Department Assists in Hurricane Relief Effort

The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina left the Gulf Coast with thousands of buildings in disrepair and a network of highways in need of attention. Among the problems to be dealt with across Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama were flooded highways, debris in the roadways and structural damage of various degrees to roadways and bridges.

Damage was extensive and the need to get the highways up and running again resulted in a call from Mississippi to the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD). Through EMAC, the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, a disaster impacted state can request and receive assistance from other member states. Turning to EMAC, the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) called the AHTD for help.

Besides clearing debris from the roadways, attention had to be focused on assessing damage to bridges in the area.

Volunteering for a trip to Hancock County, Mississippi, from the AHTD staff were Senior Bridge Design Engineer Bryan Freeling and Advanced Bridge Design Engineer Dallas Stevens of the Bridge Division.

The team had no problems driving down to Bay St. Louis. Road crews had been through and moved fallen trees off of the road and cleaned up debris that had caused traffic problems. What proved to be a problem was finding their way around the area.

"The storm had destroyed all of the street signs in the area. We had city and county maps but we did a lot of doubling back and driving just to make sure we were in the right places," stated Freeling. "People had taken pieces of wood or the side of cars and painted addresses on them. Getting around in a strange place with no street signs is a lot harder than you would think."

Their first task was to inspect the Caesar Necaise Bridge near Bay St. Louis. The military felt it may have been damaged by the storm.

"I believe that is how the ball got rolling as they looked for volunteers to look at the bridge," Freeling added. "Our role was to first make sure how safe the Caesar Necaise Bridge was and then assess any damage and report it. After we looked at the bridge, we took on the job of looking at the rest of the State Aid bridges in the county, and approximately 13 miles of sea wall around Bay St. Louis and Waveland."

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Name/Job Title: Debra Meyer, District 9 Office Manager in Harrison, Arkansas.


Job Duties: I review all daily reports to make sure charges are made properly and stock is issued appropriately. I also review the monthly performance summary charges for accuracy. I interview, train, and cross-train employees and back up each position. I perform audits on all areas that have assets and inventory in our budget, including our Maintenance, Construction, Materials and Radio equipment. I represent the District and assist Internal Auditors when the District is audited. It is my duty to make sure we comply with Department audit policies as they relate to each position under my direct supervision. There are always research projects going on and I assist in many of those. Duties of all District Office Managers are quite varied and interesting, at times.

Favorite part of the job: The people in District 9 are awesome to work with. They are all like family. Everyone takes pride in their work and they’re ready to help out where needed. I enjoy getting out and doing my field audits. The supervisors I work with are always willing to do whatever is necessary to make sure we follow audit procedures. I like the diversity of my job and being able to help so many people. I enjoy researching things and solving mysteries, and in this line of work, there’s always something going on. I like my weekends, but I have never dreaded coming to work and have always been thankful to have such a job.

Family: In October, Doyle and I celebrate 22 glorious years of marriage. We have two sons, Cullen, 21 and James, 17. Although the boys are still in the home, they have so much going on in their lives, we almost feel the “empty nest” syndrome we hear about from others. We are the only ones on both sides of our family that live “up North”. The rest of our families live in and around Little Rock. Although we don’t get down there as often as we’d like, we always enjoy visiting them. Our families are important to us.

Hobbies: I enjoy reading. We have a large garden. Hiking and floating the Buffalo River or Crooked Creek are fun. I am involved in James’ schooling. Our church is important, and we spend a lot of time there and with our church family. I work with the Tiny Tots on Sundays and teens on Wednesdays. We are an active church and there is always plenty to do with serving the Lord.
One of those officers was PTL Jeffery Smith. “The damage was unbelievable,” he commented. “The people that were affected by Katrina went out of their way to thank us for being there.”

The hurricanes left thousands of people homeless and raised the problem of finding housing for storm victims. One solution was manufactured housing. The challenge was getting that housing to the storm area in a hurry. Responding to a request from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the AHP Permit Section identified specific routes for the quick transport of manufactured housing across Arkansas into the Gulf Coast area without permit. The AHP also waived permit fees for other over-sized/over-weight loads providing direct relief to the hurricane stricken area.

Arkansas Highway Police sent 16 officers to help in the recovery efforts. (l. to r., front) CPL Jeff Yates, CPL Andy Smith, PTL Jeff Smith, CPL Brad Perkins, CPL Bruce Harris, and CPL Tim Choate. (l. to r., back) CPL Darren Smith, CPL Mark Pyburn, CPL Tim Culver, SGT Martin Nunnery, PFC Greg Massey, PFC Louis Hatchett, CPL David Stovall, SGT Scott Fraley, SGT Doug Honey, and PFC Nick Phillips.

It was immediately evident that the number of evacuees was so large that many people would have to be sent to neighboring states, including Arkansas. As a result, camps were set up throughout Arkansas including Fort Chaffee in western Arkansas. AHP officers were called upon once again, this time to provide security at the camp. The AHTD also provided two self-contained light plants to Fort Chaffee.

As more evacuees arrived in Arkansas, Highway Police were called upon to also provide bus escorts from Fort Chaffee to other various camps in the area. The Department also located 46 buses and vans for use at Fort Chaffee for evacuee transport in the local area as needed.

