

A photograph of a three-story red barn with a gambrel roof, situated on a stone foundation overlooking a waterfall. The barn has several windows and a sign that reads "War Eagle Mill". The scene is set against a clear blue sky with some bare trees in the background.

Arkansas HIGHWAYS

JANUARY 2014

A PUBLICATION OF THE
ARKANSAS STATE HIGHWAY & TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT | MAGAZINE

Frank D. Scott, Jr. Begins Term on Commission

NEW HIGHWAY COMMISSIONER
EMBRACES TRANSPORTATION ADVOCACY

ROAD TRIP:
Beauty Around
Beaver Lake

Highways from
Overhead with
AHTD'S AERIAL
PHOTOGRAPHER

SAFETY MATTERS:
Railroad Crossing
Improvements



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

I want to take a moment to thank our staff members who worked outside clearing the roadways during the ice and snow event in early December. Your efforts are always greatly appreciated as you leave home and family to work around the clock for the safety of our motorists. Driving on ice and snow is a challenge for motorists, and for our AHTD crews to be out on the roadways under those conditions clearing a path for them is to be applauded. I am very proud of your dedication and hard work. Your efforts are always top notch.

As many of you know, a photo of our icy roads hit the news and social media portraying us in a bad light. The Department elected to respond to the criticism with a news release issued to the media. We wanted the public to know that the AHTD has recently adopted new methods and invested in new equipment to address winter storms. Our crews battling the icy precipitation are always ready to give a 100 percent effort and I'm confident as we move forward it will be reflected in our results.

As you read this issue of *Arkansas Highways* magazine, we have begun a new calendar year. This is the time of year that we, as a Department, plan for great things in the months to come. Each member of our staff is an expert at what he or she does so there is every reason to believe that we will be successful in our roles this year as we work for a better transportation system in Arkansas. Whether it is out on a construction site or utilizing a computer program in an office, each of us now has another year of experience to make us better prepared for the challenges that we will encounter in 2014.

As the New Year begins, the Department finds many projects well underway. Arkansans placed their trust in us when they voted approval for the Connecting Arkansas Program and the Interstate Rehabilitation Program. They saw a need for improvements to our highway system and as a result, both of those programs are now a reality. The next twelve months will see an increase in construction activity for both programs. Many other projects will be getting underway across Arkansas as well. As always, it is important to remember that motorists and their safety are always job number one.

With the close of 2013, we said goodbye to our friend Frank Vozel, Deputy Director and Chief Engineer, who retired recently. The Department has benefitted from Frank's service for 43 years and he will be missed. I know we all wish him the best in the years ahead.

Again, I thank all of you for your hard work and here's hoping we enjoy many successes in the year ahead.



Scott E. Bennett

Scott E. Bennett
Director of Highways and Transportation

FRONT COVER:
Near Highway 12
War Eagle Mill
Rogers, Arkansas

BACK COVER:
Highway 187 Bridge
"The Little Golden Gate"
Beaver, Arkansas

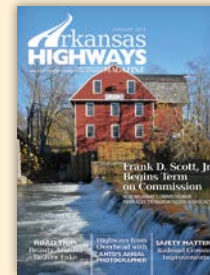
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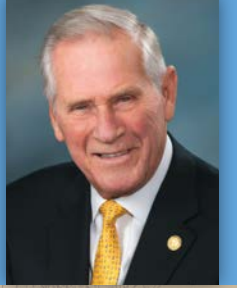
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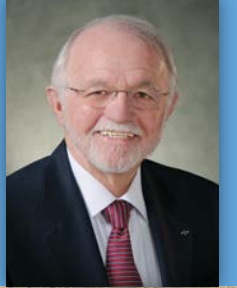


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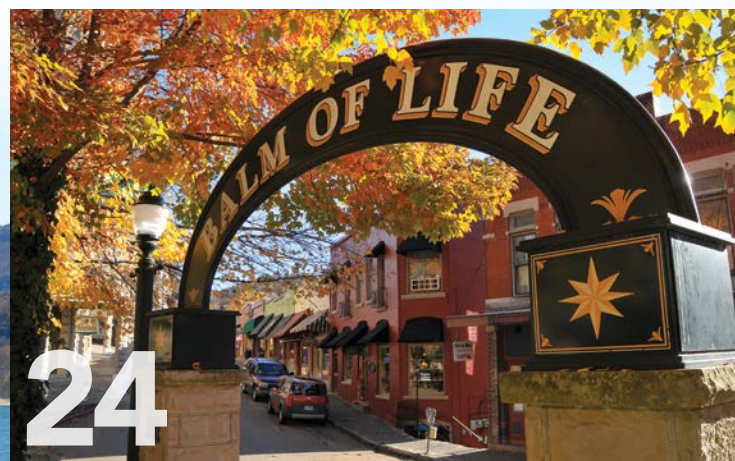
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FRANK D. SCOTT, JR.

**NEW COMMISSIONER
BEGINS TERM WITH AHTD**

FRANK D. SCOTT, JR. of Little Rock became the newest member of the Arkansas State Highway Commission when his appointment was announced by Governor Mike Beebe on October 17th of 2013. Scott is a resident of Little Rock and is a business development officer for First Security Bank.

Scott grew up in southwest Little Rock. He graduated from Little Rock Parkview and received a business degree from the University of Memphis. He began his career at Target Corporation as a distribution manager upon returning to Little Rock. In 2006, he joined Governor Beebe's campaign and then spent five years on the Governor's staff. He began as a policy advisor and ended his service on the Governor's staff as director of intergovernmental affairs and deputy director of policy. During that time, he obtained his Master's of Business degree with an emphasis on strategic management from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. In 2012, Scott joined First Security Bank as a commercial lender focusing on new business development and commercial lending.

(continued on page 6)



Scott spent time recently with Internal Communications Coordinator David Nilles to discuss his appointment to the Highway Commission and the future of Arkansas' transportation system.

NILLES: What were your thoughts when Governor Beebe approached you about serving on the Highway Commission?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: It was a complete shock. It was something that I didn't think was possible, nor did I think I deserved the opportunity at this point in time in my life. In my conversation with Governor Beebe about this opportunity, he said he saw something in me that Governor Bumpers saw in him years ago. He wanted to give me an opportunity just as Governor Bumpers had given him an opportunity when Governor Beebe was 26 years old and appointed to Arkansas State University System Board of Trustees. I have a great affinity for Governor Beebe. He is a great mentor and I have learned a great deal from him. Not only about politics and business, but about leadership as well. He is definitely a credit to my development and I really do appreciate him.

NILLES: You have worked on the Governor's staff and now you're in a position with First Security Bank. How do you feel your past experience and what you are doing now will help you as a member of the Arkansas Highway Commission in the years ahead?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Well, as you and I both know, transportation is extremely critical to economic development in Arkansas and across this country. I have been fortunate to have a career in both public policy and economic development and

had an active hand in both. Now, the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department is at the center of that. It is what we deal with on a daily basis, not only making sure that there are safe highways for the public to travel but also that there is a transportation system that can handle the delivery of goods and services. Employers and businesses are directly connected to the highway system and how well they can safely navigate our highway system increases the effectiveness and efficiency of the goods and services that they provide. So I really believe that my experiences in public policy and economic development will play well with the Highway Commission and how we set policy for the Highway and Transportation Department. I look forward to being a part of moving things forward to create a greater transportation system here in the State of Arkansas.

NILLES: What do you feel are some of Arkansas' most pressing needs when you consider the highway system five or ten years from now?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Director Bennett said it best when he said one of the most pressing needs is the funding of our highway system. We cover approximately 16,414 miles here in the State making Arkansas the 12th largest highway system in the country. However, we lag behind when you look at our amount of funding available and how we are funded.

As a finance guy, one of the things I want to do is determine innovative ways to finance our highway system. I want to consider ways that we can use our existing resources and determine how we can efficiently stretch that existing dollar. I know at this time we are doing less with less and I want to try to

I LOOK FORWARD TO BEING A PART OF MOVING THINGS FORWARD TO CREATE A GREATER TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM HERE IN THE STATE OF ARKANSAS.



(Left) Director Scott E. Bennett welcomes Commissioner Scott to the Highway Commission.

(Below) Commissioner Frank D. Scott, Jr. speaks to the crowd at his appointment.



do more with what we have and figure out how to find additional revenues to improve and enhance our existing roads and build new roads. You can only do that with proper funding and financing.

I am very thankful to the voters of the State of Arkansas for funding the half-cent sales tax and the Connecting Arkansas Program. That is going to allow us to rehabilitate highways and construct additional highways. I'm also grateful for what has been done with the GARVEE bonds and the second phase of the Interstate Rehabilitation Program and what that program is going to allow the Department to do. The voters have done great things by supporting those two programs.

I know we have an approximate \$17 billion gap in what we need to get done and what our budget will allow us to do. Our road system is a big part of our way of life in this country. We are going to always need to utilize our highways and that means we have to maintain them and properly improve the system as well. So we have to determine the best way to sustain our financing mechanism. I don't know if we are going to ever determine how to close that funding gap entirely

so we must focus on the efficiency and effectiveness of how we stretch our dollars and find new dollars.

NILLES: As a new member of the Commission, are you hearing from people across the State about what their most pressing needs are out there?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: I think everybody has an opinion about what the needs are on Arkansas' highway system. Yes, I am hearing things and I am also doing a great deal of listening. I'm trying my best to take my time to respond but be quick to listen. With just two months on the Commission, I still need to learn the culture here at the Highway and Transportation Department and understand existing policy in order to help sustain that policy or formulate new policy. So I am doing a lot of listening and learning now. But the great thing about learning is the staff at the AHTD. There is an infinite collection of wisdom or institutional knowledge here. The majority of staff members on board have been here for a long time. As an example, consider Frank Vozel, Deputy Director and Chief Engineer. He has been here 43

years and I just hate to know that he is going to be leaving us. But at the same time, to also realize that he has spent that time teaching those on the staff that are going to follow in his footsteps, that is impressive. Those individuals are ready to take the baton and continue forward. That is reassuring and a great comfort to me as a new Commissioner. There are great people in place to assist me, to help me learn and to execute policy.

NILLES: You addressed the funding gap earlier and the needs the Department has... what do you think the answer may be as we consider funding and the future of transportation in Arkansas?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: I have put some thought into this and am still trying to formulate other ideas on the matter. I don't think there is a silver bullet. I think there is always going to be a gap in funding. The question for us to consider is, how do we close that gap? And how do we do it in the correct way that is beneficial to the State, to the road user and to the Department and what we do on a daily basis as a business. *(continued on page 8)*

It's a must to be fiscally responsible. We must look at additional ways to finance improvements and development through the use of bonds. We also must consider tolls as an option to explore. Of course, there are positives and negatives to a toll as we have learned through toll studies already done. But I think everything should be on the table. We also must look internally as a business to determine where we can create more efficiency and effectiveness.

