Workers build the Interstate 20 bridge over East Loop 250 in Midland County.
Hello to everyone. It’s been awhile since our last News at Six edition since the departure of Glen Larum. I would like to personally welcome our new PIO, Gene, and I believe he will make a great addition to the Odessa District. Be sure to give him a warm welcome to TxDOT.

Here we are in the middle of winter, according to the calendar, and every day brings something new in the forecast. West Texas is truly living up to the old adage, “If you don’t like the weather now, wait a day.” In the first week of February we experienced a beautiful Monday with 74 degree temperatures followed by Tuesday’s high of 15 degrees. Wow, what a change! It makes you just want to stay inside and try to keep warm.

The very frigid weather required our field personnel to work even during days when the extreme cold brought the oilfield to a standstill. Not only did the Panhandle and West Texas get bad weather, but the entire state saw cold temperatures with snow and ice, especially in the Metroplex during what could only be described as one of the most visible events in America – the Super Bowl.

Of course, the game went on without a hitch (unless you’re a Steelers fan 😊), proving once again that TxDOT was up to the task of responding in an emergency situation. More than half of the 25 districts in the state shifted forces, equipment and materials to the Metroplex and other hard hit districts in an effort to respond to the winter road conditions. It was just another example of how this department will come together and help each other out with pride and without questions – a prime example of what our Administration has coined “OneDOT.”

I want to thank you all for the hard work during these exhausting winter events and for providing our citizens with the safest possible road conditions.

GREAT WORK!
Continue the hard work and as always, Drive Safely.

Give a little

Jack Lambert shows off a cow-shaped squeeze toy he was using to pump up while giving blood at the Jan. 13 blood drive at the Odessa office. A total of 13 units of blood were given at the drive. The next drive is scheduled the afternoon of Thursday, May 19. If you want to know more about donating blood, you can get online at home and go to www.unitedbloodservices.org.
It’s the People

Service Awards

Name.........................................Month .........................Time Served

November
Adam Arredondo .....................Midland ............................10 years
James McCormack Jr. ...........Monahans..........................10 years

December
Alfonso Hernandez Jr. .............Fort Stockton ..................25 years
Jesus Matta ............................Balmorhea .........................20 years
Oscar Dominguez .................Fort Stockton .....................15 years

January
Ramón V. Rodríguez .................Odessa ............................20 years
Manuel Ortiz ..........................Iraan ................................15 years
Hector H. Tarango .................Pecos ..................................15 years
Cody B. Woodard .................Odessa ................................15 years
Randy V. Licon ........................Pecos ..................................5 years

New Hires

Victor Walker II .......................Maintenance Tech ...............Odessa
Mario Hinojos .........................Maintenance Tech ..............Odessa
Justin King .............................Maintenance Tech ...............Andrews
Roberto Penalosa .................Maintenance Tech .............Iraan
Martin Chabarria .................Maintenance Tech ..............Monahans
Joe Olvera ..............................Maintenance Tech ..........Monahans
Tra’kole McNary .....................Maintenance Tech .............Monahans
Jonathan Collins ...................Maintenance Tech ...........Fort Stockton
Ricardo Rojas .........................Maintenance Tech ..........Fort Stockton
Gene Powell Jr. .....................Public Information Officer ....Odessa
Joe Bush ...............................Maintenance Tech ............Sanderson
Justin Barnett .........................Maintenance Tech ..............Kermit
Jorge Balcazar Jr. .................Maintenance Tech .................Crane
Daniel R. Crow .....................Maintenance Tech ..............Kermit
Eddie Roman .........................Maintenance Tech ........Balmorhea
Ervey Hernandez .....................Maintenance Tech ........Balmorhea
Francisco Barron .....................Maintenance Tech ........Sanderson
Juan Hernandez .....................Maintenance Tech ........Sanderson
Joe L. Cazares .........................Maintenance Tech ........Sanderson
Connie Lozano ......................Permit Coordinator ..........Odessa
David Mendoza .....................Maintenance Tech .............Crane
Robert Wright .........................Maintenance Tech ........Special Crew
Adam DeLeon .........................Maintenance Tech ........Andrews
Lane Thomas .........................Maintenance Tech ........Andrews

Position changes

Jesse Neveraz ................................From Midland to Stanton
Ella Hightower ....................Permit Coordinator to Traffic Coordinator
Arnulfo Valdez .......................To West Region Facilities Group
Joel Griner ............................Maintenance Supervisor in Pecos
Jesse Trejo ............................Facilities Coordinator in Odessa
Javier Molinar ........................From Special Crew supervisor

    to District Maintenance Administrator

On Jan. 3, Carolyn Dill wrote: “I am pleased to announce that Javier Molinar has accepted the new position of District Maintenance Administrator here in Operations. Javier brings 22 years of experience with TxDOT to the position. That entire time has been spent on the Special Crew, most recently as Special Jobs Coordinator. In Javier’s new position, he will supervise the Special Crew as well as many new duties. We will be posting the Special Jobs Coordinator position this week (internal to the District). Until this position is filled, Javier will continue to oversee the day-to-day operation of the crew. Please give Javier your support and cooperation during this time of transition.”

