgomery from the **Atlanta District** didn't exactly stop working when he retired in 1993. Neal went to work as a construction consultant at the Upshur County Airport. The 37-year department veteran also works at home and does a little fishing.

Travel was atop the activity list of two former **Houston District** employees — **Oliver Stork** and **Wade Reed**.

Oliver, a 1986 retiree, also enjoys gardening, photography and spending time with his grandchildren. He left the department with 39 years of service.

Wade, a 35-year veteran, can be found working at home and "taking it easy." He retired in 1987.

Heard from two 1979 **Childress District** retirees — **James Swarngen** and **Richard Sweek**. James, who retired with 35 years, stays busy in the yard and garden.

After 29 years with the department, Richard did a few odd jobs and spent some time traveling and fishing. Unfortunately, arthritis has curtailed many of his activities.

Six grandchildren topped **Georgia Horn-don's** list of activities keeping her retirement days filled. The **Atlanta District** retiree also enjoys traveling, playing tennis and volunteering at a nearby hospital. Georgia left TxDOT in 1997 with 25 years of service. "I'm



Maureen Jacobsen, a retiree from the Odessa District, has adopted a section of highway east of McCamey on U.S. 67.

having a ball!!!!" she wrote.

Ava Jane Fisher spends much of her time on the road. In addition to traveling, this 1993 retiree from the **Motor Vehicle Division** (now called **Vehicle Titles and Registration**), is on the state staff of the Texas Good Sams. When the 20-year veteran is at home, she volunteers with Hospice.

Received cards from **Charles Crudginton** and **John Hutt** from the **Brownwood District**. Charles and John retired in 1996 with 23 and 33 years, respectively. John still spends time working on his farm.

Martha Jane Duggan helped set up a library at the Plano Senior Center after retiring from **VTR** in 1994. In addition to her work at the center, she has found time to travel, including a Caribbean cruise. Martha worked in the examiners' office for 10 years.

Traveling is also what **Eddie Kohleffel** and **Melvin Coldewey** from the **San Antonio District** have been doing. Eddie and Melvin retired in 1987 with 32 and 29 years, respectively.

In addition to travel, Eddie works in his garden and at church, while Melvin is a nursing home volunteer and historian for the local V.F.W. post.

You might find **Maureen Jacobsen** along an **Odessa District** highway. This 1987 retiree and her grandchildren have adopted a section of highway as part of TxDOT's Adopt-a-Highway program. Lydia, who retired with 25 years, is also involved with Elderhostel programs.

Bettie Brown, who retired from **VTR** in Houston in 1993, is taking art lessons, volunteers at her church and takes care of her house and yard. After 18 years with TxDOT, Bettie is "fully enjoying retirement!"

Former **Dallas District** employee **Ina Tyler** has had a full plate of activities since retiring in 1985. She crochets, works in the yard and garden, and travels, making stops

in Rio De Janeiro and the Canadian Rockies. Ina retired with almost 17 years of service.

The time of year dictates where you will find **Herman Kelly** from the old **Travel and Information Division**. The former publisher of *Texas Highways* lives in Georgetown, but has a second home on the west coast of Canada.

Herman is the executive director of International Regional Magazine Association. He had 25 years of service when he left the department in 1995.

Albert Wicker also makes his home in Georgetown. Albert had 26 years with the department when he retired in 1991 from the **Occupational Safety Division**.

Retirement from TxDOT hasn't kept **Concepcion Fuentes** from working. The 1995 retiree has a janitorial service. Concepcion had 27 years of service when he left the **Odessa District**.

After 34 years with TxDOT, **Willard "Bud" Collier** from the **Beaumont District** hasn't slacked off. The 1993 retiree is building a log home on Toledo Bend Lake. He also explores the nearby national forest, bowls in two leagues and enjoys cooking and

baking.

Two employees from the **Automation Division** (now called **Information Systems Division**) dropped us a card. **Tommie Howell**, the former **division director**, retired in 1993 after 36 years. **Helen Horn** left that same year with 31 years of service.

After retiring in 1973 with 40 years of service, **Charles Baxter** from the **San Antonio District** continued working. He put in 25 years with the National Lime Association before calling it quits in 1997.

Like Charlie, **Amarillo District's Merlin Koch** could not call it quits. He is also working full time since retiring in 1993. Merlin had 28 years with the department.

"I had the best job in District 21," wrote 1976 retiree **V.F. Scribner**. He left the **Pharr District** with 27 years and now spends time fishing and with the family.

Eldon Chandler from the **Amarillo District** spends much of his retirement time traveling. The 27-year veteran can be seen driving his 33-foot travel trailer throughout the state. "We enjoy going lots of places," he wrote. Eldon retired in 1988.

In January, I had the opportunity to spend a few days with former state highway engineers/engineer-directors, **Luther DeBerry** and **Mark Goode**. Both are doing well. Luther lives in Lufkin, and Mark is in Dallas.

Also, want to extend our congratulations to former executive director **Bill Burnett**. Bill is now a grandfather. William Conner Burnett and parents are reportedly doing fine.