So those are the various things we are looking at. Everyone wants dedicated revenue. At this time, I still feel the same way I did at the news conference when Governor Beebe announced my appointment. I stated then that I believed that general revenue should be directed to education, health and human services, and our State prison system. Those are some core things that should receive that dedicated revenue. But I do think that just as voters were generous about the half-cent sales tax, as long as we do a good job of being a good service provider then the voters will be amicable when we come to them for the right things in regards to financing our road system. Take for instance the recent winter storm. I commend all of the AHTD staffers in their efforts to prepare for the storm and then be readily available out on the roadways to help those that had to get on our highways to reach their next destination. People recognize the good job that we are doing and I think they will respond accordingly.

NILLES: Are there any specific highway projects around the State that you would like to see come to the forefront now?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: At this time, I'm not ready to make a comment on specific projects, but I will comment that I want what is best for Arkansas. No matter

the corner of the State that we consider. Whatever we can do to create a better Arkansas with our transportation system is what I would like to see.

NILLES: Keeping in mind the Connecting Arkansas Program and the Interstate Rehabilitation Program, do you feel like we are headed in the right direction?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Oh yes, we are heading in a great direction. You look at the improvements being made at the Big Rock Interchange out in west Little Rock and the future plans for Highway 70, Highway 67 and the Broadway Bridge, to name a few. There are improvements everywhere you look. Both of these programs are good for Arkansas and a great use of public dollars when you consider the public need. I again commend those that are a part of this process and that helped to get us where we are today. Now we find ourselves doing a great job of executing these programs. Both programs are a big step forward.

NILLES: What is your impression of the staff members you have had an opportunity to meet and work with here at the Department?

I AM EXCITED NOT ONLY TO SERVE BUT ALSO EXCITED TO LEARN AND TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADVOCATE FOR ALL ARKANSANS.



COMMISSIONER SCOTT: I have been very impressed. I've been impressed with the responsiveness and the accessibility the staff displays. I've also been very impressed with the leadership of Scott Bennett. He is a great man who is willing to be open-minded, to listen and to learn the needs of others around the State. Whether they are Commissioners, business developers, county or city officials, Scott is willing to listen and that is a great characteristic.

NILLES: How do you think you are going to enjoy working with your fellow Commissioners towards the common goal of building a better highway system?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: I'm excited any time, as a young man, that I am surrounded by the wisdom of my fellow Commissioners. These guys are business leaders and public servants in their own right. I love being around a wealth of knowledge, knowledge such as you see displayed by the Highway and Transportation Department leadership. So I am excited not only to serve but also excited to learn and to have the opportunity to advocate for all Arkansans. ■

Construction progresses at the Interstate 430/630 Big Rock Interchange.



AHTD RECOGNIZED FOR 430/630 PROJECT



(L. to R.) Assistant Chief Engineer/Design Mike Fugett accepts the ASCE Outstanding Project of the Year Award from Jaysson Funkhouser, Past President of ASCE.

The Arkansas State Highway & Transportation Department was presented an award from the American Society of Civil Engineers — Arkansas Section (ASCE) recently for the Department's work on the Interstate 430/630 Big Rock Interchange in Little Rock.

The "Outstanding Engineering Project of the Year" Award was presented to the AHTD at the Chapter's annual conference held October 17th & 18th at the Wyndham Hotel in North Little Rock.

Construction crews are now in the third and final phase of construction at the Big Rock interchange. The three phases of improvements have included the widening of a ramp connecting Interstate 630 and Interstate 430, installation of multiple traffic signals, replacement of four existing bridge structures, widening loop ramp connections, construction of a bridge over Shackelford Road and construction of two flyover ramps.

The contractors on the final phase of construction are Manhattan Road and Bridge Company of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Weaver Bailey Contractors, Inc. of El Paso, Arkansas.

"We are pleased to receive recognition from the American Society of Civil Engineers for the Big Rock project," stated AHTD Director Scott Bennett.

"These are major improvements being done at one of the busiest interchanges in the State. To carry out construction while keeping traffic flowing through the interchange has been a challenge and has taken a great deal of planning. Everyone involved is doing a tremendous job."

Work on the \$150 million project is just over 80 percent complete. Crews are expected to be finished with construction in the spring of 2015.

Founded in 1852, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) represents more than 140,000 members of the civil engineering profession worldwide and is America's oldest national engineering society.

ASCE's mission is to advance civil engineering and serve the public good. In carrying out their mission, the ASCE advances technology, encourages lifelong learning, promotes professionalism and the profession, develops civil engineer leaders, and advocates infrastructure and environmental stewardship. ■



Arkansas' WELCOME CENTERS

BY DAVID NILLES

They're positioned at strategic locations across the State, welcoming motorists to Arkansas. Attractive and inviting places to take a break from the road. They are the State's thirteen Arkansas Welcome Centers.

The facilities provide a wide variety of services to travelers. Waiting inside each Center, a cheerful staff provides travelers with helpful information on what there is to see and do in the Natural State and how to get there. Of the thirteen Arkansas Welcome Centers, twelve are owned and maintained by the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department and are staffed by the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism. The reason for the timing of this article.... of those twelve facilities, eight have been replaced with brand new buildings over the past eleven years in a program kicked off by Governor Mike Huckabee.

On November 19th of 2013, the ribbon was cut on the last of the eight new Arkansas Welcome Centers to be built over that eleven-year period.



The brand new Helena-West Helena facility sits on the Arkansas side of the Highway 49 Bridge across the Mississippi River and reflects the unique Antebellum-style architecture of the city around it. As in Helena-West Helena, each new Welcome Center is a proud addition to the city it serves.

"It obviously takes a lot of people working together for a common goal on these Welcome Centers," AHTD Director Scott Bennett told a crowd gathered at the ribbon cutting for the new Center in Helena-West Helena. "Our Highway Commission worked with the Parks & Tourism Commission over eleven years ago to come up with a plan to upgrade these facilities. I think it has worked out well for all of us."

Back the clock up 11 years and many of the State's old Welcome Centers had seen better days. A study conducted in 1997 indicated the time had come to begin replacing eight of the old Centers with new facilities that would provide safe and clean locations for travelers to rest as well as to promote tourism in Arkansas.

Governor Mike Huckabee and the Legislature passed Act 345 of 2001 that approved the initial phase, replacing four of the Centers. In May of 2001, the Arkansas State Highway Commission passed a Minute Order approving those projects. The Atkins/Benham Firm of Lowell, Arkansas, was selected as the Department's architect and were charged with overseeing the development of the projects.

(continued on page 12)

WELCOME

At a news conference in the spring of 2002, Governor Huckabee announced plans for the first of the new Centers to be located at Texarkana and construction began soon after.

Act 1145 of 2003 was passed to begin the next round of Center improvements. Since 2002, new facilities have been constructed in Texarkana, Corning, El Dorado, Fort Smith/Van Buren, Lake Village, Blytheville, West Memphis and Helena-West Helena.

The new Centers incorporate design elements such as native stone and large timbers. Each includes more space for travel brochures, sitting areas and special exhibits. They also contain computer kiosks, multi-media space and picnic areas. A special feature of the Lake Village Welcome Center is a 3,700 square-foot multi-level fishing and observation deck overlooking Lake Chicot.

Commission Chairman John Ed Regenold also addressed the crowd at the Helena-West Helena ribbon cutting, "During my time on the Commission, we have approved over \$30 million to build eight new Welcome Centers. I'd like to say a word of thanks to the Directors of both the Highway and Transportation Department and the Department of Parks & Tourism for working together to bring us such great attractions."

Construction of the eight new Centers has been funded with Federal Transportation Enhancement Funds, stimulus money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and State matching funds.

Neighboring states have built new Welcome Centers recently. Tennessee opened a facility on Interstate 40 in Memphis. Texas constructed a new facility on Interstate 30 in Texarkana and Oklahoma has a new Center on Interstate 40 near Sallisaw. ■



Lake Village, Arkansas



Texarkana, Arkansas



Blytheville, Arkansas



Van Buren, Arkansas

CENTERS

ON THE MAP

SPENDING TIME WITH AN ARKANSAS HIGHWAY MAP CAN BE INTERESTING. THE FOLLOWING IS THE NAME OF AN ACTUAL TOWN IN ARKANSAS! HAVE YOU EVER VISITED HERE?



Located in the Ozark Mountains, just below the Buffalo River, is the community of Snowball. Found on Highway 74 in Searcy County, this town was once a thriving community.

Snowball got its start in the 1830s when John Campbell settled his family along Calf Creek. In 1886, land for a Masonic Lodge was purchased. Once constructed, the lodge also served as a school and a church. Lodge members decided to name the building after the county sheriff, Bill Snow. Residents afterward referred to the building as Snow Hall.

A growing community sprang up around the creek. In 1888, residents decided a post office was needed in the community. The local story goes that documents submitted to the postal service listed the community as Snow Hall. However, postal workers misread the name and it was recorded as Snowball.

By the 1900s, the town was thriving. At its peak, Snowball had around 500 residents. Unfortunately, a fire in 1945 destroyed much of the business district. Attendance in the local school declined over the next 20 years and soon the school was consolidated with nearby Marshall.

Today, there are few residents who have remained in the area. The storefronts have all been boarded up. However, the Masonic Lodge is still active. ■



Snowball, Arkansas
Circa 1937.
Photo courtesy of
Larry and Betty Renfroe.

A typical flight photographing a project site can last up to four hours. The AHTD uses a Cessna 206 airplane like the one shown here.



Nichols prepares her photography equipment prior to take-off.

ON THE JOB *with*

VALARIE NICHOLS

BY DAVID NILLES

VALARIE NICHOLS' JOB AS AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHER FOR THE ARKANSAS STATE HIGHWAY AND

TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT gives her a unique perspective on future highway projects. She spends a great deal of her time in a Cessna 206 airplane looking down at the site of future roadways from the skies above.

As the Department's aerial photographer, Nichols captures the images that are later used in pinpointing property boundaries, for indicating corridors for future highways, lining up construction limits for roadway design or perhaps used for displays at public meetings.

{ CAPTURING FUTURE ROADWAYS FROM THE SKIES ABOVE }

Photography is a passion for Nichols. She received a degree in studio art photography from Lyon College and does photography work in her spare time.

"I have a small home studio and I do senior photos, baby portraits, weddings and Christmas cards," Nichols states.

She has been at the AHTD for five years using her camera thousands of feet above where her office is in the Surveys Division and where she does her other photography work. In fact, her work takes her statewide.

"This isn't where I thought photography would take me but I am very pleased to be here," she comments

about her job. "I just happened to find a great job at the AHTD and I am very thankful for it."

The busy flying months for Nichols and AHTD pilot Harrell Clendenin are December through March.

"Those are the months when there are no leaves on the trees and you can capture better images of the ground," she comments.

The process of getting photographs from the camera, which is mounted on the floor of the airplane, to the surveyors and engineers who will eventually utilize them is a long one. It begins by determining what needs to be shot.

(continued on page 16)



Valarie Nichols, AHTD Aerial Photographer, and Harrell Clendenin, AHTD Pilot, stand with their trusty Cessna 206 airplane.



