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On the cover:

This Texas icon, accented by multi-colored lights, is one of eight stars gracing the new SH 71 overpass in Bastrop. This time of the year, they may look like holiday decorations, but they are lasting works of public art.

TxDOT photo by Stan Williams

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- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**
Mike Behrens
- DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**
Steve Simmons
- PUBLISHER**
Randall Dillard
- EDITOR**
Mike Cox
- Managing Editor**
Tim Cunningham
- ASSOCIATE EDITOR**
Judith Curtis
- GRAPHIC DESIGN**
Jeremy G. Boehm

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Straight Talk



TxDOT people care and care again

by **Mike Behrens**
Executive Director



Mike Behrens

The people of TxDOT have a tradition of caring for each other and even for people they may not know. We have been tested in recent weeks as we became aware of the many needs facing our families and friends, and strangers, too. Here are a few recent instances:

■ TxDOT employee Caesar Garcia of the Austin District is a husband and father expecting the arrival of his second child near Christmas. Just before Thanksgiving, he helped move a stranded motorist from a busy Austin roadway. That’s when a sport-utility vehicle struck him from behind. Garcia suffered broken bones and internal injuries — and, no doubt, will suffer the resulting costs that stem from a lengthy recovery.

The district has set up a fund to help the family in this time of need: Caesar Garcia Fund, c/o TxDOT, 7901 Interstate 35 North, Austin, TX 78753. Question? Call 512-832-7000.

■ Hurricane Rita and its effects hurt several TxDOT employees in Southeast Texas in late September and into October and beyond. Wind-driven trees flattened homes and vehicles. People suffered and are suffering.

TxDOT established the Katrina Assistance Relief Effort (KARE) fund to help transportation workers in Louisiana and Mississippi after that region’s hurricane — soon followed by our own devastating storm, Rita.

The fund then aimed to help those needing it within the TxDOT family in our Beaumont and Lufkin districts, as well as those among our neighbors engaged in providing transportation in their states. In all, the fund raised nearly \$80,000 — it will be distributed before Christmas.

■ TxDOT employees regularly give blood in their local communities. In mid-November, the Blood and Tissue Center of Central Texas reported that TxDOT employees in the region donated 502 units for the year (an annual increase of nearly 20 percent) and helped 1,500 people needing blood products. The center credited TxDOT as a major source of blood donations and as a model for blood drives in other work places. Interesting note: Each blood donor in the region qualifies for a coupon to help cover the cost of blood products not covered by health insurance.

These instances of generosity are but a very few of the ways TxDOT people support family, friends and strangers in need. No list can detail the actual caring you show throughout the year. Plainly, your actions speak more forcefully than my few words ever could.

Thank you and have a safe and happy holiday season.★

Communications world spins faster

by Mike Cox

Of its thousands of employees, TxDOT has only a few dozen men and women whose specialty is communication — mostly media liaison officers or public information officers. But all TxDOT workers are spokespeople for this agency.

Earlier in November, many of TxDOT's professional communicators met in Galveston for a two-day training conference. One of the speakers, Texas State University's Dr. Laurie Fluker, brought home the point that communication — which is to say good communication — is important for TxDOT.

The first thing she explained is how the world of mass communication has changed. For Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, the change has been particularly profound. Some of us remember when television was a novelty (bet-winning trivia item: more TVs were sold in the 1950s than Boomers born). Most of us remember when TV was the dominant source of news (along with newspapers). But now all of us must learn how to send and receive our messages in new ways.

No longer are newspapers, magazines and the broadcast television networks our prime source of news and information. In fact, Fluker said, research shows that for the younger demographic, Jon Stewart's "The Daily Show" (a spoof) on the Comedy Channel is the prime source of news.

In a sentence, the mass media — with many outlets and many channels — have splintered beyond the grasp of easy understanding or shared satisfaction.

Think of an info-delivery system as a media "cake" once shared by all. Now, instead, we see thousands of cupcakes. Fewer people today take the cake served to them. More choose their news to suit their schedules, their interests, their needs.

Smaller groups of ever-distinct individuals, seeking the satisfaction of news or knowledge, now select

Letter from the editor

from among these "cupcakes" — often taking just a bite, rarely consuming the entire morsel.

Some even now can customize their news intake to suit their individual tastes.

To use another analogy, today's info delivery flows as a multimedia Rio Grande — a wide and often shallow river fed by many streams.

With all these media demanding our attention, the shared experience of receiving information now is slivered into ever smaller and thinner pieces — the targeted readers and audiences for print, radio, TV, cable, electronic kiosks, motion billboards, and now the Internet and e-mail and cell phones and instant messaging and teleconferencing and podcasts and blogs (Web logs) and vlogs (video blogs) and more.