Bill is the director of project development for J.D. Abrams, Inc. in Austin. Don't spoil him too fast, Bill. ★

Helen Havelka is director of Organizational Publications in the Public Information Office.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Denton Area Office inspector's quick action saves ailing backhoe driver

By Michelle Releford
Dallas District

It looked kind of funny, the way the man seemed to be checking the tire on his backhoe as it bounced along at about 15 miles per hour on the Texas 114 construction site in Denton County.

Just before noon Jan. 12, inspector Joseph Clay of the Denton Area Office was driving his truck across the rough terrain toward the job shack when he noticed the odd scene. He could have let his rumbling stomach dictate the outcome of an event that had the potential to leave at least two contract employees dead or seriously injured.

Instead, in a split second, he realized the man wasn't looking at his tire; his head was actually bobbling along, bouncing off the backhoe's fender.

"I was looking at traffic and I saw a backhoe coming towards me and going a fairly good speed," he recalled.

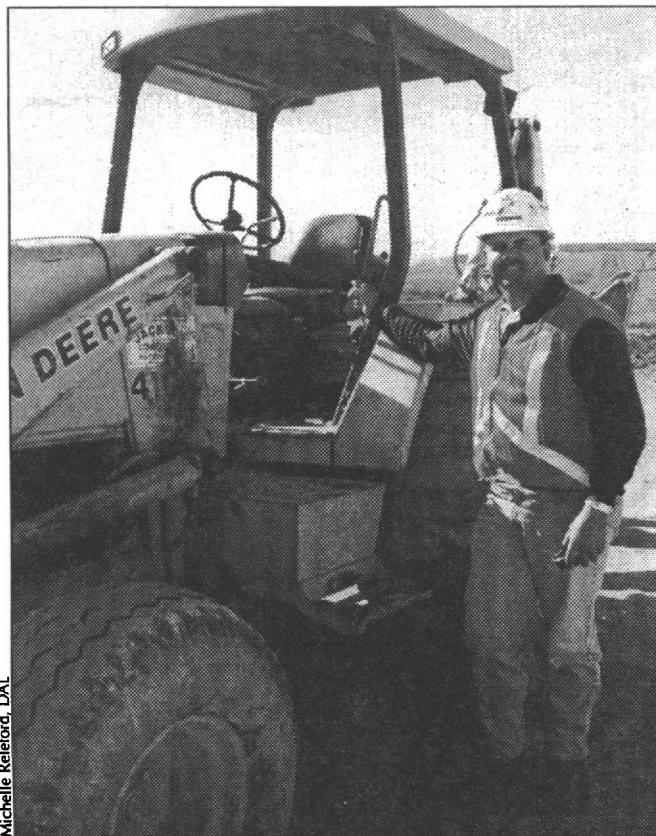
The backhoe was more than 20 feet away.

"The driver was slumped over on the wheel side and I looked again and he was shaking. He was going into traffic on U.S. 377 off the bypass."

The backhoe was driving on its own, carrying its unconscious driver toward the Texas 114/U.S. 377 intersection where unwitting motorists waited. Most importantly, on a collision course with the backhoe, was an 18-wheeler rumbling over a bridge at a blind angle and carrying a load of rock weighing more than 60,000 pounds.

For Clay, it must have been like watching one of those bad defensive driving movies in which the viewer's mind can easily jump ahead to a disastrous conclusion. Except for one significant factor, the intervention of Joe Clay.

"I jumped out of the pickup and caught



Joe Clay, inspector for the Denton County Area Office, saved a contractor who passed out while driving a backhoe on the job site. Clay was honored by the city of Roanoke for his actions.

up with the backhoe."

Slipping on the metal side steps the first time he tried to board the moving machinery, he recovered and leapt aboard with the driver, whose face had been lacerated by the metal wheel cover, painting it with blood.

Clay lifted the unconscious driver, whose elbow was on the throttle and leg was wedged under the brake, to change gears, diverting the backhoe away from the highway. He then had to pull the man's leg out from under the brake to stop the 15,000-pound piece of equipment.

Just before the backhoe diverted, the 18-wheeler topped the hill and only then the driver realized that if it had not been for

Clay, he'd surely have hit the backhoe. Clay directed nearby flaggers to stay with the driver while he left to find a cellular phone. Moments later, he relayed the story to Allan Dvorak, site foreman for the main contractor, Duin-inck Brothers Construction of Minnesota.

"He thought I was kidding at first," Clay said.

Dvorak sprung into action as well.

"I called 9-1-1 as I was driving over there. The operator asked me if I knew CPR and I told her no, and she said, 'I'll tell you how.'"

Just as Dvorak arrived on the scene, the backhoe driver, Billy Mac Williams, began to revive from his mysterious sleep.

"That's when I heard the ambulance. It was (Williams') first day on the job working for the subcontractor, Jackson Construction. Since it was his first day, I didn't know his name, and none of his co-workers knew his name," he said. Williams is still on the mend and it has been determined he suffered a reaction to a diabetic condition he had been unaware of until he passed out while on the job.

"We talk about things like this all the time in safety meetings. We are constantly saying, 'Be aware of what's going on around you,'" Dvorak said.