“We fly for two different purposes,” Nichols states. “We fly high altitude around 12,000 feet in order to take county photography. Those shots are used by the Transportation Planning & Policy Division. Sharon Hawkins, Section Head of Mapping & Graphics, tells us what is needed.

“We also do low altitude shooting flying at 1,200 feet for the Mapping Section. That photography is used for help in designing highway widenings, passing lanes, traffic lights and that type of design work. I determine what needs shooting for those purposes from the weekly staff minutes.”

Once she has a project location, Nichols uses a computer program named ASCOT

to determine a flight path. ASCOT provides information on planning the flight, navigation and camera triggering during flight.

With photography locations determined by ASCOT, it is time to take to the air.

“We use a Leica RC30 camera that is located behind the pilot and co-pilot seats,” Nichols says. “It uses a large format film measuring 10 inches in width. We purchase the film on 250-foot rolls. I occasionally have to work my way to the back of the plane to change the film rolls. It can be a tight squeeze moving around in the plane when we are up in the air.”

Nichols prepares the camera before takeoff to insure it is properly loaded and running correctly.

The camera automatically takes images approximately every ten seconds based on predetermined latitude and longitude points entered into the ASCOT program. Nichols sits in the co-pilot seat during flight and looks into a bomber site built into the floor that looks similar to a gear shift. It has a viewfinder, exposure control and a shutter button built in should Nichols want to make adjustments or take extra photos.

A typical flight photographing a project site can last up to four hours.



Aerial oblique photo of Highway 70 (Broadway Bridge) in downtown Little Rock.



Robert Kesi



Aerial overhead photo of Highway 70 (Broadway Bridge) in downtown Little Rock.

IN ORDER TO DRAW IN DETAILS ELECTRONICALLY, ROBERT KESL SITS IN HIS DARKENED OFFICE WEARING **3D GLASSES** AND USING A **HAND HELD CONTROLLER** SIMILAR TO ONE USED FOR A GAME CONSOLE.

“We usually fly between nine in the morning and two in the afternoon,” says Nichols. “That’s when the sun’s angles are the best for capturing images. The airplane holds four hours of fuel so we sometimes have to land to top off our fuel.”

To get all of the photographs needed above the project site, it sometimes takes multiple approaches over the same area to shoot it all.

Once Nichols and Clendenin are finished and back on the ground, the film is sent to Dayton, Ohio, for development.

“We used to shoot black and white film and develop it ourselves in our lab,”

Nichols adds. “Today, we color film and because it is a much more involved chemical process it is more cost-effective to send it off for development.”

When the film returns to the AHTD, Photogrammetry Technicians Randy Boyd, Robert Kesi and Don Halbert go to work on the new photos. The photos are visually checked for blurs and overlapping once they return. Randy Boyd then transfers the entire role of photos onto a large format scanner where it is turned into an electronic file. Copies of the electronic images go to a Department server so they are available for future Departmental use. In addition to use by the Department, aerial images of the counties are available for sale to the public for use in determining property lines, environmental issues or property improvements.

Once all of the photos are transferred to a digital format, Don Halbert and Robert Kesi then take the images and electronically “draw in” details on top of the photos such as ground elevations, trees, roadways, ditches and buildings located in the shot.

“It’s easier for our survey crews to use the images if we have detailed the elevations and structures,” she adds.

In order to draw in the details electronically, Robert Kesi sits in his darkened office wearing 3D glasses and using a hand held controller similar to one used for a game console.

After all of the details have been drawn in, classifications are determined. That process involves driving the project area to identify what the buildings are and what they are made of, for example, brick or wood frame.

“That type of information is helpful when our engineers consider what path a roadway will take and consider what structures may have to be taken out,” Nichols comments.

After everything has been drawn in and identified, the photos and accompanying information are sent to the Transportation Planning & Policy Division and the Surveys Division for use on highway projects.

If all goes well, Nichols’ work is complete and she and the crew move on to the next project.

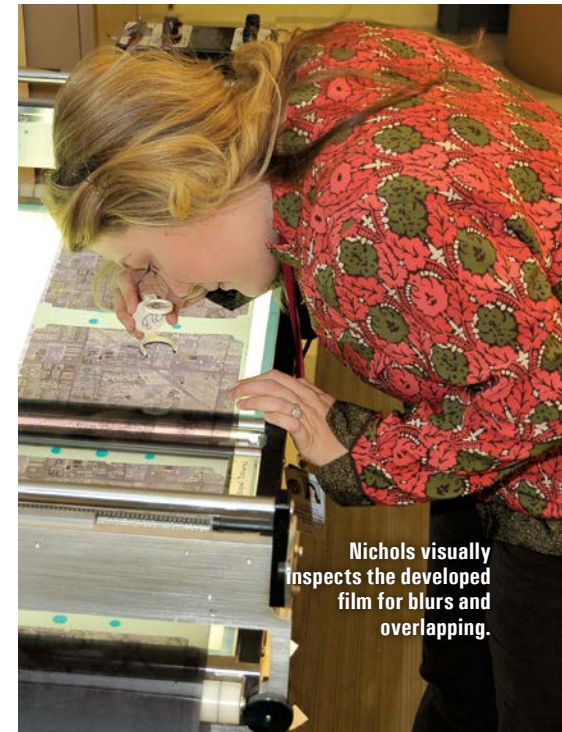
“It may take several flights to complete a project due to things like unexpected cloud coverage, camera problems or airplane mechanical issues,” Nichols adds.

Those things can be expected occasionally but don’t cause too much

of a delay. On a time scale, photography is taken approximately two years in advance of shovel work.

A map on the wall in Nichols’s office displays many of the areas of the state she has captured on film over the past dozen years.

With good weather and a list of future projects ready to be photographed, it won’t be too long before she is taking another bird’s eye view of many of the Department’s future highway construction jobs. ■



Nichols visually inspects the developed film for blurs and overlapping.



FRANK VOZEL RETIREES with 43 years of service

BY DAVID NILLES

FRANK VOZEL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR AND CHIEF ENGINEER, and a member of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department staff for 43 years, retired from the AHTD in December.

Vozel began his career at the AHTD in 1970 in the Traffic Division after completing college with an engineering degree from the University of Arkansas. During his career at the Department, he worked his way to Deputy Director and Chief Engineer, a position he held from December of 2006 until his retirement in 2013.

In an interview with Internal Communications Coordinator David Nilles, Vozel reflected on his career at the Department.

NILLES: What career direction was going through your mind as you were about to earn your engineering degree?

VOZEL: When I was close to graduating from the University of Arkansas, I called the Highway and Transportation Department and talked to Hugh Wadley, the Personnel Officer. Hugh came right up to Fayetteville the very next day to

interview me. I was offered a job within a day or two. I told my parents that I'd gotten a job at the Highway Department and would be starting right after I got out of school. They were very happy with the news. My parents kept telling me what a great place the Highway Department was to work. They told me I was very lucky to come to work here. After a few months, I was very pleased and realized they were right. I felt very lucky to be here and today I still love the Highway and Transportation Department.

After I'd been here a few months though, it dawned on me that my parents didn't know anything about the Department, they were just thrilled that I was going to work and getting off of their payroll! I told them back then that I would work here a year or two and then I would move on. Now 43 years later, I'm finally moving on.

NILLES: From your first year at the Department to your retirement this month, I'm sure you have seen many changes in the way we see highway designs become a reality.

VOZEL: Seeing the improvements in the actual design methods has probably been the biggest change I have experienced. When I got out of school, we didn't have calculators or personal computers to work with. Engineers actually used a slide rule to do many of their calculations. The only calculators we had were the old adding machines where you punch in the numbers

and pull the crank. So the job of designing was totally different because of the tools you had to rely on. Soon, hand held calculators and personal computers came along and it really changed.

Another area where changes have come a long way is in surveying methods. When I went to school, you had the old instruments that you took out in the field and would look through to do your surveying. Today, surveyors use what we call total stations, or electronic equipment.

Back at the office, most of the plans were being drawn by people called draftsmen. Today, everyone works with CAD software. There have been changes in so many areas.

NILLES: What about the big picture, have you seen changes in the transportation industry as a whole over the years?

VOZEL: When I came to work at the AHTD, the Interstate system was a relatively new idea, we were right in the middle of building the system. Our Department went about construction in a way that I think was very visionary on our part. We chose to go into urban areas and build those Interstate miles first. Many other states made the decision to begin building their share of the system in the rural areas first. Arkansas constructed the most difficult miles first inside those urban areas. As a result, when construction of the Interstate system was winding down across the country, Arkansas was one of the first states to complete their Interstate miles.



Vozel with former State Representative Sandra Prater



Vozel with AHTD Director Scott E. Bennett

Another change in the transportation industry over the years is the automobile itself. I think one of the biggest changes is the weight limits on vehicles. Many of our Interstate system miles were built for 56,000 pounds. Today, you have vehicles driving our highways at 80,000 pounds.

We were told in those days to design the Interstate system for 10% truck traffic. Now, there are places in Arkansas such as Interstate 40 near Forest City that have 60% truck traffic. So, the makeup of what is being driven on our roadways and how we travel have been big changes for the industry.

NILLES: After working in the Traffic Division for four years, you were promoted to Section Head of the newly formed Highway Safety Section. Can you address the issue of safety in the transportation industry?

VOZEL: The importance of safety in our industry has grown over the years. I would say that developments in that area are what I am the proudest of in my career. It's not because of my role, but just seeing the changes develop.

When I came to work here in 1970, the fatality rate for all roads, including city streets and county roads, was near 5.4 fatalities per 100,000 vehicle miles traveled. Today, that rate has dropped

to near 1.6 fatalities per 100,000 miles traveled. That is a tremendous drop.

If the fatality rate had stayed the same and had not dropped, and you had the same amount of traffic that you have today, you would have had 25 to 26,000 more fatalities from 1970 to the present. So we can say there have been that many lives saved during my career. There are a lot of reasons for that. Our highways are so much safer due to things like wider lane widths, wider shoulders, highway pavement markings and signage. We try to do design curves that are flatter with safer radii. We have crash cushions, barrier walls and guard cables now. There are all kinds of things we do differently.

You also have much safer vehicles that feature seat belts and safer glass to name a few things. In addition, today's driver is much safer. There are strict DWI laws and safety campaigns to encourage people to drive safer. When you look at all of these things together, you have a much safer roadway system. Of everything that I have dealt with in my career, I feel safety and how we have enhanced it are the most rewarding things.

NILLES: In 1994, you were promoted to Division Head of the Programs & Contracts Division. Did you feel a sense of accomplishment?

VOZEL: When I first came to work here and looked at the structure of the Department, I thought if one day I could

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“I BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND THAT HIGHWAYS ARE MORE THAN JUST ASPHALT, CONCRETE AND STEEL. IT IS SO IMPORTANT THAT WE DESIGN AND BUILD HIGHWAYS CORRECTLY AND ARE ABLE TO MAINTAIN THEM.”

make Division Head, that would really be something. And then I became Division Head of Programs and Contracts. That was quite an honor. At the same time, it was quite a challenge because I had a great deal to learn about that Division. I had never worked in Programs and Contracts and that first year was a hard year for me. I worked a good many extra hours that first year learning the ins and outs of that Division. It was one of the most challenging times in my entire career because I had to really educate myself. But it was a real honor to be put in that position.