How to cope? Beyond merely trying to keep abreast of all the new ways to communicate, we must convey our messages to our multiple stakeholders, from citizens to law makers to contractors, continuously and at a fast pace. In addition to getting information across with immediacy, what we say must be trustworthy.

Our challenge, the educator concluded, is to continue to find new ways to tell our story. Part of that story — the good things we do for the people of Texas — is reflected in this issue, which focuses on the annual Transportation Short Course.

Finally, you'll notice that we're still not caught up with service anniversaries and retirements. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita needed all the space we could spare, and this issue could not handle all the names that have accumulated. If your name hasn't seen print yet, we promise to tell your story as soon as we can. ☺

TNotes

■ Funding rail action

Texas voters in early November approved a constitutional amendment that sets up the Texas Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund. Passage authorizes the state to make grants and issue bonds to relocate rail lines out of cities and neighborhoods, expand passenger and freight rail, and build railroad underpasses and overpasses to reduce accidents and delays. "Texas voters have spoken," said Ric Williamson, chair of the Texas Transportation Commission. "They want to increase safety, reduce truck traffic on highways, improve air quality and spur the Texas economy."

■ Name, function change

TxDOT's Legislative Affairs Office was expanded to become a TxDOT division in August. The new Government and Business Enterprises Division, headed by Coby Chase, comprises four sections: state legislative affairs (Jefferson Grimes), federal legislative affairs (Cindy Mueller), and two new sections, marketing (Helen Havelka) and research (Tonia Ramirez). The new division, known as GBE, was created "because of the demands placed upon the agency by new programs, a need to define the public dialogue on these news undertakings, and a desire by our external partners to learn more," said Executive Director Mike Behrens.

■ Commission action

The commission at its pre-Thanksgiving holiday meeting took first steps in defining success when approaching TxDOT's five key goals: reduce congestion, increase safety, enhance economic development, improve air quality and increase the value of the state's existing transportation systems. At the request of Gov. Perry, commissioners awarded \$1.9 million to 39 rural transit districts adversely affected by high fuel costs after hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In addition, the state's sixth regional mobility authority, in Hidalgo County, received the go-ahead from the commission. The commission also directed the department to continue on a fast track to establish ways to measure success in meeting the five goals.

— Judith Curtis, Associate Editor

Annual project awards cite cooperation

TxDOT in September recognized department projects whose participants showed exceptional cooperation in completing a complex task. The annual project awards, presented at an Austin luncheon sponsored by the Associated General Contractors, singled out TxDOT employees for their cooperation and partnership in project construction and design.

Amarillo District

■ **Construction award** — The \$4.5-million project on Interstate 40 in Potter County began in September 2002 and was completed in May 2004. High volumes of traffic — mostly tractor-trailer rigs — combined with snow at times to present special challenges for this rehabilitation of 10 miles of existing roadway. During work on bridges, a decision was made to use a more substantial rail (TY T 501) that would reduce future maintenance for TxDOT and provide a higher degree of safety. During the project, a tractor-trailer driver fell asleep at the wheel. The truck would have entered the work area, but the temporary concrete rail kept the rig on the side of the traffic. Had it been otherwise, results could have been tragic. TxDOT representative: **Raymond D. Martinez, Jr.**

Corpus Christi District

■ **Construction award** — A \$4.2-million project on U.S. 181 widened the four-lane freeway to six lanes. Project also included double-lane, northbound and southbound frontage road segments, two 430-foot boardwalks and permanent retaining walls to protect wildlife and wetlands. Substantially complete in September 2004, the project covered 2.3 miles from the north end of Nueces Bay Causeway to the city of Portland. Due to Zachry Construction's

two-week look-ahead schedule of construction activities, TxDOT was able to schedule timely inspections which resulted in the contractor achieving incentives set up in the contract. Working together, Zachry Construction and TxDOT provided a quality project that minimized disruption to the traveling public. TxDOT representative: **Juan Montano.**

■ **Design award** — Honors U.S. 181 Portland Phase III. This was a redesign of a project designed in the late 1980s. One of the most significant achievements was the reduction in time needed to coordinate and permit this project for construction. By working closely with governmental and environmental groups, the contractor, and the community, a significant transportation project was redesigned to minimize the effect on the environment and area populations. TxDOT representatives: **Victor Vourcos, Larry Wenger and Sam Saldivar.**