Even with safety instruction, anyone else might not have stopped. Clay realized something wasn't right and he followed through, Dvorak said.

"Like I told Joe and tell him all the time, there are not enough guys like you!" he said.

Texas 114 project manager David McBride of the Denton Area Office, agrees.

"I've been friends with Joe for years and he's always been that kind of person. He's always helping somebody," McBride said.

The city of Roanoke honored Clay by giving him a plaque for his quick and meritorious action during the incident. ★

Amarillo employee honored after saving motorist

By Tonya Detten
Amarillo District

Being a hero is just all in a day's work for TxDOT employees like Garry Cathey, assistant maintenance supervisor for the Amarillo Expressway maintenance office.

"It was something that anybody would have done," said Garry Cathey, modestly describing his actions on Nov. 19, 1998. "It was no big deal at the time."

But to the Amarillo Police Department, Cathey is a hero. Officers gave Cathey a certificate of appreciation recently for his "bravery and quick thinking" at the scene of a wreck in Amarillo.

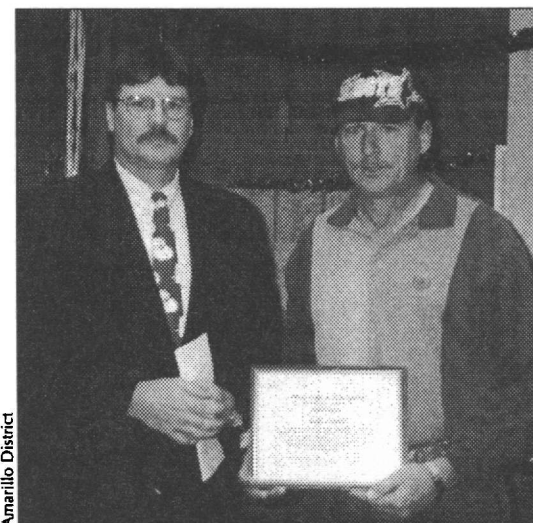
The accident occurred when a pickup truck collided with a passenger car on U.S. 60. Cathey was heading back to the TxDOT maintenance office when he came upon the wreck. The driver of the passenger car was walking around, but the driver of the pickup

truck was still inside his vehicle when the vehicle caught fire.

"Garry told me that when he looked in the pickup, the driver was conscious lying on the passenger side but not making any attempt to exit the vehicle," wrote APD investigator Cpl. L.R. Hernandez. "Garry helped Mr. Hoffman (the driver of the pickup) exit to safety before being burned. The pickup was fully engulfed in flames before the fire department arrived. Had Mr. Hoffman not been helped by Garry, who risked his own safety approaching a burning vehicle, he may have been seriously burned."

Cathey downplays his role in the incident.

"The fire wasn't that bad at first. I got him out, walked across the street and by then the pickup was engulfed in flames and exploded. It was something that anybody would have done." ★



Amarillo Police Department Officer L.R. Hernandez, left, presents Gary Cathey, assistant maintenance supervisor, with a certificate of appreciation. Cathey saved the life of a motorist after an accident.

Service Awards

Ablene District
30 years
 James C. Peters
5 years
 Ty W. Fraser
 John T. Matthies
 Wallace E. Rennels
 Steve M. Roth

Amarillo District
35 years
 Edgar L. Wood
20 years
 Lynne A. Jones
15 years
 Nick W. Durfey
 Bobby J. Pulliam
 Michael W. Taylor

Atlanta District
20 years
 Robert E. Lansdale
5 years
 Aubrey G. Hill
 Amy M. Russell
 Ellen R. Stafford

Austin District
15 years
 Janet Miley
 Gail M. Stenholm
10 years
 Everett W. Leggott Jr.
 Jacqueline A. Magill
5 years
 Christopher G. Vaughn

Beaumont District
30 years
 Pearl E. Walters
 Joseph P. Zachery
25 years
 Thurman A. Rector Jr.
20 years
 Ronnie E. Vanpett
10 years
 Roy A. Powell
5 years
 Diana L. Evans
 John D. Miguez

Brownwood District
20 years
 Tommy F. Treadaway
15 years
 John L. Whitney
10 years
 Richard L. Cook
 Bruce A. Stewart
5 years
 David E. Brooks
 Louis A. Coronado
 Thomas S. Greer

Bryan District
5 years
 Richard A. Canatella
 Randall C. Gronos
 Elton E. Haynes

Childress District
30 years
 Le Roy A. Thomas
20 years
 Kenneth D. Fowler
10 years
 Donna K. Garrison
 Kenneth J. Warren
5 years
 Jerry L. Allison
 Billy S. Elliott

Corpus Christi District
30 years
 John S. Arnold
 Tommy J. Solomon
15 years
 Robert E. Deleon
 Arturo Morin
10 years
 Edward Bernal
 Lester W. Caraway
 Larry E. Ditzenberger
 David R. Perez
5 years
 Carlos R. Carrillo
 Paula Ditzenberger
 Ignacio Guajardo Jr.
 James E. Jennings
 Martha J. Ondrej
 Brian D. Skinner
 David F. Woods Jr.