NILLES: Several years later you were promoted to Assistant Chief Engineer of Planning and your learning curve grew.

VOZEL: I began to understand that highways are more than just asphalt, concrete and steel. It is so important that we design and build highways correctly and are able to maintain them. I learned that there are many other things that play a part in doing that. You have to be sure you have the right personnel in place and they have the equipment they need to do the job correctly. You have to be certain that you have the budget in place to handle all of the construction. If you don't have proper funding in place, you have to know how you go about getting your budget increased. As an Assistant Chief Engineer, those are some of the additional things you must consider. A big percentage of our funding comes from the Federal government. So it is important to know all you can about Federal aid, the Federal Aid Highway Act and all of the programs

that they have so you can be sure that your State gets its share of Federal Aid funds.

NILLES: Throughout your 43-year career at the Department, you have been involved in more projects than can be mentioned. What are some of the more memorable ones?

VOZEL: The first one I would mention would probably be the Interstate 430/630 Interchange in Little Rock. It is one of the largest highway projects we have ever taken on in the history of the State. We are making tremendous changes at that interchange and managing a high volume of traffic through there as we work. It is here in my hometown so I drive through it several times a day and can see the changes in construction being made day to day. It's hard not to get excited about that one. I would say I am the proudest of that project and have enjoyed working on it the most. It's probably given us more challenges than any of the others and I enjoy working with the team out there to solve those challenges. We have various team approaches on that project and when we come across a problem we get to work on solving it immediately.

Another thing I am proud of is the use of guard cables going up in our medians across the State. There are going to be a lot of lives saved because of those. In fact, we've already saved many lives. There are going to be a lot more saved. It's a very cost effective counter measure to enhance safety and I am proud of my involvement in that.

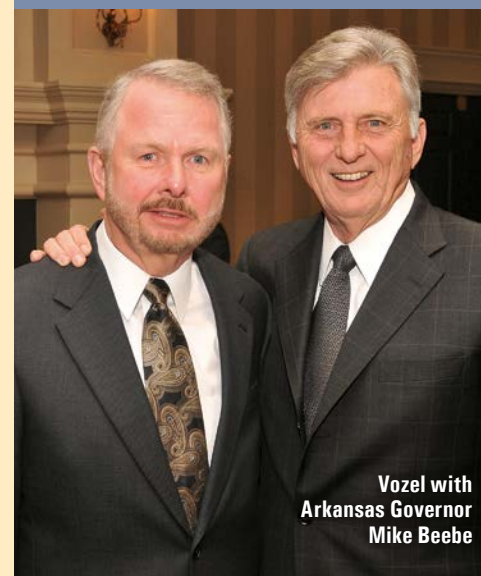
When I think back on what we've accomplished, it's not always just the big jobs or a single job by itself. Sometimes

it's highway corridors where you have to put several jobs together. For example, the Highway 226 corridor from Highway 67 eastward to Jonesboro. You have several jobs underway at the same time. Consider funding, you must get funding from one pot for improvements on one job and then funding for another. And then determine how you are going to get funding for the last one. You have to consider timing as well. One job may be in the grading and structures phase. Then you must determine when the paving phase is going to fit into the schedule. It's one thing to work all of that out for a small corridor like Highway 226, but when you have to do it for the entire State, that really gets involved.

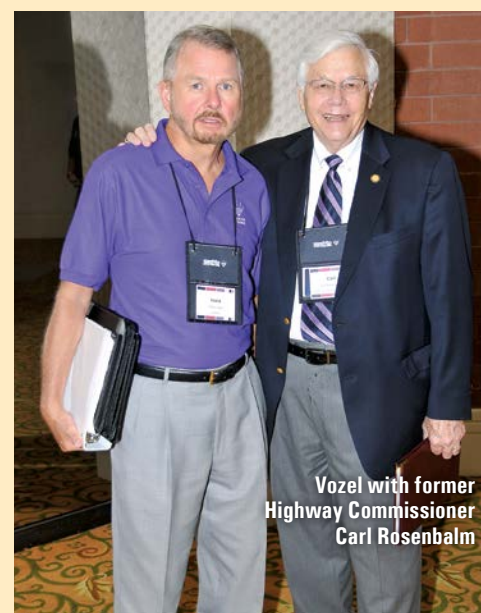
There are a lot of other things that are memorable. The two Interstate Rehabilitation Programs, the one in 1999 and the one we have underway now. There was a great need for those. It's a pleasure putting all of that time and effort together for a program that is rewarding and makes you feel like you've accomplished something good when it is all done.

Especially when it works and people notice. You can't imagine how many phone calls we get when people really notice what we are doing. Some of them are complimentary, but some of them are not. Either way, people are interested. We get a lot of good ideas from people that call us. They know more about their particular area than we do because they drive it every day and are familiar with the problems that may arise.

And along those lines, we have so much more public involvement in all of our projects now. There is a good reason for it.



Vozel with Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe



Vozel with former Highway Commissioner Carl Rosenbalm



Yes, we are required to do it, but, we get great information from people attending those meetings. We find out a lot that we didn't know. For example, you may be selecting a line for a new location and may discover from the public that there is a small cemetery along that line you have selected that is going to alter your plans. These are very helpful things.

NILLES: You were instrumental in the work on the Interstate 430/630 project in west Little Rock and mentioned the team approach used at that location. Can you address the new Maintenance of Traffic Review Committee that was formed?

VOZEL: The committee formed for the 430-630 project is probably one of the best things to happen on that job. With a project that complicated, you have so many challenges and one person can't solve all the problems that may occur. So we have a team including people involved in the design, the construction, materials and traffic. Staff from the Federal Highway Administration are involved and bring their area of expertise in. We brought in staff from the City of Little Rock that have helped with maintaining traffic signals. We have all of these disciplines that come together to talk about upcoming phases of the project. Every time we progress from one phase to another, our team meets to

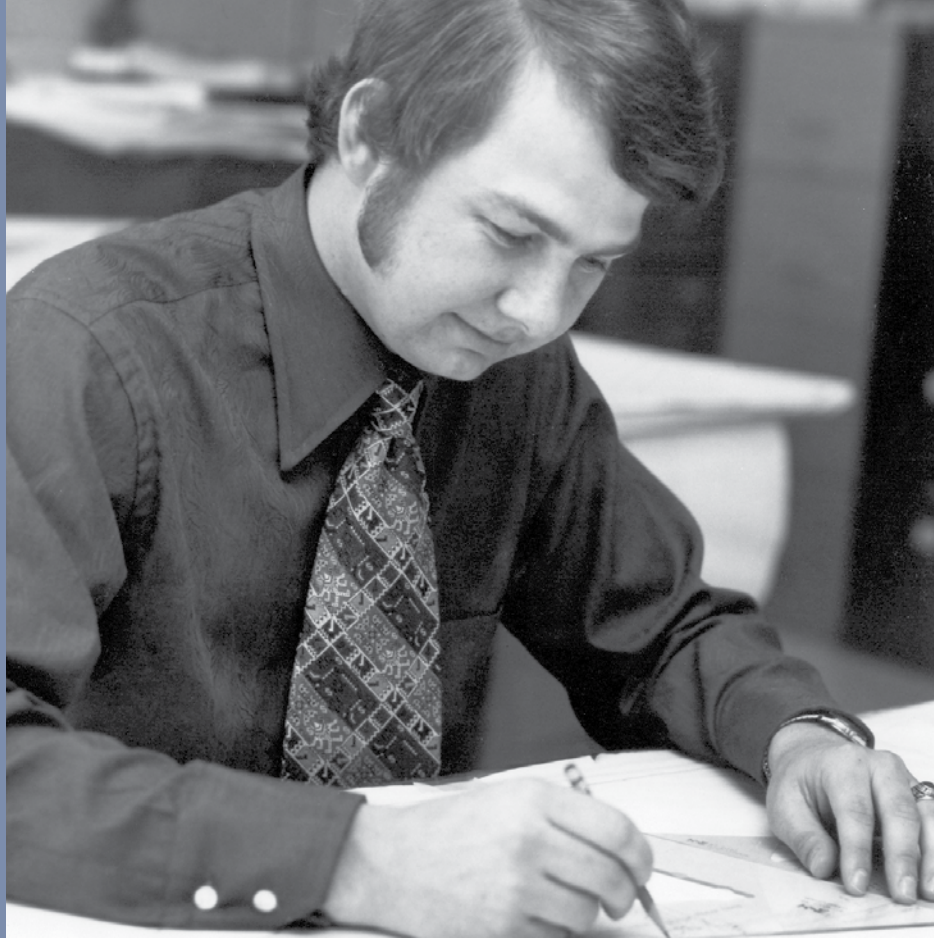
see what the challenges are going to be and consider all of the potential problems we may face. It has worked out very well and I do think that committees will be something the Department will use more of in the future, especially on the big projects.

NILLES: In 2007, you were appointed to the Arkansas State Board of Licensure for Professional Engineers and Professional Surveyors. How important is that board to the profession and AHTD staff?

VOZEL: The board is tremendously beneficial to the engineering field. It plays a big role for our engineers here at the AHTD. The Department employs more engineers than anybody else in the State of Arkansas. The board provides a barometer for where our engineers should be in the particular stages of their careers and explains to them the importance of being a Professional Engineer (PE). Looking at specific job requirements, when you reach a certain level, you have to become a PE. I think having a representative from the AHTD on the PE board helps the engineers here at the AHTD more than it helps the board. It goes both ways. It is a big help to the people on our staff.

NILLES: What advice would you have for a student that is getting out of engineering school and preparing to go to work?

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(L to R) Vozel with former Assistant Chief Engineer/Design Phil McConnell and Assistant to the Director Ralph Hall



and told my roommate what had happened. I said to him, this is a sign that no matter how bad things get, it can get worse! Right there and then, I changed my mind about quitting and decided to stick with school. If that bird hadn't have done that to my head, I might not have been here at all much less 43 years.

NILLES: Do you feel there is a legacy that you are leaving at the AHTD?

VOZEL: I don't think I'm leaving a legacy by any means. But I will tell you something and I am very sincere about this. There were years when I would see people leave or retire and I would think, how

are we going to make it without them? I can remember one time in 1987 we had an "early retirement" option. We lost our Director, our Chief Engineer, District Engineers and some Division Heads. We lost a tremendous amount of talent. Well a year after they were gone, I realized that even with their hard work and dedication, the work still got accomplished. When you have an organization that has over 3,400 employees like we do, when one employee leaves, you aren't going to miss their hard work. People are going to remember those people because they have been around a long time, but staff are going to come in that can do that same job and do it better. We are always getting better. Better education backgrounds and better experience. People take the best of things they have learned from various staff members they have worked with and it makes them even better. There are always people moving up the ranks that will do a great job... always. I've seen a lot of talented people come and go, but somehow the Department always seems to get even better. ■

fish too, so I'll do that and things around the house. I may come up to the Department and bug everybody now and then!