■ **More recognition** — The U.S. 181 Portland Phase III project also won top recognition from the **Texas Partnership for Transportation Quality (TPTQ)**. Known as the TPTQ Award, it recognizes partnerships and projects excelling in design and construction quality. Additional TxDOT representatives recognized for their work on the project: **Jose Gaytan, Bill Reitmann, Amando Bosquez, Mitzie Gibson, Paula Sales-Evans, Mary Perez and Craig Clark, district engineer.**

Dallas District

■ **Construction award** — This project called for relocating a farm-to-market road (including grading, structures and surface) in Kaufman County. In January 2005,

at a price of \$7.3 million, the contractor completed the work in 419 days, sooner than scheduled. The fast-growing city of Forney, whose population soared 20 percent in the past year, looked forward to this project. Completion of the project was tied to the success of proposed commercial development along U.S. 80. Major retailers had purchased sites before the "new" roadway was open to traffic. As sometimes happens, property owners along the road provided special challenges to those building roads. This project was no exception, but TxDOT and the contractor worked together to address citizen concerns. TxDOT representative: **Christopher G. Bruner.**

Odessa District

■ **Construction award** — When it rains, sometimes it really does pour — as it did in April 2004 in Reeves County. The resulting torrent — seven miles east of Toyah and a long way from anywhere — took out an 86-foot section of the eastbound bridge and weakened its twin on Interstate 20 over Salt Draw. This \$3.6-million project is notable for the speed and responsiveness of the contractor, who worked in under 60 days to make the bridges again able to bear traffic. Others who had bid on the project said it would take more than 112 days. This project will long serve to instruct everyone involved in bridge construction on the virtues of scheduling work and delivery. TxDOT representative: **"C.J." Zuniga.**

■ **Construction award** — This project started in March 2004 and was complete in late June, finished

■ See Page 5

■ **Continued from Page 4**

in 135 days — on time and under budget, even with some significant change orders. The \$1.6-million contract was reasonably simple, calling for rehabilitation of just over a mile of an existing roadway in Midland. Some of the usual challenges presented themselves: utilities disputes, public concerns, a softened subgrade. And, as usual, all challenges were met. More importantly, after the work was complete, pedestrians in wheelchairs were rolling along a section of the street on ADA-compliant sidewalk where they had never been before. TxDOT representative: **Louis B. Lara.**

Paris District

■ **Construction award** — This project rehabilitated 9.8 miles of roadway from the Collin County line to FM 902 in Grayson County. Work on the \$46.4-million contract — the largest in the district's history — began in March 2002 and was substantially complete six months ahead of schedule. The project is the first of the district's efforts to rehabilitate and improve mobility in Grayson County on U.S. 75, which is a four-lane divided roadway with frontage roads. Old concrete pavement was recycled and incorporated into the 5-inch cement-treated base. TxDOT representative: **Louis Cartwright.**

Pharr District

■ **Construction award** — It's known as the U.S. 83 Mission Project and was completed in September 2004 for \$37.7 million. The 5.5-mile project in Hidalgo County called for reconstruction and widening of the expressway through the city of Mission. Since it was built in the 1960s, population in the area boomed, meaning that traffic demand on

the four-lane expressway also had grown. Further, the project called for construction of overpasses at major intersections to eliminate traffic congestion, which had created safety concerns and long delays for the traveling public. One challenge: utility conflicts throughout the course of construction meant the project could be built only in sections, depending on where the utility conflicts had been resolved. TxDOT representative: **Pedro R. Alvarez.**

■ **Construction Award** — Loop 499 is in Harlingen in Cameron County. The \$6.3-million contract was for a 2.8-mile reconstruction of the rural roadway made into a divided four-lane urban road with curb and gutter drainage. Now traffic can move more easily.

Because of rapid growth in the area, combined with an increasing volume of traffic, the project encountered many challenges. Even so, safety of the traveling public always was given highest priority. Even with these factors in play, the project was completed more than a month early. TxDOT representative: **Robert Puentes Jr.**

San Angelo District

■ **Construction Award** — Well, it's actually for two projects in the district that were nominated as a single effort that produced benefits along 3.7 miles of U.S. 67 in Tom Green County. This effort represents construction of the final segment of the Houston-Harte Freeway. The contracts, when combined, total \$41.5 million. Initial work to construct freeway mainlanes began in September 2001 and all work was complete by December 2004. These projects are notable because of the efforts by all involved to provide timely information to the media and the public. TxDOT representative: **Rodney Tucker.**

San Antonio District

■ **Design award** — Honors a project known as Spur 66 in Bexar County essentially designed on spec to help entice a major automotive company to select San Antonio for a new production plant. Once Toyota made its choice to accept the incentive package and to favor San Antonio, TxDOT needed to move very fast to satisfy the needs of this company. The year-long work was completed in December 2004 for the \$7.5 million project. TxDOT designed a project that included building 1.8 miles of a four-lane divided highway with two full intersections. More importantly, this new transportation infrastructure will propel economic growth for decades to come. TxDOT representative: **Kathryn Pearson.**