Dallas District
20 years
 John B. Dupre
10 years
 David R. McClung
5 years
 William R. Laird
 Roy A. Vargas
El Paso District

15 years
 Arturo Gutierrez
10 years
 Horacio Fernandez
5 years
 Gloria C. Carbajal
 Rebecca S. Puckett
 Ricardo Quintana

Fort Worth District
35 years
 Clifford C. Logan
30 years
 James R. Hall
15 years
 Deborah G. Bodiford
 James N. Whitehead
10 years
 Rex A. Frye
 Jack H. Hobson
5 years
 Willard L. Baker
 Gary D. McCoy
 Carlos Vasquez Jr.

Houston District
30 years
 Betty J. Mueller
25 years
 Burl E. Holmes
20 years
 Jose D. Corvalan
 Isaac P. Lucio
 Guillermo E. Tamez
15 years
 Lloyd E. Dumont Jr.
 Robert R. Flores
 Edgar Harris
 Alan K. Hohle
 Alfred L. Jones
 Janet E. Lamphier
 Charles P. McLachlan
 George R. Nichols
 Kelly J. Petru
10 years
 Olivia H. Brown
 Chad O. Burks
 Dwayne D. Gajewski
 Juanita L. Gilbert
 Leslie S. Howard
 Michael S. McCoy
 Matthew K. Nguyen
 Kenneth B. Paradowski
 John D. Sullivan
5 years
 Margie L. Edwards
 Eldon T. Hockensmith
 Debra D. Lee
 Esther C. Salinas
 Catherine E. Thompson

Laredo District
5 years
 Armando Bolanos
 Ricardo A. Garcia
 Elsa Guerra

Lufkin District
15 years
 Walter G. Fornea Jr.
5 years
 Clifford G. Bell
 Harvey E. Horace
 Richard S. Howell
 Johnny K. Johnson Jr.
 Timothy E. Shown

Lubbock District
20 years
 David W. Kinser
15 years
 Carlos Flores
 Tommy M. Stevens
10 years
 David L. Harper
 Kathy W. Manuel
 Regan T. McNeely

Odessa District
30 years
 Phyllis C. Bates
20 years
 Frances S. Tedford
15 years
 Ruben G. Molina
10 years
 James W. Burton
 Javier B. Guevara
 David L. Prather
5 years
 Anthony Bustos
 Jesus I. Garcia
 Jd T. Pickens

Paris District
35 years
 Jack R. Williams
25 years
 Tommie E. Cox
20 years
 Dan D. Bray
 Lenny G. Kanaday
15 years

Delbert L. Gann
 Roy Harper Jr.
 James E. Meals Jr.
 Billy R. Michael
10 years
 Jolita S. Norris
5 years
 Todd S. Prestien

Pharr District
30 years
 Harvey L. Heerssen
20 years
 Arnoldo Cortez
15 years
 Juan C. Ramirez
5 years
 Joel Garcia
 Maria I. Mata
 Eduardo Ramirez
 Filiberto Valderas Jr.
 Armando Zamarripa

San Angelo District
20 years
 Dennis W. Wilde
10 years
 Kyle M. Abbott
 Sara F. Gilbert
 Arthur D. Welborn
5 years
 Waylan L. Ensor

San Antonio District
30 years
 Alfred A. Fey Jr.
15 years
 Rickey L. Hanks
 Darren B. Marty
 John E. Spencer Jr.
10 years
 William A. Chancellor
 Victoria L. Lessing
5 years
 Walter J. Alexander
 Troy A. Magers
 Barrynn J. West Jr.

Tyler District
20 years
 Mary W. Kee
 Walter Roberson
15 years
 Wilford Easley
 Darlene M. Wheeler

Waco District
25 years
 Charles D. Snider
20 years
 William W. Walker
15 years
 David L. Bitner
 Kristi L. Kubitzka
 Charles D. Reasonover
5 years
 Roscoe G. Grow Jr.
 Gregory L. Jares
 Bradley J. Nors
 Billy H. Pendergrass
 Thomas E. Polansky

Wichita Falls District
30 years
 Clifford L. Bartram
 Sharon C. Robinson
5 years
 David Garcia
 Antonio F. Leal
 Jose M. Villastrigo

Yoakum District
40 years
 John J. Trojczak Jr.
30 years
 Clara L. Heintschel
 Billie J. Malatek
20 years
 Maxine C. Brugger
 Junius R. Johnson II
 Ruben A. Trevino
15 years
 Carlton L. Efrid

Audit Office
15 years
 Paula M. Howrey

Aviation Division
10 years
 John F. Greer
 Edie M. Stimach
5 years
 William B. Gunn
 Sheri D. Quinlan

Construction Division
20 years
 Teresa F. Cloud
15 years

Dawn E. Scheel
10 years
 Marcus J. Galvan
 Robert L. Sarcinella
5 years
 Janice M. Thomas

Design Division
15 years
 Adelmira S. Garcia
 Joann K. Vanburkleo
10 years
 Elton L. Brown Jr.
5 years
 David M. Blume
 Susan A. Miller
 Stephanie E. Williams

Finance Division
20 years
 Barbara L. Gittinger

General Services Division
15 years
 Curtis W. Reinert
 Craig S. Mason
5 years
 Samuel J. Reyes

Human Resources Division
5 years
 Connie L. Hofmann

Information Systems Division
25 years
 Lee D. Formby
 Charles H. Parr
15 years
 Paula H. Nichols
 Bennie C. Pridgon
10 years
 Madjid Benchouia
5 years
 Debbi K. Cooke
 Michael W. Hyde

International Relations Office
5 years
 Henry Nevares Jr.