NILLES: Was there ever a time during your career that you thought about being something other than an engineer?

VOZEL: No there really wasn't. But I will share a story about what happened to me once that really made me stay on course. I was attending engineering school in Fayetteville. There I was right out of high school in Fort Smith. Of all my friends that I ran around with in high school, I was the only one that went on to school. My sophomore year, I was living in Fayetteville going to class. It was winter so I was going to school in the dark and getting out of class in the dark. On one cold winter day I was coming from class in the dark reflecting on what I had heard my friends had been doing back at home such as going places and dating. And there I was in school, struggling with no money. I made up my mind that night that I was quitting school and going home. I was going to pack my stuff, tell my roommate goodbye, and be home in two hours. No sooner had I made that decision than something hit me on the top of my head. Well, I had walked under a spruce tree by the Engineering Building where several birds roost. I felt the top of my head and realized a bird had targeted me. I couldn't believe the mess. I went home

Division I worked in. He really helped me, especially in the area of communications skills and writing.

Dan Flowers played a big role as well. And now, Scott Bennett has played a big role. Just working with Scott and being able to bounce ideas off of each other. It's hard to do things by yourself. You have to have somebody that you trust and respect that you can bounce ideas off of. You may have a great idea, but it may even be better if there is someone to add to the equation. I've always thought that I've done better because I was able to come together with Scott.

NILLES: What's next as you enter retirement?

VOZEL: I have no idea what I am going to do in retirement. One thing that I have done over the past six months, I have started a list of things that I need to get done. I can now start working on that list. I have some hobbies I want to spend more time with as well. I'm involved in horse racing and I'm sure I'll do more of that. I like to hunt and

I would have liked to have seen all the way through. We've gotten off to a good start. We have our on-call consultants and we have a program manager. It would be fun to be around when those two programs are completed just to see how much better the highway system becomes. I think it is very important to remember, considering all of the work we are going to do in those two programs; it's only going to enhance about four percent of our highway system. Even though it excites me to know there are going to be improvements in many areas, at the same time, what's going to happen to the rest of our system? And so I'm sure when this program is winding down, then the next person in this position is going to be wondering about the next program. It's a never ending deal.

NILLES: Who has influenced you the most during your time here?

VOZEL: Right off the bat, I think of Jim Barnett. When I came to work, he was the Assistant Division Head of the old Traffic

VOZEL: One thing we try to impress on young engineers just getting started is that they should have good communications skills. When you go into engineering, you have to study a lot of math and science in school. That is a big part of it. But you have to be able to communicate if you are going to do anything. You have to be able to communicate face to face and on paper. In years past, a lot of our engineers were coming out of engineering school and many of them lacked that skill. I think there have been improvements in that area and that is very important.

NILLES: Are there any projects that you would like to see become a reality over the next ten years that are still in the planning stages?

VOZEL: The first thing that comes to mind is the rehabilitation of the Interstate system. As many people know, we just began the new program. I would have liked to see that through. I think the Connecting Arkansas Program is something else that



Vozel with Little Rock Mayor Mark Stodola



Vozel with former Highway Commissioner Prissy Hickerson



WEEKEND ROAD TRIP

AROUND



Pea Ridge National Military Park



Beaver Bridge



Eureka Springs

BY DAVID NILLES

BEAVER LAKE

The northwest corner of Arkansas offers so many things for visitors to do that you could stay a week and still have more to discover. This weekend road trip centers around one of the jewels of northwest Arkansas, Beaver Lake. We will circle the lake on Highways 12, 23, 62, 127 and 187 following its shoreline in Benton, Carroll and Madison counties.

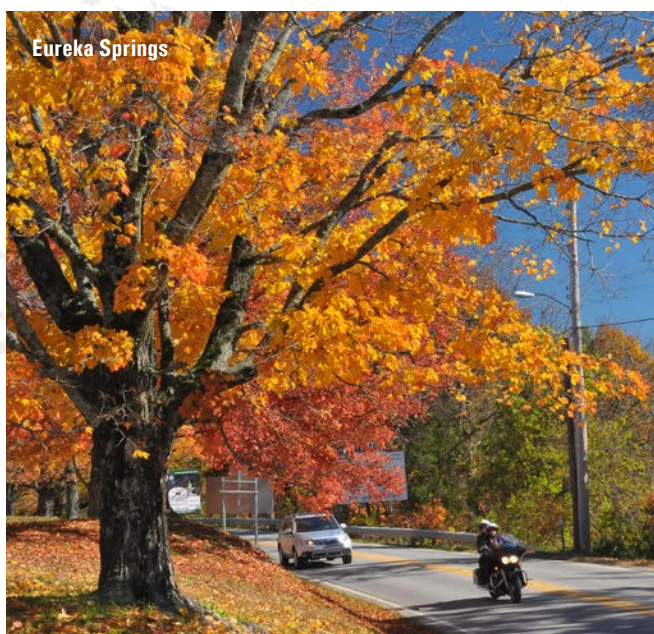
Beaver Lake has over 480 miles of shoreline and looking down on the lake from the hills above leaves quite an impression. It is easy to see why the lake is a paradise for fishing, swimming, boating and camping. Because the water is so clear, it is also a favorite lake for scuba divers and attracts divers from neighboring states. Recreational facilities can be found surrounding the lake in every direction. The lake was formed by a dam across the White River in 1960. The dam site features an overlook that provides a great overall view of the area.

Our road trip around Beaver Lake itself begins in Rogers. Heading east out of town on Highway 62, the first stop on the journey is a historical one, **Pea Ridge National Military Park**¹. It is at this Civil War battlefield that 26,000 Confederate and Union soldiers clashed in 1862. The aftermath of the battle gave Union forces total control of the State of Missouri. Today, the park boasts being the most intact Civil War battlefield in the country. Driving tours begin at the park's Visitors Center. A brochure tells the story at 11 stops as you follow Telegraph Road

through the park. The road itself was built in 1838 and linked Springfield, Missouri, with Fort Smith. A highlight of the tour is a stop at Elkhorn Tavern. The tavern served travelers on Telegraph Road before the war came to Arkansas. During the war, the tavern was used as a supply house and then as a field hospital. Picnic facilities are found on the grounds. The park is 20 minutes east of Interstate 540 at 15930 Highway 62. On leaving Pea Ridge, continue around the north side of Beaver Lake on Highway 62. At the intersection with Highway 187, turn left and travel five miles to the town

of Beaver. Situated at the bottom of the hill is the **Beaver Bridge**². Known as "the Little Golden Gate of Arkansas," the one-lane bridge over the White River is the last suspension bridge of its type in the State. With its deck made of wooden planks, the bridge measures 554 feet in length and was built in 1949. Traveling across the bridge is a unique experience as you listen to the "clickety-clack" of the planks below the wheels. A walking trail along the river can be found at the foot of the north side of the bridge. The Beaver Bridge was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. Leaving Beaver on Highway 187 South, it is just a short drive south to the town of **Eureka Springs**³. Nestled in the Ozark hills, this town is well known for its Victorian architecture, its arts and its many shops. Make plans to spend the night since there is plenty to do in the area. Old historical hotels and bed & breakfasts make for unique headquarters during your stay.

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Eureka Springs



Thorncrown Chapel

THE AMERICAN
INSTITUTE OF
ARCHITECTS PLACED
THORNCROWN
CHAPEL

FOURTH ON ITS
LIST OF THE TOP
BUILDINGS OF
THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY.

A visit to Eureka Springs begins with a stroll downtown on Spring Street and Center Street. Step into the many shops and restaurants leading up the hill for a unique shopping experience. Also take time to take one of the historical tours around downtown Eureka Springs as they offer a glimpse into the town's past. The entire downtown area is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

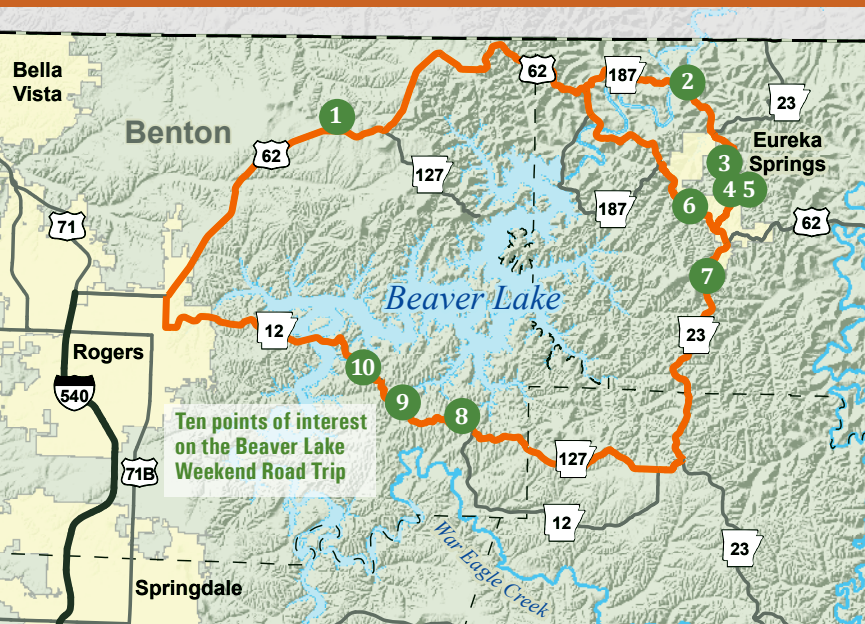
Popular tourist destinations on the outskirts of town include the **Christ of the Ozarks**⁴ statue. At over seven stories tall, it is the second largest statue of Christ in the world. The statue is made of steel and mortar. At the same location is **The Great Passion Play**⁵. It is the country's highest ranked outdoor drama. Over 200 actors and animals bring the "Greatest Story Ever Told" to life. To arrive at the statue and the Passion Play, take Highway 62 East out of Eureka Springs and follow it for a couple of miles to Passion Play Road.

Five miles outside of town on Highway 62 is the **Thorncrown Chapel**⁶. A short, paved trail through the woods leads to this architectural jewel. The chapel features over 6,000 square feet of glass and 425 windows. It was designed by well-known architect E. Fay Jones. Over six million people have visited this

peaceful sanctuary since it opened in 1980. It has won numerous architectural awards and recently, members of the American Institute of Architects placed Thorncrown Chapel fourth on its list of the top buildings of the twentieth century. The chapel is located at 12968 Highway 62 West.