■ **Construction award** — This \$2.8-million project on Highway 27 in Kerr County called for widening the three-lane roadway to five lanes, along with adding storm sewers and sidewalks. Work began in July 2003 and was completed in March 2005. At a half-mile long, the project is one of the smaller ones undertaken in Texas. It presented special challenges that concerned property owners and business people along the right of way, which was narrow. Also, the work was in an older section of the city of Kerrville where "new and bigger" weren't always seen as improvements. Lines of communication with residents and business owners were kept open. The effort was time-consuming, but it assured that the public had a voice in the quality of the work being done. TxDOT representative: **John Waliky.** ☺

More news about awards:

<http://crossroads.org/pio/TNews/tnol.htm>

Awards hail excellence

Annual Short Course spotlights 5 who shine as TxDOT champions

The Texas Transportation Institute presented annual transportation-related awards during the opening session of the 2005 Transportation Short Course in October at Texas A&M University. These awards recognize the best within TxDOT and among the department's supporters. The following profiles are from remarks made at the presentations.

■ Greer Award — Joe S. Graff

The award: Honors skill, dedication, civic-mindedness, innovation, and performance excellence of TxDOT engineers.

The winner: Joe S. Graff, deputy director of the TxDOT Maintenance Division ... known for community involvement, exceptional management skills, sound judgment ... bachelor's degree, civil engineering, Texas A&M University ... key person furthering TxDOT efforts to be a leader in maintenance management, rest areas, pavements, bridges and safety ... develops first asset-management contract to help maintain Texas highways and develop process to rate overall maintenance of a roadway ... one of the first persons in state mobilized to respond when disaster strikes (as with Hurricane Rita in September).

■ Gilchrist Award — Douglas W. Eichorst II

The award: Honors the performance of an outstanding TxDOT engineer.

The winner: Douglas W. Eichorst II, area engineer for Midland, Odessa District ... oversaw first full-time night construction project in district's history ... as an engineer, looks years into the future to minimize the long-term user cost of construction ... example: pioneers district's use of a "white topping" at intersections of a major highway, providing a 30-year project life rather than the typical 7-to-10 years for asphalt intersections ... Texas A&M graduate with two degrees ... readily credits his many mentors and those who work with him for his successes.

■ DeBerry Award — Clifford W. Halvorsen

The award: Honors outstanding contributions to the state of Texas in the field of transportation.

The winner: Clifford W. Halvorsen, Central Houston area engineer, Houston District, shows willingness and ability to accept ever-greater responsibility ... oversees largest single contract ever awarded in the Houston District, a reconstruction project valued at more than \$250 million ... watchwords: "faster, better, safer, and with maximum value" ... helps move millions of people every day as they make their way around Houston ... graduate of Texas A&M with his bachelor's degree in civil engineering.

■ Perry Award — H. Thomas Kornegay

The award: Honors citizens for leadership in creating public awareness of the need for adequate transportation facilities in the state.

The winner: H. Thomas Kornegay, executive director of the Port of Houston Authority ... understands importance of transportation in building a community's prosperity and advancing its economic future ... promotes progress through inter-modal transportation systems ... bachelor's degree, architectural engineering, University of Texas; master's degree, architectural engineering, Oklahoma State University ... appreciates benefits of efficient transportation systems and of clean air; argues that access for two trains a day to the Barbours Cut Terminal in Houston takes 400 trucks off the roads every day, reduces fume-heavy emissions, and improves mobility.

■ Stotzer Award — Robert W. Jackson

The award: Honors non-engineer from TxDOT for outstanding leadership, dedication, and service to the department.

The winner: Robert W. "Bob" Jackson, deputy general counsel in TxDOT's Office of General Counsel ... known for intellect, dedication, and ability to grasp an idea and keep it in focus ... bachelor's degree and master's degree, University of Texas; University of Houston law degree ... since 1991, TxDOT's lead person in drafting legislative proposals ... during 78th Legislature of 2003, drafted or supervised the drafting of a virtual rewrite of the Texas Transportation Code as it related to highway finance and construction ... credited with fashioning the tools TxDOT now uses to reduce traffic congestion and to improve mobility. ♻

Ideas highlight annual Short Course

Transportation leaders in Texas had plenty of ideas to share with those gathered for the opening session of the mid-October edition of the 2005 Transportation Short Course at Texas A&M University.