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Fiscal Services: Jim Whitley, 4 months old, is the son of Wayne Whitley. Budget & Expenditure Controller, & wife Kimberly.

Planning & Research: Service awards were recently received by (front row, L to R) Alan Meadows, Division Head; 25 years; Steve Alexander, Administrative Officer III, 25 years; Velma Smith, Transportation Management Analyst II, 15 years; (back row, L to R) Cliff McKinney, Intermodal Transportation Planner, 20 years; Michael Schiltz, Cartographer IV, 25 years; Sheila Neighbors, Office Administrative Assistant V, 25 years; Paul Edwards, Section Head - Mapping & Graphics, 40 years; Steve Mitchell, Senior Transportation Planner, 25 years.

Planning & Research: Jaelun Thomas, son of Johnna Thomas, Transportation Management Analyst I, and husband Patrick, recently turned 3 years old.

District 1: James Eddie Tucker, District Caretaker, receives his 15-year service award.

District 1: Benford Adell, Single Axle Truck Driver in St. Francis County, receives his 10-year service award.

District 1: Receiving their 20-year service awards were (L to R) Charles Alldridge, Senior Mechanic; and Danny Glenn, Electrical, Plumbing & Mechanical Repairer.

District 6: (L to R) Sam Neal, Jr., Senior Mechanic in the District Shop Crew, receives his 15-year service award from Rex Sprlock, District Maintenance Engineer.

Maintenance: (L to R) Chuck Bishop, Communications Maintenance Specialist, receives his 20-year service award from Kevin Purifoy, Section Head, Communications.

Maintenance: (L to R) Ed McLaughlin, Communications Maintenance Specialist, receives his 40-year service award from Kevin Purifoy, Section Head, Communications.

District 10: Nathan Thomas Cooper, son of Randy & Alisa Cooper, was born September 14, 2005. He weighed 8 lbs., 2 oz., and measured 19.5 inches. Randy, Stockroom Supervisor, was honored with a baby shower by his co-workers.

Programs & Contracts: Nancy Jo Summers, Programs & Contracts Tech in the Project Development Section, recently retired with 29+ years of service with the Department. She is pictured at her retirement party, June 22, 2005, with (L) Frank Vozel, Assistant to the Director, and (R) Dan Flowers, Director.

District 1: Service awards were recently received by (L to R) Marilyn Johnson, Field Clerk II, 5 years; Juanita Mendez, Maintenance Aide I, 10 years; Jeff Kaiser, Construction Aide III, 5 years; Brian McElrea, Construction Aide II, 5 years; Alton Chapman, Backhoe/ Front End Loader Operator, 5 years; James Fingers, Backhoe/Front End Loader Operator, 5 years; James Leon, Jr., Maintenance Aide I, 5 years; Christopher Pruitt, Distributor/Roller Operator, 5 years; Veronica Richards, Rest Area Attendant, 5 years; and Mel Fowler, Motor Patrol Operator, 5 years.
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Many of the evacuees arrived in Arkansas with very little in the way of clothing. Pleas for donations from the public resulted in mountains of clothing and supplies. The next challenge was to determine how to get the supplies distributed to those in need.

The Arkansas Department of Emergency Management contacted the AHTD to request equipment and personnel to relocate pallets of donated goods to various evacuee camps. AHTD District 4 personnel responded by providing trucks and manpower, and during a three-day period, moved 535 pallets of goods to dry storage.

“One of the things we are most proud of is the timeliness of the response by our personnel,” stated District 4 Engineer Joe Shipman.

In the weeks to follow, conditions improved in the storm-stricken area and evacuees’ thoughts turned to returning home. At this point, the AHTD’s Planning & Research Division entered the picture.

The Public Transportation Section was given the responsibility for coordinating transportation requests from Governor Huckabee’s Task Force for several camps across the state. The AHTD worked through local area transit systems to meet those needs. In some instances, Planning & Research employees stepped in to handle special requests for transportation.

As AHTD personnel stationed down south wrapped up their duties, two things about the return to Arkansas worried them. One was finding gasoline in the gulf area and the other was the possibility of another hit from a hurricane...Hurricane Rita. Fortunately, they found one and not the other. Gasoline was available and Rita chose a different path to follow.

Director Flowers summarized the Department’s involvement in the hurricane relief area and here at home saying, “We are extremely proud of the effort of our staff and commend them for their hard work and long hours.”

AHP officer CPL Darren Smith summarized it this way, “The people of Mississippi are great and I was glad to represent my state, the AHTD and the Arkansas Highway Police in such a wonderful effort.”

The AHTD 2005 United Way Campaign is Underway!

With your help, United Way supports a large variety of health and human services organizations in Arkansas. Using a network of local charitable groups and volunteers, they reach citizens of all ages and from all walks of life.

Please consider helping improve the quality of life for those in need. Watch for your pledge card and return it soon!

The AHTD booth at the Arkansas State Fair was once again a great success! The Department appreciates the work and support of the employees who took time to staff the booth this year. Thank you!

Four-Day Work Week Ending

AHTD employees currently working the four-day work schedule will revert to the normal five-day, eight-hour work schedule beginning on Thursday, October 27th.