Yet another unique experience awaits at the **Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge**⁷ just outside of town. This non-profit organization provides a refuge on 459 acres for abandoned, abused and neglected big cats with an emphasis on lions, tigers, leopards and cougars. A tour of the wildlife refuge is an opportunity to get close up with the animals that now call this home. Founded in 1992, the refuge currently provides a caring and nurturing home to 125 big cats and seven bears, among other animals. Most of them have been rescued from private ownership. For a unique lodging experience, stay overnight in one of the refuge's safari lodges and fall asleep to the sound of roaring lions and tigers. Of note, the refuge offers an internship program for students desiring more experience in the care of exotic cats and animals. Intern applicants are college graduates with degrees in the fields of zoology, biology, animal

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The Great Passion Play



Christ of the Ozarks



FOR A UNIQUE LODGING EXPERIENCE, STAY OVERNIGHT IN A SAFARI LODGE AT TURPENTINE CREEK WILDLIFE REFUGE AND FALL ASLEEP TO THE SOUND OF ROARING LIONS AND TIGERS.



psychology, veterinary sciences and other animal related areas. Students from Texas A & M, University of Illinois, University of Nebraska and Brigham Young University to name just a few, have completed internships at the facility. A rewarding time to visit the refuge is at feeding time late in the afternoons. To reach the refuge, drive seven miles south of Eureka Springs on Highway 23 and turn left at 239 Turpentine Creek Lane.

On leaving Eureka Springs, the drive south on Highway 23 provides scenic views of the surrounding hillsides east of Beaver Lake. At the intersection with Highway 127, turn right and begin the journey west towards Rogers.

The first stop on this leg of our road trip is **Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area**⁸. This is the Arkansas State Park system's largest park at 12,056 acres. The park is managed jointly by Arkansas State Parks, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

Begin your stay at the park's Visitors Center which features wildlife exhibits and interactive kiosks. Then take time to walk on one of a wide variety of trails through the woods. Of note for gun enthusiasts, the park also includes the only public outdoor shooting range in the State with a bullet trap. The park's Visitors Center is on Highway 12 near the junction with War Eagle Road.

After visiting the State Park, continue west on Highway 12 and it's just a few miles to **War Eagle Mill**⁹, the only working grist mill in Arkansas. The setting couldn't be prettier. Walk across the bridge over War Eagle Creek for some scenic photos, then step inside the mill and visit the gift shops. Tours offering a historical overview of the mill are offered daily. If you're hungry, stay for a home-cooked breakfast or lunch in the Bean Palace Restaurant. Be sure to return in October for the most popular craft fair in

the State, the War Eagle Mill Fall Arts & Crafts Fair. The Mill is located at 11045 War Eagle Road.

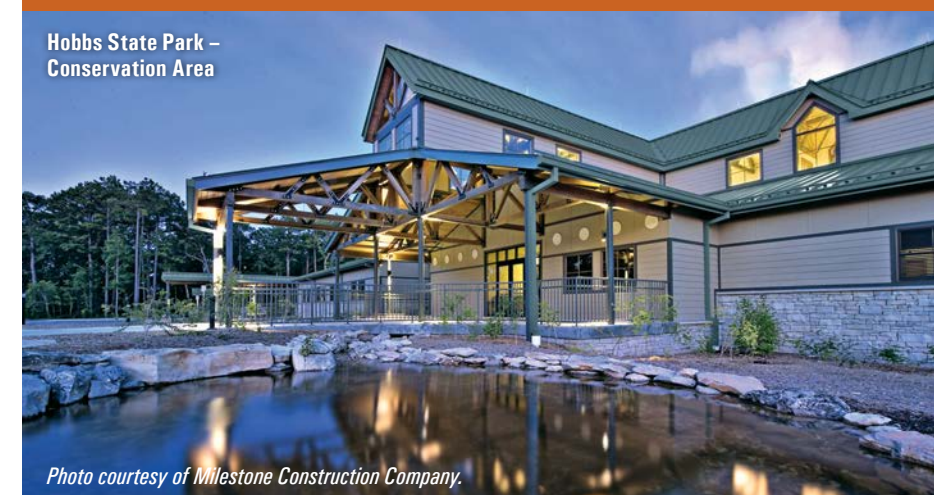
The final destination on the south side of Beaver Lake is the War Eagle Cavern.

War Eagle Cavern¹⁰ opened to the public in 1978. However, its secluded site was used by the Native Americans hundreds of years before the first settlers came to the area. Guided tours of the cave are offered daily. The short walk down to the cave entrance from the trading post includes a view of Beaver Lake. Inside the cave, you'll take a half-mile easy walk on a wide open path. A tour guide takes visitors through explaining cave formations and sharing stories about Native Americans and other notorious visitors who used the cave in days gone by. The one-hour tour ends with an incredible view of the waterfall in the newly expanded Rimstone Dam Room. The cavern is located off of Highway 12 at 21494 Cavern Road, approximately five miles from War Eagle Mill.

From the cavern, its just 15 miles back into the town of Rogers and the end of this trip around Beaver Lake. With so much to do, chances are it won't be your last trip to the area. ■

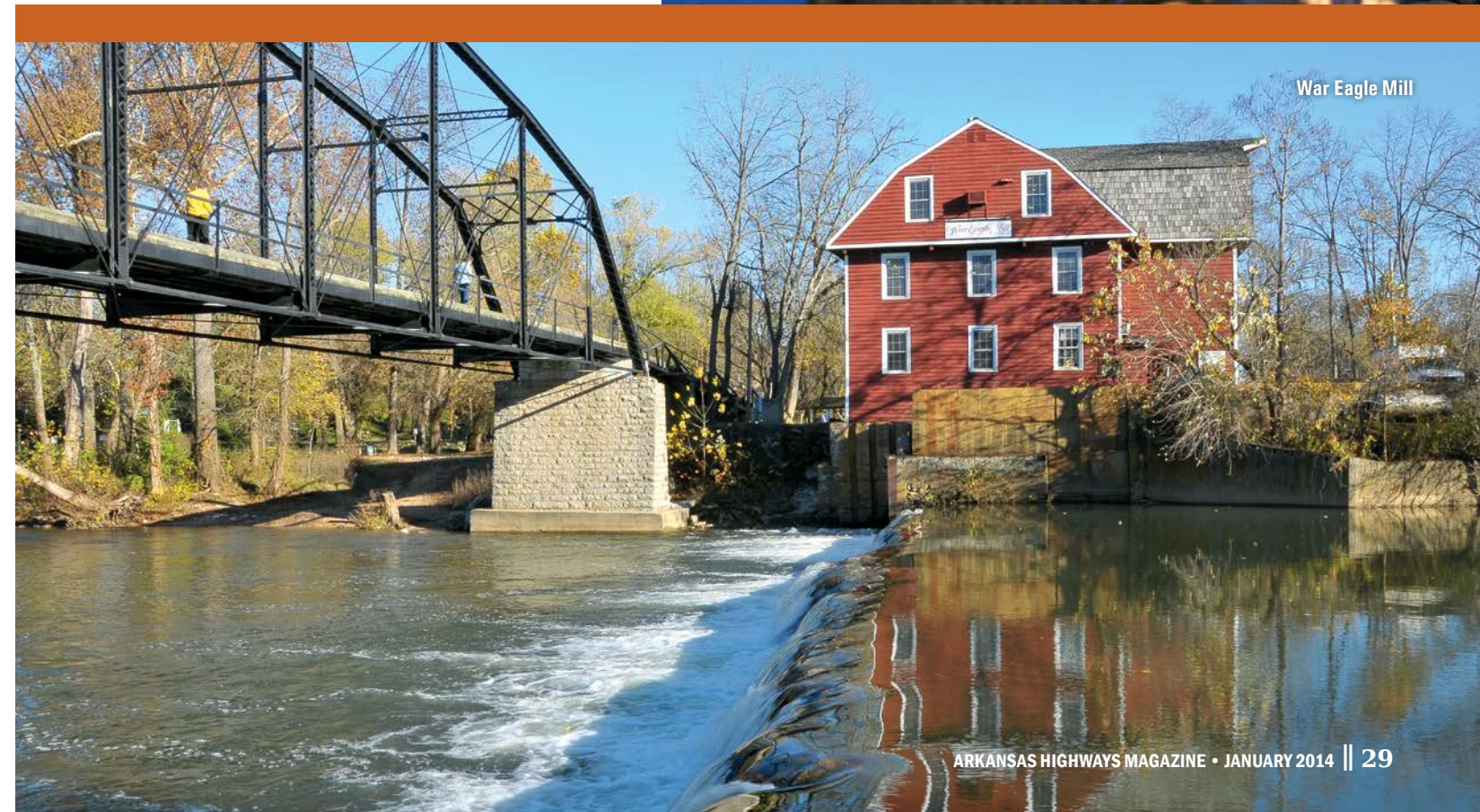


War Eagle Cavern



Hobbs State Park - Conservation Area

Photo courtesy of Milestone Construction Company.



War Eagle Mill



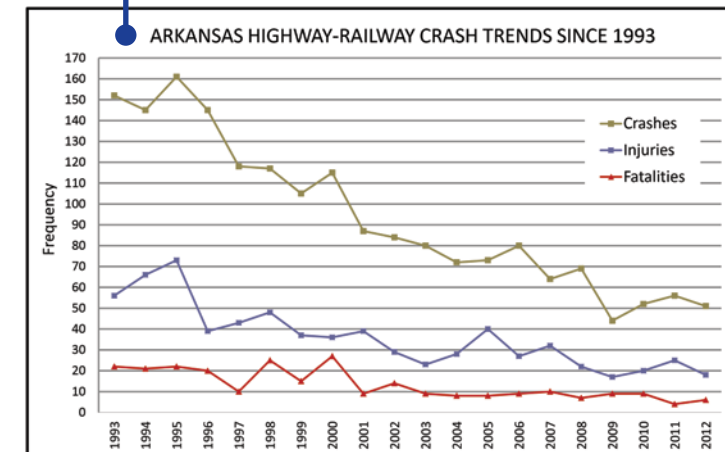
Multi-track surface on King Street in Lewisville, Arkansas.



IMPROVING ROADWAY SAFETY AT RAILROAD CROSSINGS

BY ANDY BREWER AND STEVE WESTON

Arkansas highway – railway crash incidents have trended downward since 1993.



Railroads in the United States still play a major role in the transportation of freight and passengers from one destination to another today. As an example, North American railroads operated 1,471,736 freight cars and 31,875 locomotives in 2011. Passenger rail travel has declined over the years, yet there has been growth in commuter rail travel. With so much riding on the rails, safety is always at the forefront of the industry.

In 2012, 51 crashes in Arkansas involved a motor vehicle and a train, resulting in six fatalities. This is down from 22 fatalities 20 years ago, a 73 percent decrease. This decrease in fatalities is significantly greater than the decrease of all motor vehicle fatalities during the same time period. Much of this decrease can be attributed to the Railway-Highway Crossing Program (RHCP), which is a Federal-aid program

that has been administered under the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in various forms since the 1970s. This program is managed through the Traffic Safety Section in the Transportation Planning and Policy Division of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department.

Although only approximately one percent of all of roadway fatalities in Arkansas involve a train, railroad crossings still present serious safety concerns and are a crucial component of the Arkansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan and the movement Toward Zero Deaths. The average locomotive weighs 200 tons and some can weigh up to 6,000 tons. Trains always have the right of way at road crossings, and can travel up to 60 mph or more. A 100-car train traveling at 60 mph can take up to one mile to come to a complete stop. For these reasons, addressing safety at railroad crossings is critical.