Among the speakers were members of the Texas Transportation Commission and TxDOT's executive director. Here are some of the highlights:

Michael Behrens, TxDOT executive director

Growth: "This department awarded \$5 billion in construction contracts in fiscal year 2005. Volume is estimated to be as big or bigger in 2006."

Safety: "Proposition 14 allowed \$600 million to be spent on safety improvements. The improvements are estimated to save 1,800 lives and prevent 21,000 injuries over the next 20 years."

50th anniversary of interstate highways: "This gives us the opportunity to look back at this effort to connect the major cities in the state and nation, as well as demonstrate the need for additional corridors to move people and goods."

Ted Houghton Jr., commissioner

Perspective: "Texas is the number two transportation system in the world behind the United States. That's how big, that's how important this system is to the world."

International trade: "We need to look beyond our borders and our own jurisdictions. We have to look outside and reach and see where we're going to have the greatest opportunity to magnify these trade corridors."

Hope Andrade, commissioner

Regional planning: "Presently, 24 planning regions around the state are working to develop locally relevant work plans to improve the delivery of public-transportation service."

Teen safety: "We are losing our teenagers due to a lack of knowledge regarding the risky behaviors teens should avoid when behind the wheel. They are driving at night, (there are) distractions and cell phones, speeding, not wearing a seatbelt, drinking and driving."

John Johnson, commissioner

Listening: "During the past two years, we've talked to Texans about tolling, pass-through tolling, more local control, public-private partnerships, and a host of other things. We've heard enough ... to fill volumes."

Innovation: "Public-private partnerships, local control, and the Trans-Texas Corridor represent departures from the way we've always done things."

Ric Williamson, commission chair

Communicating: "Our message is we have a problem and we have a plan to solve that problem."

Future: "We are going to reduce congestion in this state. We're going to eliminate unsafe travel conditions in this state. We are going to expand economic opportunity in this state. We're going to improve air quality and we're going to increase — not just preserve — the system."

Action: "We've simplified the unified transportation plan. We have fiscally constrained the unified transportation plan and we've created the metro-mobility plan. We've allocated resources to the MPOs (metropolitan planning organizations) to pay for that plan. We approve any RMA (regional-mobility authority) with a credible plan. We have negotiated pass-through toll projects. We've issued safety bonds, Mobility Fund bonds, toll-equity bonds. We're negotiating projects with the private sector. We're developing rail-relocation plans. And we're advancing the Trans-Texas Corridor." ❖

Editor's note: Bill Powell of the TxDOT Public Information Office excerpted the above remarks, taken from longer statements made by the speakers.



Graff



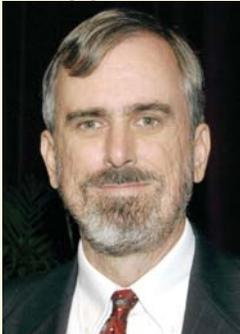
Eichorst



Halvorsen



Kornegay



Jackson



McMurrey



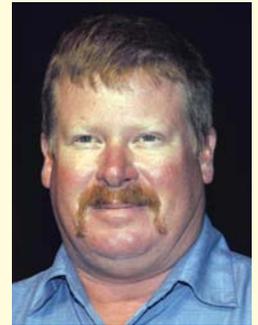
Necessary



Polk



McCoslin



Gartman

TxDOT's heroes

Award winners fight floods, snowstorm

by Mike Cox
Editor

The TxDOT Extra Mile Award recognizes individual employees who have shown extraordinary courage. They have put their own lives in danger to prevent injury or to save the life of another.

As part of the opening ceremonies at the 2005 Transportation Short Course in mid-October, TxDOT honored five employees with the Extra Mile Award.

Since the recognition program began in 1983, TxDOT has presented the awards to 157 employees.

Bryan District Ronald McMurrey

When 18-year-old Naomi Fusaro woke up April 11, she knew it was a big day — she just didn't know how big a day.

As Naomi dressed for school, Huntsville Maintenance Foreman

Ronald McMurrey was already on the job. An early morning downpour dumped up to seven inches of rain in some areas of Walker County.

As he does any time there's bad weather, McMurrey was out looking for any water-related problems. He had already placed a barricade on FM 2929 and now drove back down the road to check other low spots.

Fusaro knew it had been raining all night long, but she didn't give it much thought. She was running late for school.

Even so, she was smart enough not to drive too fast on FM 2929, the route she took every day to school.

"I was only going about 40 or 45," she recalls, "but my car hydroplaned. It went off into the water and started sinking."

Alternately screaming and praying, Fusaro struggled for breath in what little air remained as her car continued to settle. Then she saw headlights.