Congrats to Javier!!!

On Down the Road

John P. Cooper .................Design Tech ..........................Odessa
Frank V. Meza .................Maintenance Tech ........................Odessa
Charles B. Granado .............Maintenance Tech ..........................Odessa
Rafael DeLao .....................Maintenance Tech ..........................Andrews
Paul Delao .........................Maintenance Tech ...............Stanton
Josh Walters ......................Design Tech ..........................Odessa
Rigoberto Lujan .................Maintenance Tech ..........................Odessa

Births

Saul Acosta (Special Crew) and his wife, Berenice, are the proud grandparents of a baby boy, Levy Auden Vasquez, born Dec. 18 to their daughter Rebecca. Levy weighed 7 pounds, 6 ounces and was 21 inches long.

Rene Muniz (a regional employee who works in the shop) and his wife, Rosario, had a baby boy Dec. 19. Gabriel Nazario Muniz weighed 10 pounds, 2 ounces and was 21.25 inches long.

Congrats to the new parents!!!

Deaths

Jessie E. Walker, brother of TxDOT retiree Benny Walker, passed away Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2010 in Fort Stockton.

Mary Margaret Hamilton, widow of Carl Hamilton, an inspector in Fort Stockton, died in an Odessa hospital on Friday, Jan. 7. Her funeral was Jan. 9 in Fort Stockton. Carl retired in 1998 and passed away in 1999.

Bea Wiley, mother-in-law of Robert Watts in District Operations, passed away on Jan. 17. Services were at 10 a.m. Jan. 20 at the Chapel at Manor Park in Midland.

Robert Garcia, father of Roy Garcia (Monahans maintenance section), died Friday, Jan. 28. His service was Jan. 31 at St. John Catholic Church with burial in Monahans Memorial Cemetery.

Please keep all these folks in your thoughts and prayers.
I-20 bridge pour

With Brundage-Bone Concrete Pumping supplying the concrete, Reece Albert Inc. workers work on the Interstate 20 bridge over East Loop 250 in Midland. The bridge pouring on the eastbound span took place on Dec. 15, 2010. This part of the project took about 263 yards of concrete. The $27.5 million project is scheduled to be completed in November 2011.
More on the pour
What a team!

Debbie Trimble of the Crane section (clockwise from top right), Gay Brooks of the Iraan section, Teresa Chambers of Odessa administration and Kevin Barnhart and Donnie McNatt of Automation were on a team with Business Manager Lennerd Byrd that focused on developing an electronic filing system to streamline operations. Their effort was successful enough to draw praise from both WASHTO and AASHTO, and group members were presented with certificates recently by our own District Engineer Mike McAnally. The work also caught the attention of other TxDOT districts and some of them have asked about installing the system in their districts.
It’s a fairly safe bet Jim Kindred didn’t want a gold watch as his retirement gift.

“I’m tired of living by a watch,” Kindred said on his last day on the job — Thursday, Dec. 30. He even joked that he was ready to throw his wristwatch and alarm clock in the trash.

Kindred stepped down from his post in the Automation Department in the Odessa office after some 14 years behind the keyboard — and 17 years with the agency.

“It’s been a helluva ride the last 14 years,” Kindred said. “I’ve really enjoyed it.”

Though he’s done running cables and working on computer network issues for TxDOT, don’t expect him to leave electronics behind completely. He plans to have a place to tinker with things from time to time since he’s always been interested in electronics.

In fact, it was his interest in electronics that brought him to the Odessa office in the first place. He started out in the maintenance office in Andrews.

“When Donnie (McNatt) and Dwain (Medders, who left in the late 1990s to work for Dell) came up to work on our computers, I got in there and bugged them,” Kindred said.

That led to a friendship, which eventually led to an opportunity — coming to Odessa as a loaner when the automation department was shorthanded.

Kindred’s been busy ever since. So busy, in fact, that he said he never really took time to notice the changes that have taken place during his career.

“We’re usually busy,” Kindred said. “We never stop to think about the changes.”

After thinking a few seconds, Kindred listed regionalization, a better network and better computers among the changes he’s seen, adding that he thought the state regularly provided the district with good equipment.

As for what he’ll miss the most, Kindred’s answer was philosophic: “I guess just ‘here’.”

A self-described people person, Kindred said he’ll surely miss all the friends he has made all over the district. “I’m going to miss the people for one,” Kindred said.

McNatt said automation will miss Kindred as well. McNatt was quick to describe Kindred as a “super hard worker” who was always dependable and willing to do whatever it took to get the job done right. McNatt said Kindred’s work ethic meant he was willing to work late whenever the job called for it.

Now Kindred gets to move on to other loves. “We’ve got grandkids in Lufkin, and we’re going to spend some serious time with them,” he said.

He and his wife plan to travel as much as they can and make regular trips to the mountains. His love for the outdoors is so widely known that his goodbye banner featured a caricature of Kindred on a camping trip. He was even doing the cooking.

“We’re definitely going to be using the camping trailer quite a bit,” Kindred said.