Motor Carrier Division
25 years
 Joe B. Barnard
10 years
 Rebecca J. Brite

Right of Way Division
10 years
 Kerry K. Fulton
 John F. Reed

Transportation Planning and Programming Division
25 years
 William D. Shaffer
15 years
 Elizabeth M. Moreno
5 years
 David A. Messineo
 Robert E. Wellauer

Traffic Operations Division
15 years
 Karen S. Gibson
10 years
 Robert E. Small
5 years
 Steven J. Valdez

Travel Division
15 years
 John C. Lowry
 Tonji B. Rudd
10 years
 Jan M. Autry
5 years
 Nola P. McKey
 Brenda A. Mowm
 Jose X. Paz

Vehicle Titles and Registration Division
15 years
 Diana B. Caskey
10 years
 Frances M. Dehaven
5 years
 Susan F. Sampson
 Robert W. Tanner

In Memoriam

Employees

Ablene District
 Joe C. Morgan, Maintenance Technician II, retired in 1972, died Nov. 20, 1998

Amarillo District
 Rex E. Chitwood, Engineer III, retired in 1987, died Nov. 1, 1998

Austin District
 Clyde J. Davis, Maintenance Construction Supervisor II, retired in 1971, died Oct. 26, 1998

Erven Heiligmann, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1990, died Nov. 18, 1998

Noel E. Massey, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1976, died Oct. 12, 1998

Beaumont District
 John H. Cook, Jr., Maintenance Technician II, retired in 1983, died Nov. 2, 1998

Bryan District
 Marshall E. Schroeder, Roadway Maintenance Supervisor III, retired in 1992, died Dec. 22, 1998

Childress District
 Curtis L. Kidwell, Maintenance Construction Supervisor II, retired in 1972, died Oct. 15, 1998

Dallas District
 Mildred L. Fuchs, Administrative Technician I, retired in 1994, died Nov. 10, 1998

Fort Worth District
 William D. Roy, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1975, died Sept. 30, 1998

Houston District
 Wendon E. Bell, Engineer IV, retired

in 1984, died Sept. 30, 1998
 Raymond Ramirez, Motor Vehicle Mechanic II, retired in 1998, died Oct. 6, 1998

Walter W. Rothen, Engineering Technician V, retired in 1987, died Sept. 19, 1998

Lubbock District
 Clelia P. Coker, Clerical Supervisor IV, retired in 1985, died Nov. 14, 1998

Lufkin District
 Randy G. Pierce, Engineering Technician III, retired in 1998, died Sept. 12, 1998

San Angelo District
 Herman H. McQueen, Engineering Technician IV, retired in 1975, died Nov. 26, 1998

San Antonio District
 Edwin J. Bednarz, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1975, died Nov. 8, 1998

Frank Y. Hernandez, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1991, died Nov. 3, 1998

James E. Lewis, Machinist II, retired in 1991, died Nov. 29, 1998

Yoakum District
 Robert Schroeder, Maintenance Technician III, retired in 1982, died Dec. 27, 1998

Materials & Tests Division
 Dora P. Olson, Clerical Supervisor II, retired in 1968, died Sept. 30, 1998

Traffic Operations Division
 Thaddeus Bynum, Engineer IV, retired in 1989, died Nov. 23, 1998

Vehicle Titles & Registration
 Virginia S. Goerdel, Record Control Clerk II, retired in 1984, died Nov. 2, 1998

QUALITY

Continued from Page 7

sored jointly by Vehicle Titles and Registration Division (VTR) Director Jerry Dike and Information Systems Division (ISD) Director Judy Skeen, provided process improvement recommendations resulting in significant quality upgrades for the Registration and Title System (RTS) users.

The RTS supports all the car owners of Texas and the numerous automotive sales dealerships through more than 450 sites across the state operated by 254 county tax assessor-collectors and the 17 VTR regional offices.

Wichita Falls District Warehouse Stock Management Team: This group, sponsored by former Wichita Falls District Engineer David Peoples Jr., made three major policy change recommendations which, when implemented, significantly improved district warehouse operations and resulted in increased customer satisfaction, time savings and decreased costs.

When the project was initiated, WFS district was meeting only one of the seven inventory management goals established by the General Services Division. Since the group's recommendations have been implemented all seven goals are routinely met or exceeded. Joe Nelson is the current District Engineer.

WASHTO Quality Support Fund Program

This program was adopted by the Western Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (WASHTO) Policy Committee in November 1997. Under this program each state with a qualified Quality program is eligible for cash awards to support the existing quality program or to start a new program based on the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award criteria or another acceptable process.

Since TxDOT's Journey Toward Excellence Quality Award program meets the eligibility criteria for the WASHTO Quality Support Fund Program, the department nominated the members of the Odessa Materials/Stock Purchasing Team for this award.