McMurrey had driven up in his TxDOT truck about the same time that volunteer firefighter Troy Lawson arrived.

With a safety rope from the TxDOT truck tied around his waist, Lawson dove into the fast-moving floodwater. In his hand he gripped a screwdriver.

As McMurrey held the rope to keep Lawson from being washed away, the volunteer firefighter smashed the back window and pulled Fusaro from the car just as it sank.

But then the suction from the sinking vehicle dragged both Lawson and Fusaro under the water.

Fortunately, McMurrey had kept a tight grip on the rope. Bracing his feet, he pulled the pair out of the water.

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Bryan District **William Necessary** **David Polk** **James McCoslin**

When Robertson County Maintenance Supervisor William “Peanut” Necessary left home in China Springs that morning, he noticed mist on his windshield. Then it began to rain.

The closer he got to the maintenance office in Hearne, the harder the rain came down. A 17-inch downpour soon had much of Hearne, and the bridges and roads leading into town, under water.

As Necessary checked barricades on flooded roads, he noticed an 18-wheeler had ventured into the water rushing across U.S. 79. The truck had gone around a barrier and now floated in the fast current.

If not for a clump of trees, the truck would have been swept away and its driver likely drowned. Even with the trees, the driver remained at peril.

Necessary called the warehouse and told TxDOT co-workers David Polk and James McCoslin to bring a front-end loader from the yard.

With Necessary directing the operation by radio, Polk drove the loader parallel to the water with McCoslin riding in the bucket.

When the loader made it to the trucker, McCoslin helped the trucker get out of his rig and into the safety of the loader’s bucket as Polk then drove them to safety.

After moving to U.S. 190 to check conditions from Bryan to Hearne, Necessary found another truck driver intent on going through a barricade into dangerous water.

Knowing he had to keep the trucker out of trouble, Necessary blocked the Freightliner with his pickup. Fortunately, the trucker listened to reason and stayed put. Necessary had possibly saved a second life.

He had no idea that the next life he saved would be his own.

When Necessary and area engineer Robert Cochran checked a bridge at FM 391 they found rapidly rising water. As he and Cochran walked out on the approach they realized the rushing water had damaged the road surface. The approach suddenly folded and the two ended up in the swirling water.

Cochran quickly got out of the water. But battered by the current, Necessary found himself trapped between two pieces of concrete. With Cochran’s help, Necessary made it out.

Yoakum District **Steve Gartman**

An outdoor enthusiast will gladly put up with bad weather for good hunting, which probably explains why two duck hunters ventured out on Matagorda Bay last Christmas Eve. Maybe they didn’t believe the weather forecast: Snow.

Normally, the night before Christmas is relatively temperate on the Texas coast, but that’s not how it turned out in 2004. For the first time since 1895, it snowed from Houston to below Corpus Christi. Ten inches fell on Victoria, six in Corpus Christi, and even four inches on Galveston Island.

About 6 p.m., Texas Parks and Wildlife Department game warden David Janssen of Palacios received a report from the Matagorda County sheriff’s office that two duck hunters were stranded in their small aluminum boat on Matagorda Bay. One of the young men had reported by cell phone that their fuel line had broken.

The Coast Guard had dispatched a rescue helicopter from Houston’s Ellington Field, but the mission had to be scrubbed due to near-blizzard conditions.

That’s when Janssen remembered Steve Gartman. A tender at the Sargent swing bridge, Gartman had given Janssen his home

number three years earlier. If Parks and Wildlife ever needed help in locating a missing boat, Gartman had said, “Just give me a call.”

About 10 p.m., Janssen phoned. Gartman said he could have his boat in the water in 10 minutes.

Then Janssen dialed the stranded hunters to tell them help was coming. He could tell their condition had deteriorated. One of the hunters had gone into potentially fatal hypothermia.

No one knew exactly where the hunters were, but Gartman had an idea. He knew the Mountaineer, a tug on the Intracoastal Canal, had radar. He also knew the vessel and its crew lay at anchor riding out the storm.

Gartman and his wife Jennifer gathered blankets and gear, stopped at the bridge so he could pick up a hand-held marine radio, and then drove to their boat.

Steve raised the Mountaineer on the hand-held and explained the situation. He asked the tug’s captain if the Mountaineer could see his boat on radar. When he said he could, Steve asked if he could make out any other boat on the bay.

When the captain confirmed another echo from a smaller vessel and gave its position, the Gartmans headed in that direction. Hoping that the Mountaineer’s master had detected the hunters’ disabled boat, Gartman, reliant on a compass and directions radioed from the tug, guided his boat through the blinding snow.