There are **THREE PRIMARY IMPROVEMENTS** that can be done through the RHCP at existing railroad crossings:

1. Upgrade traffic control devices;
2. Replace at-grade crossings with a grade-separation; or
3. Close the crossings entirely.

There are currently 2,463 public at-grade railroad crossings in Arkansas, 413 of which are on the State Highway System. Of those 2,463 crossings, 866 are actively protected (crossings where an oncoming train activates flashing lights, which can also include gates). The remaining 1,597 public at-grade crossings are passively protected with crossbuck signs only. It is at these 1,597 crossings where most of the focus of the RHCP lays.

In an effort to prioritize at-grade crossings for improvements, the AHTD

calculates a Hazard Rating (HR) for each crossing. The HR of each crossing, which can range from near 0 to 100, is calculated based on the number of trains per day, average daily motor vehicle traffic, the number and type of tracks, and the number of crashes in the last 15 years. This allows the Department to objectively compare the relative "hazard" potential of one crossing to all other crossings in the State. A list of at-grade crossings with high HRs is developed each year.

Once a list of at-grade crossings with high HRs is developed, on-site meetings with railroads, District personnel, local officials and FHWA representatives

are scheduled by the Railroad Crossing Coordinator in the Traffic Safety Section for further investigation. Sometimes members of the general public attend. The team discusses the crossing in detail and notes any circumstances or concerns related to safety such as site distances, visual obstructions, high numbers of school busses or heavy trucks use. The end result of these meetings is a recommendation for possible safety improvements.

If a recommendation moves forward for approval by the Arkansas Highway Commission and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), then a project is developed in coordination with the

appropriate roadway authority (if the crossing is on a local road), the railroad, and the Department. Improvements can range from simple modifications of existing signage to more complex improvements such as changes in the crossing geometry. In extreme cases, where other improvements prove impractical, a grade-separation or overpass can be constructed. In some instances, the Department will work with a local community and railroad to develop a corridor plan to address safety where numerous crossings in close proximity to each other exist. The most common project consists of the installation of flashing lights with gates. The Department typically coordinates

10 to 20 such safety crossing improvement projects each year with railroads as part of the RHCP.

The Department also addresses railroad crossing safety through other means. The AHTD participates with Operational Lifesaver, a non-profit organization providing public education programs to address safety on railroads and railroad crossings. Operation Lifesaver sponsors several Highway-Railway Grade Crossing Collision Investigation courses in Arkansas each year where local law enforcement officers and emergency responders are trained in proper procedures for reacting to railroad crossing crashes.

The Department also deals with

crossing issues related to train blockages and crossing surfaces, which can be safety concerns. Blocked crossings can impede emergency vehicle access to certain neighborhoods while rough crossings (or crossings with a "hump") can hinder certain vehicles from crossing.

Although significant improvements to railroad crossing safety have been made in Arkansas in recent years, there is still more work to be done. Increases in motor vehicle traffic and train traffic as the economy improves will increase conflicts at crossings. Addressing railroad crossing safety is one more effort to bring Arkansas one step closer Toward Zero Deaths. ■

RAILROAD CROSSING FACTS

▶ The Department received approximately \$3.8 million through the RHCP in FY 2013.

▶ In addition to the current 2,463 public at-grade crossings, Arkansas has 1,273 private at-grade crossings and 321 public grade-separated crossings.

▶ The Department is currently updating its State Rail Plan and working on a High Speed Rail Plan. AHTD is the designated State rail planning agency for Arkansas.

▶ The Railroads are responsible for the maintenance of all traffic control devices in its right of way and the roadway surface between the ends of the crossties.

▶ The roadway authority, such as AHTD, is responsible for maintaining the approaches leading to the crossing.

▶ The AHTD operates under the Railroad Safety and Regulatory Rules promulgated by the Arkansas Highway Commission by Act 726 of 1993 and amended by Act 668 of 1995.

▶ Steve Weston is the Railroad Crossing Coordinator at AHTD.



Daffodil Days

OUT & ABOUT

CALENDAR OF EVENTS AROUND THE STATE

As you travel Arkansas over the next two months, consider checking out some of the listed events. Our State is full of interesting things to do, no matter which highway you find yourself driving. For additional event listings, check Arkansas.com/events.

* **SHATNER'S WORLD:** William Shatner... a one man force of nature delivers a larger than life performance complete with his laugh-out-loud humor, signature storytelling and musical selections in his inimitable style. Through anecdotes, songs, jokes, and even some poignant moments, you will experience William Shatner's phenomenal path from classically trained Shakespearean actor to cultural icon, brilliantly creating the larger-than-life and most important character he has ever played, William Shatner. • JAN. 11

* **HELLO DOLLY:** Two-time Emmy Award and Golden Globe Award winner Sally Struthers brings Hello Dolly to the stage in Little Rock. Hello Dolly has enjoyed international success, three Broadway revivals, an Oscar-nominated movie and ten Tony Awards. • JAN. 14-15

* **LANTERNS!:** A magical weekend designed to delight children and adults alike. LANTERNS! celebrates the first full moon of the lunar year with a profusion of lanterns, entertainment and gourmet treats. Lighted walking paths and fire pits along the lake lead park visitors into winter woodlands to discover vistas representing a variety of years, cultures and locations. • FEB. 14-16

* **DAFFODIL DAYS:** Garvan Woodland Gardens in Hot Springs boast a total of around 200,000 daffodils in various shades of yellow and white scattered throughout the Gardens' paths this time of year. • FEB. 15 - MAR. 15

JANUARY 11 *
SHATNER'S WORLD
Walton Arts Center
Fayetteville, AR

JANUARY 14 - 15 *
HELLO DOLLY
Robinson Center Music Hall
Little Rock, AR

JANUARY 15
FULL MOON KAYAK TOUR
Cane Creek State Park
Star City, AR

JANUARY 24 - 26
EAGLES ET CETERA
DeGray Lake Resort State Park
Arkadelphia, AR

FEBRUARY 2
WINTER DISCOVERY LAKE CRUISE
Pinnacle Mountain State Park
Little Rock, AR

FEBRUARY 14 - 16 *
LANTERNS! FESTIVAL
Wildwood Park
Little Rock, AR

FEBRUARY 15 - MARCH 15 *
DAFFODIL DAYS
Garvan Woodland Gardens
Hot Springs, AR

FEBRUARY 22
BOYS CHOIR OF KENYA
Arkansas State University
Jonesboro, AR



Shatner



Lanterns!



Struthers

CONSTRUCTION

CORNER



Two projects in Conway and Pope Counties are rehabilitating over 25 miles of Interstate 40.

The first project was recently completed. It improved 18.5 miles of the Interstate and rehabilitated four bridges. The improvements begin at Plumerville and extend westward to Atkins. The project was awarded to Rogers Group Inc. of Nashville, Tennessee, in February of 2013 for \$12.3 million and was completed in October of the same year. A cable median barrier is also a part of the project.

The second project is reconstructing 7.2 miles of main lanes east of Russellville and rebuilding four bridges. The improvements begin at Mill Creek Road and continue westward to Highway 331. The project was awarded to Blackstone Construction, LLC of Russellville for \$42.4 million. Work began in January of 2013. Improvements are approximately halfway complete and should be finished in the spring of 2015.

The two projects are part of Arkansas' second Interstate Rehabilitation Program. In November of 2011, voters overwhelmingly approved the sale of up to \$575 million in Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle (GARVEE) Bonds to fund over \$1 billion in improvements. Plans call for the rehabilitation of over 450 miles of the State's 656-mile Interstate highway system in the coming years. ■

Dear AHTD,

I wanted to compliment you on your Weather Condition Map on your website. It is very clear and concise and is updated regularly. My District uses the site to track the weather as it moves across Arkansas to help predict which parts of our District will be affected and when. I am sure that the travelling public in Arkansas is very appreciative to have such a useful tool at their disposal during inclement weather. We in Mississippi are certainly pleased that you do such a good job as the benefits spill over to us as well.

Thanks again,

J. Kevin Magee, P.E.
MDOT District Engineer
District III – Yazoo City, Mississippi

FLAT TIRE HELP

On November 20, 2013, my wife was returning from Memphis to our home in Bauxite. As she entered West Memphis, her vehicle had a flat tire. She was able to pull into the weigh station. Arkansas Highway Patrol Officer Matthew VanWinkle was at that location and changed her tire. I want to thank Officer VanWinkle for helping my wife make it home safe. Office VanWinkle acted in a professional and courteous manner during their contact.

Detective Richard Kindervater
 Little Rock Police Department
 Bauxite, Arkansas

EXCELLENT WORK

Just a note to compliment your milling and lay down crew for the excellent work with a very difficult traffic problem on Ramsey Mountain. This project deserves 100 percent "OK" for all involved.

With Warmest Regards,
Howard
 White River Bituminous, Inc.
 Batesville, Arkansas

IDRIVEARKANSAS FEEDBACK

This (website) has been needed for a long time. Thank you for tax dollars well spent. Let's hope this system will stay for a long time. Thank you.

Tom Gramlick

IMPRESSIVE RESURFACING

As a frequent traveler between Saline County and downtown Little Rock, I wanted to provide some positive feedback on the efforts of AHTD.

The resurfacing of I-30 on the southern Little Rock loop is very impressive. The surface in that section remains amazingly well drained and extremely safe in the heaviest of rains.

It seems everyone has complaints and compliments are rare. I simply wanted to express my appreciation for a job well done.

C.C. Holmes
 Capital Helvetica
 Benton, Arkansas

TRAVEL DIRECTIONS

While traveling from Jonesboro, Arkansas to Little Rock to catch my flight to Phoenix, I was convinced by my niece that I wouldn't need my GPS... she would give me directions. This was a bad mistake. I became totally lost. I stopped at a convenience store around Little Rock to ask for directions, as I approached the door an Arkansas Highway Transportation Department truck was parking. I decided what wonderful luck! This fellow will be able to give me directions. Not only did he give me directions, he requested that I should follow him because he was going in that direction.

Three BIG CHEERS to Lonnie Gene Murry, AHTD Senior Mechanic, District Six! Thanks to Lonnie, I made my connection to Phoenix.

Bill Floyd
 Humboldt, Tennessee

GREAT DISPATCHERS

I just wanted to take a second to compliment you and your dispatchers. I started in law enforcement in 1996. From then until I started working for the AHP, I probably worked with 20 or more dispatchers from Sevier and neighboring counties. Some of these dispatchers were awful and others were just okay. Only three of those dispatchers stood out as being "great". Having a good dispatcher makes all the difference in the world to an officer who is roadside with a touchy situation. I think a person has to be mentally sharp, blessed with lots of good ole common sense and be provided with good training to make a "GREAT" dispatcher. Without doubt, all your dispatchers rank in the "GREAT" category. Good job to you and your dispatchers!