At the January DE/DD/OD meeting, Jose Morales, Odessa District Engineer, was presented WASHTO checks in the amount of \$200 to take home to each of the 12 TxDOT employees who made up the group. ★

Letters of recognition

I wanted to thank one of your employees, **Ricky Williams**, for his kind assistance on a recent Monday morning.

My friend Kerri and I were driving from Arizona to Houston, pulling a U-haul trailer when we had a blow-out on one of the trailer tires. Luckily, we had a cellular phone, and we were able to call U-haul Roadside Assistance in Ozona. While waiting for the repairman, we — two women alone on the highway in the middle of nowhere — were passed by two police vehicles that did not stop to check on us. Fortunately, Williams stopped and offered his assistance. Although he could not make the necessary repairs, he offered to wait with us until the roadside assistance people arrived. They finally arrived one hour after Williams stopped. Williams made sure that the repairs were done correctly, that all of the other tires on both the trailer and truck were secure, and made sure we were safely back on our way.

Williams was very polite and is an excellent example of a gentleman. I commend you on your choice of employee in the position he holds. Additionally, my husband, a native of San Angelo, thanks Williams for ensuring our safety!

**Sarah Courtemanche
Spring**

Ricky Williams is assistant district maintenance manager in the San Angelo District.

Steve Graham, Mitchell County maintenance supervisor in the Abilene District, received the following letter:

I would like to extend my thanks to you for participating in the "Summer Jobs for Youth" program last summer. I appreciate your help in providing work for students from Mitchell County. Through this community endeavor, you have provided much needed training and discipline that will last a lifetime.

This is an investment in the future of our community that is well worth the expense.

**Robert Junell
State Representative, District 72**

I just wanted to write and let you know that your department helped us out of what could have been a hazardous situation.

There was an accident on Texas 271 just south of Gilmer on Dec. 10. It was raining and visibility was poor. There was a 1997 Chevy truck off in the ditch. Because of all the rain we were not able to get our wreckers off the road and there was not enough shoulder for our wreckers to stay on the pavement. We had to block one lane of traffic in order to get the vehicle out. We contacted the sheriff's department, but they were unable to assist us at the time. We contacted your office in Gilmer and they provided us with prompt and efficient service.

We want to send a special thanks to **William C. Culberson, Kevin Ward, David Hagler and Joel Middleton**. Their assistance in this matter made the work much safer for our employees.

**Harold Kennington
Mount Pleasant**

Clifford Culberson is assistant maintenance section supervisor; Kevin Ward is a transportation maintenance technician; Joel Middleton is no longer a TxDOT employee; and David Hagler is a transportation main-

tenance technician.

My husband and I just want to thank the two employees in your department, **Gabriel Castro** and **Roy Hernandez** for their willingness to rescue us while we were in desperate straits on Interstate 20 on Dec. 11. We had a flat tire and the snow was flexing its muscle.

Castro and Hernandez helped us change our tire and directed us to Monahans to replace the flat one. The most touching part was their refusal to accept our offer of money to show our gratitude. They told us they could not accept money because they work for the state of Texas. They are the true Texans and true Americans.

**Cecilia Leonard
Carlsbad, Calif.**

Gabriel Castro and Roy Hernandez are maintenance technicians in the Odessa District's Monahans Maintenance Section.

I was in need of assistance from the TxDOT Courtesy Patrol recently on Highway 820 south bound near the Sun Valley exit. I had flagged down a patrol car after running out of gas in my husband's truck (I am spoiled because my car has a light that lights up when fuel is low, the truck doesn't!). Within 20 minutes the courtesy patrol driver and assistant were there. They gave me two gallons of gas and I was on my way. I had been praying for help to arrive and my prayers were answered! They were courteous, professional and friendly, and it really helped me to feel at ease (it was in a bad part of town). Hats off to **M. Smith** (driver) and **P. Worlow III** (assistant) for their help. "Ask and ye shall receive."

**Wanda Sessums
Mansfield**

Marvin Smith and Paul Worlow III are members of the Fort Worth District Courtesy Patrol.

On Oct. 21, 1998, our Courtesy Patrol truck, with **Gloria Carbajal** and **Joe Pina**, was headed west on Interstate 10 at Viscount. They spotted a stranded, eastbound motorist out of gas and sitting by the median. They quickly pulled over, got out of the truck, jumped over the barrier to help the motorist and found more than what they anticipated. A screeching cry for help came from underneath the barrier. A tiny, blue-eyed Seal Point kitten came out to meet them. He was very friendly but, with bruises on the face, an open wound on the side, and extremely dehydration, showed obvious signs of being tossed from a passing car. The motorist quickly pulled a box out of his car for the kitty while the Courtesy Patrol added gas to the tank of his automobile.

Gloria and Joe lost no time; they went to the store for some cat food and delivered the kitten to those who wanted to care for the kitten. Thanks to our Courtesy Patrol, "Freeway" the kitten is resting in a new home.