Getting cold themselves, Gartman and his wife found the drifting boat and got the two wet and cold young men into the Gartman boat.

After wrapping them in blankets, the husband-wife rescuers turned back across Matagorda Bay. A waiting ambulance carried the hunter experiencing hypothermia to the hospital in Baytown. ❖



Volunteer enforcer keeps parking spots open

by Paul Braun

Amarillo District PIO

Harvey Davis, purchasing clerk with in the Amarillo District warehouse, knows what it's like to have something taken away. That's why he is giving back to his community as part of the Amarillo Police Department's Volunteer Handicapped-Parking Patrol.

Every other Saturday, Harvey and his partner patrol the parking lots of Amarillo, searching for vehicles illegally parked in spaces reserved for the disabled. If they find one, they write a ticket, take a photo, and move to the next parking lot. If someone contests the ticket (fines can reach \$257), Harvey goes to court to testify against the alleged law-breaker.

"I hate to see others take advantage of the disabled," says Harvey. "Parking in a handicapped zone takes something away from those who are challenged enough, without having to fight for access to a store or restaurant."

Harvey is well acquainted with those challenges. In 1968, he was working with a feed auger on his family farm near Goldthwaite in Mills County. Harvey's left arm slipped into the auger, severing the arm nearly to the shoulder.

Not only was Harvey's arm taken from him, but so was his chance to serve his country. "I was supposed to go to Army basic training, but a month before I was to report, I lost my arm. I guess they didn't need me after the accident," says Harvey.

Fitted with a prosthetic arm, he was able to continue working on the family farm. He also did contract mowing for several years.

In 1984, a friend told him about a job at the Texas Department of Transportation. He applied, convinced the department he could do the work, and was hired. For the



Harvey Davis

next 17 years, Harvey has gone about his daily routine at home and at work.

But Sept. 11, 2001, changed Harvey's outlook. "I was listening to a speech by the president after the 9/11 tragedy, and he said that we all need to volunteer in some way or another to help better our local communities and this country," says Harvey.

"I heard about the Handicapped-Parking Patrol in Amarillo, and decided it was the best way for me to serve my country and community." Harvey signed up in 2002, and has been on patrol ever since.

Amarillo established its parking patrol in October 1995. Amarillo Police Sergeant Steve Davis (no relation to Harvey) oversees the patrol. He says it wasn't the first patrol of its kind in Texas, but it is the most advanced.

"Police Chief Jerry Neal puts a high priority on the patrol," says Sgt. Davis. "I believe ours was the first unit to have a marked patrol car equipped with a radio, so the patrol members can stay in touch with a dispatcher. This ensures the safety of the patrol members, who can face some fairly unruly people at times."

Harvey and his fellow volunteers go through an eight-hour training course. A judge swears them in. They differ from police officers because they are only empowered to write tickets pertaining to handicapped-parking laws, and they don't carry weapons. However, they do wear shirts that identify them as members of the patrol, and they are required to check in with a dispatcher. They are sometimes dispatched to an area where a car is illegally parked.

In the patrol's first month in operation, officers wrote 150 citations. They have written more than 14,000 citations over the past 10 years.

"Police officers are very busy, and writing tickets for vehicles parked in a handicapped zone just isn't a priority," says Sgt. Davis. "The Volunteer Handicapped Patrol takes up the slack, and they're doing a fine job."

Most volunteers are retired, and many qualify for a parking permit for the disabled. They have to be of good character (each goes through a background check), and have a good driving record. They patrol Monday through Saturday. Sgt. Davis says Harvey is special because he works a full-time job and still gives of his free time on weekends to go on patrol. "He's a terrific volunteer, and I admire his commitment," says Sgt. Davis.

Harvey says he'll stay with the patrol past retirement, or as long as he is physically able. "The secret to doing this job is to take your position seriously and to treat the public with respect, even those who break the laws," he says.

"If I can help others like me who deal with a disability, and help to educate the public on why we have parking laws to protect the disabled, then I've done my job, and I'm happy with that." ✪

By Judith Curtis
Associate Editor

■ All in the family

The thing that strikes Ed Serna (TxDOT's assistant executive director for support operations) about the KARE (Katrina Assistance Relief Effort) fund drive is that hundreds of employees wrote checks for \$5, \$10 and \$20.

Contributions amounted to nearly \$80,000 for Gulf Coast victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"This is one family member helping another family member," says Serna.

First set up in the wake of Hurricane Katrina to help employees of departments of transportation in Louisiana and Mississippi, the scope of KARE expanded after Hurricane Rita hit Texas and TxDOT employees, primarily in Beaumont and Lufkin. Some \$44,000 will go to the TxDOT employees, with the rest split among their counterparts in Louisiana and Mississippi departments of transportation who suffered damage from Hurricane Katrina.