Cameron Petross
 Arkansas Highway Police Officer, First Class
 Unit #471

INTERSECTION REPAIR

So very pleased to find that you have repaired the intersection in Ozark, AR of Highway 23 South and Highway 64 just off the bridge over the Arkansas River. Thank you so very much. I travel there every week to help take care of my 95 year old mother and it is so much better now. Thank you.

Sincerely in JESUS' Name,
Jeania Brown
 Mansfield, Arkansas

ABOVE AND BEYOND

I wanted to let you know that the requested repairs at Mammoth Spring State Park are nearing completion. The quality of work by AHTD personnel is excellent and we are very happy with the results. AHTD employees have gone above and beyond in ensuring the highest quality of work and in fully resolving the problems. In the area above the spring they removed the "junk" dirt and added tons of rip rap. The rip rap was evenly applied so that it is not only functional, but pleasing to the eye. This, and all other work, has been completed in a safe and efficient manner.

I need to mention my main contact, Mr. Evan Higginbottom, District 5 Maintenance Crew Leader. He was a pleasure to work with. He was a very capable, "hands on" crew leader.

Thanks again for helping protect Mammoth Spring — a National Natural Landmark — and for improving drainage elsewhere in the park.

Sincerely,
Dave Jackson
 Park Superintendent
 Mammoth Spring State Park

MORE IDRIVEARKANSAS KUDOS

You folks have really done a good thing with the IDriveArkansas.com site! Nice to know what you might be getting into — before you get there. Very helpful, especially going into the Thanksgiving weekend.

Mary Hightower
 Cooperative Extension Service
 University of Arkansas System

EXCEPTIONAL EMPLOYEE

I usually don't write letters like this but I had to tell you what an exceptional employee you have in Captain Thompson of your Permits Department.

I recently had occasion to speak with Captain Thompson regarding load permits. I found Captain Thompson to be one of the most articulate, accommodating and professional persons I have had the pleasure of speaking with in quite some time.

He listened very attentively to my question, responded in a very respectful manner, assured me of an answer in short order and delivered an answer to my question with a return phone call in a few short minutes

I consider Captain Thompson to be a very valuable asset to the Arkansas Highway Police and I hope my views are shared by the Department.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for staffing your department with such capable persons as Captain Thompson.

Yours Truly,
William Garrett
 Alderman
 Friendship, Arkansas

BIG ROCK COMPLIMENT

I just wanted to say GOOD JOB to the work being done on Interstate 430/630 in Little Rock. I love that the large boulder has been exposed and was left in place. I love even the detail work to the structures. I think it's a great job!

Have a good day,
Laurie Tippy



SPECIAL EVENTS

AROUND THE STATE

BY GLENN BOLICK

Governor Beebe Helps Dedicate NEW WELCOME CENTER

Governor Mike Beebe was the special guest of honor on November 19th for the dedication of the Helena-West Helena Arkansas Welcome Center.

Officials with the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department and the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism were also on hand to celebrate the opening of the new \$3.1 million center.

Governor Beebe noted how appropriate it is for the two State agencies to join forces to operate the Welcome Centers.

“One brings millions in tourism dollars into the State and the other makes it possible for them to travel throughout the State,” he said.

Twelve Arkansas Welcome Centers are jointly operated under a partnership formed by the two agencies. The AHTD builds and maintains the facilities while Parks and Tourism staffs the Centers.

The new Helena-West Helena Center is the eighth new Center to open in Arkansas since 2003. The others include: El Dorado, Texarkana, Van Buren/Fort Smith, Corning, Blytheville, Lake Village and West Memphis. Total cost of the eight Centers has been \$27 million.



(L. to R. Back Row) AHTD Director Scott E. Bennett, Commission Vice Chairman Dick Trammel, Commissioner Robert S. Moore, Jr. and Commissioner Frank D. Scott, Jr. listen as Governor Mike Beebe (Front) addresses the crowd at the dedication.



The ribbon was cut on the new Arkansas Welcome Center at Helena-West Helena on November 19, 2013.



At the ceremony, AHTD Director Scott Bennett recognized Highway Commission Chairman John Ed Regenold for his leadership during almost 10 years of service on the Commission.

“Chairman Regenold has been to several of these new Center dedications,” noted Bennett. “We appreciate the work he does.”

The new Helena-West Helena Center is over 3,500 square feet and features state-of-the-art technology inside its classic antebellum architectural style. ■

AHTD PEOPLE

The AHTD employs approximately 3,600 people. We welcome our new employees, congratulate others on promotions and service, and say goodbye to those retiring.

NEW EMPLOYEES

COMMUNICATIONS • Geneva Jones, Telecommunications Operator

CONSTRUCTION • Manco Newnum Jr., Construction Helper; Erin Seals, Engineer; Donald Pipkin, Construction Helper; Sierra Inman, Construction Helper

MAIL & SUPPLY • Marcus McCoy, Mail Courier

PROGRAMS & CONTRACTS • Ann Reves, Programs & Contracts Specialist I

DISTRICT ONE • Shumm Brown, Single Axle Truck Driver

DISTRICT THREE • Paul Melton, Single Axle Truck Driver; Sean Mason, General Laborer

DISTRICT FOUR • Jessie Barron, General Laborer

DISTRICT FIVE • Waymond Hudson, Single Axle Truck Driver; Brittany Freeman, General Laborer

DISTRICT SIX • Micha Cody, Mechanic

DISTRICT SEVEN • Thomas Kanipe, General Laborer; David Hunter, Single Axle Truck Driver; Matthew Freeman, Single Axle Truck Driver

DISTRICT EIGHT • Kenneth Bartlett, Single Axle Truck Driver

DISTRICT NINE • Darrell Cope, Single Axle Truck Driver

DISTRICT TEN • Jason Duncan, General Laborer; Charles Coffman, General Laborer

PROMOTIONS

ARKANSAS HIGHWAY POLICE • Scott Fraley, First Lieutenant; James Thomas, First Lieutenant

BRIDGE • Andrew Nanneman, Bridge Design Engineer

ENVIRONMENTAL • Terry Tucker, Environmental Scientist II

HEAVY BRIDGE MAINTENANCE • Raymond Parker, Heavy Bridge Maintenance Superintendent

MAINTENANCE • Nan Billing, Office Administrative Assistant III; Kelly Dull, Office Administrative Assistant III; Clyde Lambert Jr., Sign Erector; Roger Mahan, Pavement Profiler Job Superintendent

REPROGRAPHICS • Sandra Brown, Office Administrative Assistant III

SYSTEM INFORMATION & RESEARCH • Luke Stovall, Engineer II

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING & POLICY • Ken Banga, Safety Information Coordinator

DISTRICT TWO • Donyell Moye, Maintenance Aide I; Winston Watts, III, Maintenance Aide II

DISTRICT THREE • Victor Biddle, Senior Inspector; Andrew Clark, Maintenance Aide I; Kenny Fincher, Senior Inspector

DISTRICT FOUR • Jesse Easom, Paver Operator; David Watts, Distributor Operator; John Wilson, Inspector

DISTRICT SIX • Ryan Bailey, Construction Aide II; Samuel Barnwell, Crew Leader; Steve Chastain, Body Repairer and Painter; Deaudrey Pickens, Crew Leader; Shandale Smith, Crew Leader

DISTRICT SEVEN • George Beard, Backhoe/Front End Loader Operator; Toby Still, General Laborer

DISTRICT EIGHT • Dwayne Helton, Sign Crew Supervisor; James Wells, Mechanic; Jesse White, Senior Construction Materials Inspector

DISTRICT NINE • Joshua King, Construction Field Engineer I; Kyle Lasater, Construction Aide III; Courtney Smith, Fuel Clerk; Meredith Whittle, Resident Office Technician; Jason Williamson, Crew Leader; Timothy Young, Senior Inspector

DISTRICT TEN • Timothy Bohannon, Maintenance Aide I; Clinton Durham, General Laborer; Ryne Pillow, Single Axle Truck Driver

SERVICE

BRIDGE • Barbara Cox, Office Administrative Assistant V, 25 years

CONSTRUCTION • Peggy Owenby, Field Clerk II, 5 years

HEAVY BRIDGE MAINTENANCE • Michael Hill, Staff Heavy Bridge Maintenance Engineer, 20 years

MATERIALS • Cary Snyder, Materials Technician II, 5 years

REPROGRAPHICS • Marcus Johnson, Reprographics Technician, 15 years

RIGHT OF WAY • Sheryl Fletcher, Office Administrative Assistant V, 30 years

DISTRICT ONE • Tracy Heard, Bridge Repairer I, 15 years; Ronald Coleman, Roller Operator, 5 years; Timothy Willis, Welder, 5 years

DISTRICT TWO • Barron Johnson, Multi-Axle Truck Driver, 15 years; Rory Benson, Station Attendant II, 10 years

DISTRICT THREE • Michael Haggard, Multi-Axle Truck Driver, 15 years; Neal Price, Motor Patrol Operator – Finish, 10 years; Jack Rogers, Distributor/Roller Operator, 5 years

DISTRICT FOUR • Shannen Ray, Area Maintenance Supervisor, 20 years; William Jones, Distributor Operator, 10 years

DISTRICT FIVE • Ernie Hunt, Maintenance Aide I, 15 years

DISTRICT SIX • Clifford Roland, Motor Patrol Operator, 25 years; Hobort Watson, Maintenance Job Superintendent, 25 years; Patricia Collins, Rest Area Attendant, 20 years; Robert Davidson, Street Sweeper Operator, 10 years; Matthew Creppel, Maintenance Aide II, 10 years

DISTRICT SEVEN • Richard Long, Rest Area Attendant, 10 years

DISTRICT TEN • Roger Specking, District Bridge Inspector, 30 years; Darsha Tipton, District Bookkeeper, 15 years

RETIREMENT

MAINTENANCE • Michael Sibley, Paint Transport Truck Driver, 18 years

RIGHT OF WAY • Tommy Lynn, Reviewing Appraiser, 22 years

SYSTEM INFORMATION & RESEARCH • Mark Frazier, Pavement Management Specialist, 36 years

DISTRICT TWO • Donald Nugent, Motor Patrol Operator – Finish, 18 years

DISTRICT FIVE • Gregory Hellmann, Inspector, 35 years

DISTRICT SIX • Curtis Aud, Area Maintenance Supervisor, 25 years; Paul Precord, Motor Patrol Operator – Finish, 26 years; David Bienick, Senior Inspector, 28 years

DISTRICT SEVEN • Jimmy Ryan, Guard, 15 years

MEMORIALS

DISTRICT ONE • Willie D. Young, 11/13/2013, retired

DISTRICT THREE • George G. Derrick, 11/15/2013, retired

DISTRICT SIX • Danny R. Mitchell, 11/18/2013, retired; Anthony Donta King, 11/17/2013, active

DISTRICT TEN • Hershel W. Nelson, 11/30/2013, retired

ACTIVE DUTY

As of 1/01/14, the AHTD has two employees serving active duty in the United States military. Deployment date is noted.

PLANNING & RESEARCH • E. Wright-Kehner, Staff Research Engineer, 5/30/13

DISTRICT SIX • Jeremy Stokes, Construction Helper, 5/28/13





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