**Patty Welty
El Paso District**

I would like to take the time to say thank the **Abilene District** for its hard work and support each year in our endeavor to make a bigger and better display for our audience. We are growing and hope that we can

depend on you next year to be a part of our "gift to the community." I know that the Christmas season is a hard time to make extra commitments, but you put a twinkle in the eyes of many children as they passed through the wonderful Christmas Lane this year.

The district's interest in Abilene State School and the courtesy and cooperation you have extended is sincerely appreciated.

**Nina Truitt
Director of Volunteer Programs
Abilene State School**

The Abilene District has provided an outdoor display for the Abilene State School's Christmas Lane for the past five years.

I am writing this letter of thanks regarding a TxDOT employee in your section. His name is **Leonardo Villarreal**. On Thursday, Jan. 28, at about 7:15 a.m., I had a flat under the bridge at Mathis at U.S. 137. Immediately, a TxDOT pickup pulled up by me and Villarreal proceeded to render aid. He would not even let me assist, but proceeded to change the tire for me, with efficiency and speed.

I am very grateful for his kindness and helpfulness and hope you will be able to forward my appreciation to him. It is extremely reassuring to know that TxDOT employees are trained, experienced, and willing to help stranded motorists like myself.

**H.L. 'Sarge' Eisel
Beeville**

Leonardo Villarreal is crew chief with Sinton Maintenance Office in the Corpus Christi District.

I have just retired from being county judge of Childress County and would like to express my appreciation to you, your employees and especially Ernie Lucero for being such a "good neighbor" to our county government. Ernie is a person I really enjoyed; he relates to people very well and represents his department in a business-like manner. I feel he knows his position and does his job in a professional manner.

I enjoyed my association with all of the TxDOT employees, for I found all of them to be courteous and helpful.

**Dean Decker
Childress**

Ernie Lucero is the Childress County maintenance supervisor in the Childress District.

While traveling south on Interstate 45 on Dec. 21, 1998, I incurred a flat tire on my travel trailer. Two of your roadside clean-up men stopped to assist me in changing the wheel. They were most helpful and appreciated.

I don't know their names, but it was on I-45 at mile post 233 and in the morning of that day. Their vehicle number was 184539F.

I wish to give them both a huge "atta boy" for their efforts.

**Orv Dunlap
Garland**

Carl D. Fuller and Earnest Betts are maintenance technicians in the Navarro County Maintenance Office of the Dallas District.

Retirements

September

Atlanta District

James P. Voight, Transportation Maintenance Technician II, 10 years

November

Austin District

James W. Sacratini, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor IV, 15 years

Dallas District

Lewis Davenport, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor V, 29 years

Floyd W. Ervin, Engineering Technician III, 19 years

Bobby J. Rachel, Sr., Engineering Technician IV, 13 years

Fort Worth District

George L. Thomas, Engineer V, 6 years

Lubbock District

Jerry D. Chancellor, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor V, 31 years

San Angelo District

James S. Dutton, Engineering Technician III, 17 years

San Antonio District

William A. Geigenmiller, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor I, 32 years

Transportation Planning & Programming Division

Shirley F. Gattis, Engineering Technician IV, 26 years

December

Brownwood District

Randall Henderson, Purchaser I, 27 years

Bryan District

Billy J. Easterling, Engineering Technician III, 35 years

Dallas District

Patrick M. Ellis, Director III, 24 years
Kenneth R. Hawkins, Engineering Technician IV, 42 years

Fred Richards, Jr., Engineering Technician V, 35 years

Michael D. Stroud, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor III, 30 years

El Paso District

James A. Major, Right of Way Agent IV, 10 years

Fort Worth District

Harold Wayne Gilbreath, Electric/Air Cond. Mechanic III, 21 years

"Smokey" Phillips, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor V, 32 years

Carole H. Shea, Human Resources Management Director II, 32 years

Houston District

Karl Kiencke, Engineering Technician V, 32 years

Catherine Thompson, Administrative Technician III, 5 years

James C. Wolf, Maintenance Mechanic IV, 22 years

Lubbock District

R. L. Burnett, Transportation Maintenance Technician IV, 26 years

Leonardo Castillo, Engineering Technician III, 25 years

Edward Canady, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor I, 22 years

Maxie McElroy, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor II, 37 years

Pharr District

Harvey L. Heerssen, Appraiser V, 30 years

Martin Jackson, Motor Vehicle Mechanic III, 19 years

San Antonio District
Kenneth D. Turner, Engineering Technician IV, 43 years

Vehicle Titles & Registration Division
Ann N. Harper, Investigator II, 17 years

January

Amarillo District

Jack D. Carter, Program Administrator IV, 30 years

Austin District

Joe R. Alexander, III, Engineering Specialist III, 32 years

John R. Zakleski, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor IV, 42 years

Beaumont District

James D. Vaughn, Engineering Technician III, 32 years

El Paso District

Samuel J. Hooper, Purchaser I, 20 years

Pharr District

Herlinda "Linda" Dominguez, Administrative Technician III, 30 years

Wichita Falls District

Ermon C. Moore, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor IV, 26 years

Yoakum District

Oliver J. Weishuhn, Transportation Maintenance Supervisor IV, 31 years

Construction Division

Jerry Meyers, Program Administrator IV, 34 years

Dereck J. Norwood, Program Administrator V, 29 years

Maintenance Division

Roy L. Smith, Program Administrator V, 29 years

Motor Vehicle Division

Edward John Sheridan, Jr., Investigator III, 27 years

Right of Way Division

Betty F. Daughtry, Secretary IV, 16 years

Vehicle Titles & Registration Division

Clifford Pate, Program Administrator II, 34 years

CLAYTON

Continued from Page 3

"Other employees take note of the accomplishments of their fellow workers and are inspired to do likewise," he said. "I really believe the recognition helps reduce accidents and injuries."