Said Commission Chair Ric Williamson, "The TxDOT family has done a wonderful thing and I am prouder than ever to be part of that family."

■ Good Deere hunting

Todd Deere, sign shop technician with the San Angelo District, just returned from his latest deer hunt. But this is not your typical male-bonding adventure. The 23-year TxDOT veteran participates in the Challenge Children's Hunt in which 15 kids with handicaps go hunting to learn they can experience the outdoors and learn a new skill. They shot and field-dressed 23 deer. The hunt shows the kids their capabilities, despite their physical challenges, and helps thin the dense deer population near San Angelo.

■ Nutty engineer

Think 30,000 pecan pies, 360,000 pralines, or enough electricity to light one house for one day. That's what the 15,000 pounds of pecans grown every year by Ken Boehme, a field engineer in the Construction Division, can turn into. His land in San Saba is dotted with 250 pecan trees. This season alone, he's already bagged about 5,000 pounds of nuts off the official state tree. Even better, Boehme can discuss anything and everything pecan-related. ☼

Calendar

2005

DECEMBER

15 Commission Meeting, Austin
26 Day after Christmas*

January

16 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day*
19 Confederate Heroes' Day**
24 ATPA Insurance Fraud Committee Mtg., Austin ATPA
25 ATPA Board Meeting, Austin, ATPA
26 Commission Meeting, Conroe
31-2/2 NTI/NHI "Linking Planning and NEPA", Austin, ENV

February

1/31-2 NTI/NHI "Linking and Planning and NEPA", Austin, ENV
20 President's Day*
23 Commission Meeting, Austin

March

2 Texas Independence Day**
21-23 Const., Pavements, Materials and Env. Waco, CST
22-24 Texas Aviation Conference, Austin, Aviation
28-29 TxDOT Annual Surveyor's Conference, Austin, ISD
30 Annual Surveyor's Coordinator Mtg./Trng., Austin, ISD
30 Commission Meeting, Austin
31 Cesar Chavez Day***

April

9-11 Lifesavers Conference, Austin, TRF
14 Good Friday***
17-21 ATPA Annual Grantee Conf. & Board Mtg., SAT, ATPA
21 San Jacinto Day**
25-26 Maintenance/Traffic Operations Conf., Waco, MNT, TRF
27 Commission Meeting, Brownsville

May

25 Commission Meeting, Austin
29 Memorial Day*

June

5-8 Research Management Committee Meeting, Austin, RTI
14-15 ATPA Board Mtg., and 2007 Grant Review, Austin, ATPA
19 Emancipation Day**
26-28 Design and Bridge Conference, San Antonio, DES
29 Commission Meeting, Austin

* = all agencies closed

** = skeleton crew holiday

*** = optional holiday (in lieu of any state holiday where a skeleton crew is required)

In Memoriam

Austin

James F. Todd
Civil Engineer
retired Feb. 1978
died Oct. 3, 2004

Dallas

Harold C. "Cheezy" Blazer
retired May 1987
died Oct. 15, 2005

Joe D. Fisher
Asst. Maintenance
Supervisor
died April 7, 2005

Houston

Timothy C. Colby
Engineering Tech IV
died Nov. 3, 2005

Harley Harper
Mechanic
retired
died Oct. 9, 2005

Betty Jo Moline
retired 1987
died Oct. 7, 2005

Francis H. Smith P.E.
Area Engineer
retired Dec. 31, 1976
died Oct. 1, 2005

San Antonio

Michael K. Anglin
Engineering Technician IV
died Sept. 19, 2005

Yoakum

Clyde R. Froebel
Maintenance Tech
retired Sept. 30, 1993
died Oct. 17, 2005

Motor Vehicle

Brian H. Clapp
Attorney III
died Aug. 20, 2005

backtracks



The car in the center is a Model A, the other vehicles are Model Ts. And, obviously, they are parked at a Magnolia service station. But the when, where and why of this image is a mystery we'd like to solve. If you have more information about this picture, contact Anne Cook at (512) 486-5838 or by e-mail at acook@dot.state.tx.us



The **backtracks** picture from the September 2005 issue of Transportation News was taken after Hurricane Carla in 1961, but the specifics have remained elusive.★



Looking Back...

The department set a new record in annual lettings, in excess of \$132 million, with two months remaining in the year. With this letting, the department topped by \$1 million the record total (\$131 million) achieved the year before.

— from **Highway News**,

Texas Highway Department newsletter, November 1955



125 E. 11th St.
Austin, Texas 78701

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