One thing Kindred won’t be doing is living on a schedule. He said he and his wife plan to “play it by ear” and “fly by the seat of our pants” in retirement. As he said: “If you don’t plan it, it can’t go wrong.”

After a life of jobs ranging from being a diesel mechanic to running a Western Auto shop to working for UPS to his stint here at TxDOT, Kindred’s spirit is ready to relax and take it easy.

“Hopefully we’ll have a few years to just do nothing,” he said.
After 17 years with TxDOT, Kathy Rauscher stepped down at the end of January. One look around her retirement party in Fort Stockton and anyone could see she’ll be missed.

Mohammad Moabed, one of Kathy’s former bosses, even came in from Albuquerque, N.M., to say farewell.

Moabed said Rauscher was his own personal “Dr. Phil” while they worked together and that she was a trusted confidante.

“That’s the best feeling in the world — that you can trust someone,” Moabed said.

Moabed was one of five area engineers Rauscher worked under. Steve Poage, Paul Hoelscher, Patrick Ryan and Ed Goebel are the others. Goebel said Rauscher made his workload much lighter.

“The stuff you do behind the scenes really makes sure TxDOT goes and we get the quality roads we need,” he said before presenting her with a set of dominoes and a “surrogate” service award (the real award hadn’t arrived yet).

Rauscher said in an e-mail later that others had made similar impressions on her.

“What I will miss the most is the people I worked with over the years,” she wrote.

Those words only echoed what she said addressing those who went to her party.

“I appreciate all of you and working with you,” she said. “Thank you very much ... I appreciate everybody.”

Rauscher also has an appreciation for family, and that’s where her future lies, according to her e-mail.

“Our intentions are to eventually sell our home and move to Lubbock,” she wrote. “I have twin sons and one of them lives in Lubbock. He also has twin sons that are 6 years old. We would like to share in their growing up years.”

While she’s seen a lot in her time with TxDOT, Rauscher said she can see more changes on the horizon for the agency.

“I have worked here a total of 17 years,” she wrote. “The biggest change in my years here is the changes that are coming down the road regarding personnel and what they will be doing and the lack of monies for projects running low in this area.”

If Moabed is right, those changes will be met with success.

“This is a good organization,” he told the crowd at the retirement party. “And the reason it’s a good organization is because of people like Kathy and people like you.”
Many of us broke bread Dec. 17 with a fantastic barbecue meal on site at the Odessa office. We feasted on brisket, sausages and ribs as well as the normal barbecue trimmings.

The cooks were Jorge Estrella, Cody Woodard and Hector Flores. Jorge Estrella provided the grill.

Ella Hightower and Martha Stock worked to pull the event all together.

“I was very pleased with the turn out and the time we had with our TxDOT family,” Hightower said.

Rumor is the owners of Jack Jordan’s Barbecue and Johnny’s Barbecue are hoping Jorge, Cody and Hector stick with their day jobs and don’t open a barbecue place anywhere in the area.
A helping hand

The Odessa District offered some help to the road clearing efforts in the Dallas area in early February by sending out 18 super sacks of Meltdown 20. Helping load the truck were Armando Franco (not seen), Nicholas Torres on the forklift and Ramon Rodriguez on top of the sacks.

A letter from the new PIO guy

I can’t tell you all how glad I am to be a part of the Texas Department of Transportation. As I’ve mentioned to some of you already, I’ve been telling Glen Larum that I wanted his job for about the past five years.

It goes to show you should be careful what you wish for because now I face the daunting task of following in his footsteps.

I know you all will miss Glen. He’s a terrific friend and an even better guy. Glen and I became friends through our fantasy baseball league as well as through a professional relationship.

While I was working at the Odessa American the past eight years, it was widely agreed upon that Glen was the best PIO in the area. He got media what they needed, when they needed it. I plan to continue that.

The harder part for me will be doing what Glen did in house. After 15-plus years with TxDOT, Glen knew where all the skeletons (figuratively speaking) were buried. I barely know where Automation is (I still wouldn’t know if Jim Kindred hadn’t retired).

That’s why I need your help. I know how to write, and I know how to gather information. What I don’t know is what’s going on in your lives. That’s where you can help me.

Please send me things going on in your life. They can be work-related or personal. I want to know when a major step is being taken on a project, and I want to know when Junior graduates from college. Anything that you want the TxDOT family to know about is fair game. (And if I can’t use it, I’ll be sure to let you know why.)

Eddy Rentas, our safety guy, has agreed to pass along information on a regular basis that relates to safety. Anyone else who wants to carve out some space is encouraged to e-mail me at gene.powell@txdot.gov or call me at 246 (498-4746 if you need a real phone number).

As for me, I’ll do my best to make sure you don’t have to miss Glen’s work too much, even though we’ll all miss our friend. He always said he loved this job, and I’m sure I will as well.

I’m lucky enough to already have a few friends here that I met long before coming to work here. Maybe I can get Ciro Baeza (pavement) to write up some golf tips for us. David Alvarez (operations) could do a column on fantasy baseball. And Deanne Hamilton (public transportation) could write a poker column.

Though I’m not sure I’d trust any of their advice.

Till later, keep Texas moving. — Gene