In November of this year, the "good new days" will actually become the "good old days" for Tommy Clayton; he's going to retire.

"I will have spent 42 years in safety," he said, "so I think it's time to take a break."

I realize if you're doing the arithmetic, you've figured out that Clayton has worked for TxDOT for 29 years. But before coming here, he worked for 13 years at Thiokol Corporation, a munitions company that produced the Nike and Pershing missiles.

"I got a job in production to pay for college," he said, smiling ruefully, "but then I bought a car, and you know how familiar this sounds, I suddenly couldn't afford to quit working."

The plant's safety officer took a liking to Clayton and asked him to transfer to his section.

"I knew at first I would lose some seniority, but the safety job was a management position," he said, "so I talked it over with my wife and we saw it as the opportunity of a lifetime."

Deadline for application to Master's Program is in May

The deadline to apply to the TxDOT Master's Program for fall 1999 is the last day of May. The deadline for applications to be accepted for Spring 2000 is the last day of September 1999.

The Master's Program allows department employees to conduct research in an approved subject. Program employees attend school full time. An employee must

The career change exposed Clayton to excellent safety training at the federal level, and if fate hadn't taken a hand, TxDOT probably never would have benefited from all that expertise.

"The company was planning a reduction in force and wanted to transfer me to Pennsylvania," he said, "but I sure didn't want to leave Texas." As fortune would have it, the Atlanta District safety position opened right about that time and the rest is history.

Although he doesn't have any firm plans on how he's going to spend his retirement, Clayton suspects he and his wife, Faye, of 38 years, will finally have time to do some things they've put off.

"We used to play a lot of golf," he said, "particularly in couples tournaments. Maybe when she retires from the bank, we'll do that again."

Or he might take her on a cruise first, he thought. And he's definitely looking forward to being able to get after all the yard work he never had time for, and maybe he'll start back on his exercise program.

He'll also be busy seeing more of his daughter, Wanda, a school teacher who lives in Lewisville with her husband. His mother, who lives in Atlanta, will get to see Clayton even more.

We'll all miss the considerable talents of Tommy Clayton, but I guess safety coordinators will have some "good old days" stories about him to tell when they gather for

have four years with the department to apply in engineering. For other degrees, an employee must have five years.

For an application, send a GroupWise to Marilyn Dell. Type GET MASTER in the subject line and send. The form will be sent to you automatically. For info, call Dell, 512-483-3628. ★

Calendar

MARCH

- 2** Texas Independence Day (holiday)
- 3-5** CPPB/CPPO Review/Exam, Austin, GSD
- 9** Board of Directors Meeting, Austin, TTA
- 16-17** 1999 Construction Conference, Austin, CST
- 17-19** Intermediate Public Purchasing, Houston, GSD
- 23-24** GEOPAK Drainage Training, Lubbock, DES
- 25** Commission Meeting, Austin
- 25-26** GEOPAK Drainage Training, Lubbock, DES
- 29-4/1** DPE & PMIS Coordinators Meeting/LTPP Meeting, Austin, DES

APRIL

- 4/1** DPE & PMIS Coordinators Meeting/LTPP Meeting, Austin, DES
- 7-9** Texas Aviation Conference, Austin, AVN
- 10** Don't Mess with Texas Trash-Off, statewide, TRV
- 13-14** 1999 Maintenance Conference, Waco, MNT
- 14-16** Competitive Sealed Proposals/Competitive Negotiations, Houston, GSD
- 14-16** General Public Purchasing, Austin, GSD
- 21** San Jacinto Day (holiday)
- 24-28** Texas Public Transportation Conference & Rodeo Competition, San Antonio, PTN
- 27-28** GEOPAK Drainage Training, Lubbock, DES
- 29-30** GEOPAK Drainage Training, Lubbock, DES
- 29** Commission Meeting, Austin

MAY

- 5** Board of Directors Meeting, Austin, TTA
- 5-7** Intermediate Public Purchasing, Austin, GSD
- 13-15** CPPB/CPPO Review/Exam, Houston, GSD
- 20-21** Contract Administration, San Antonio, GSD
- 27** Commission Meeting, Austin
- 31** Memorial Day (holiday)

JUNE

- 8-11** 15th Annual TxDOT Internal Audit Conference, Austin, AUD
- 16** How to Process and Evaluate Bids, San Antonio, GSD
- 16** Specification Writing, San Antonio, GSD
- 22-24** Traffic Safety Strategic Planning Meeting, Austin, TRF
- 23-25** General Public Purchasing, Lewisville, GSD

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