



Arkansas HIGHWAYS

JANUARY 2015

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

Regenold Remembers Board Service

**OUTGOING COMMISSIONER
DISCUSSES THE LAST 10 YEARS**

**Program Helps
the MONARCH
BUTTERFLIES**

**AHTD'S New
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
& CHIEF ENGINEER**

**Driving into the
HEART OF THE
OZARKS**



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

With this issue of *Arkansas Highways* magazine we usher in a new year. Without a doubt, 2015 is going to be a busy one for us here at the AHTD. But first, let me thank each of you for your hard work and efforts over the past twelve months. We should all be proud of our accomplishments as we closed out 2014.

As we begin the New Year, we find ourselves with new faces in new places, and not just at the Department. We are eager to begin working with new Governor Asa Hutchinson and his staff. In addition, a new legislative session begins this month at the Capitol. One thing is certain, Governor Hutchinson and our legislators share a common goal with us — providing Arkansans with the best transportation system possible. I look forward to joining ranks with those at the Capitol in the months ahead to achieve that goal.

Here at the AHTD, we've experienced a wave of promotions among our ranks. These changes mean new opportunities and new ideas and I am excited with the potential we now hold. The Department recently announced several promotions at the Central Office. In December, Lorie Tudor became the Department's Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer. At the same time, Emanuel Banks was named Deputy Director and Chief Engineer. This issue of *Arkansas Highways* features an article on Banks and the March issue of the magazine will feature a story on Tudor to help you get better acquainted with both.

In addition, three more AHTD employees have been promoted into new positions. In December, Tony Sullivan became the Department's Assistant Chief Engineer for Operations, Kevin Thornton became the Assistant Chief Engineer for Planning and Joe Sartini became the State Maintenance Engineer. You'll read more about each of them in next month's *Arkansas Highways* newsletter.

It's a real benefit to have the experience in place that all of these staff members bring to their new positions. I'm confident that they will represent the AHTD in the best manner possible.

As the New Year begins, we also say goodbye to two people that have given many years to the Department. Ralph Hall, former Deputy Director and Chief Engineer, retired in November with 42 years of service to the AHTD. In addition, Highway Commission Chairman John Ed Regenold finished out his ten-year term on our team. I want to extend my thanks and admiration to Ralph and John Ed for their commitment and service over the years. It has been a pleasure to work with them both.

We all share the common goal of making our Department the best it can possibly be. I am confident each of us will do our part to make that happen in 2015. As we look ahead, let's continue our momentum and hit the ground running in all phases of what we do to reach that goal.



Scott E. Bennett, P.E.
Director of Highways and Transportation

FRONT AND BACK COVER:
Rush hour traffic at sunset
Interstate 30
Little Rock • Pulaski County

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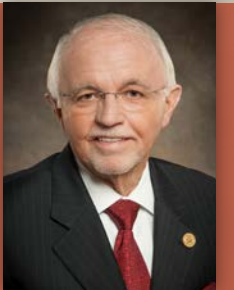
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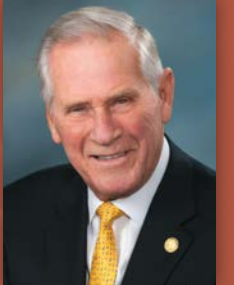
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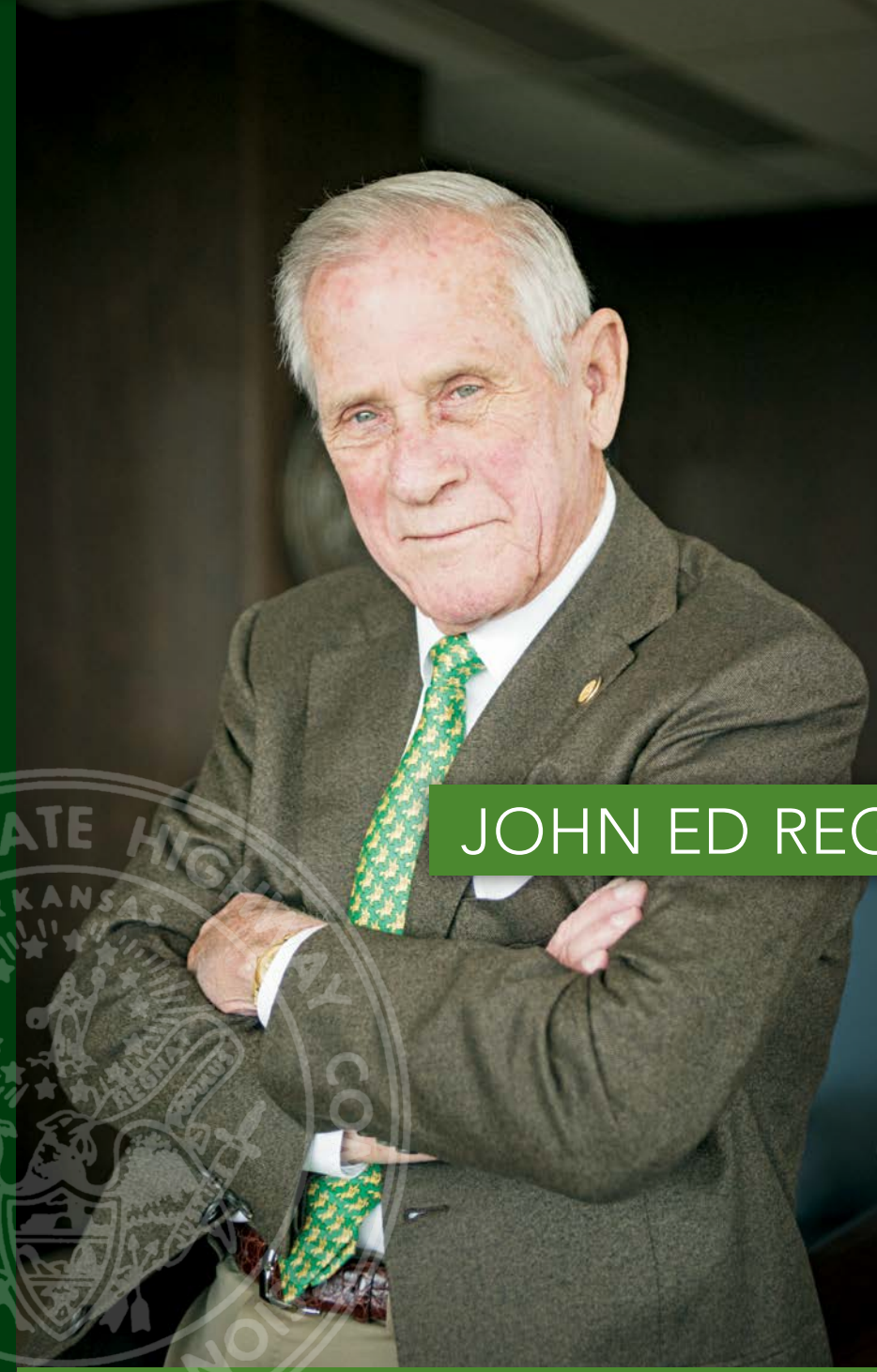


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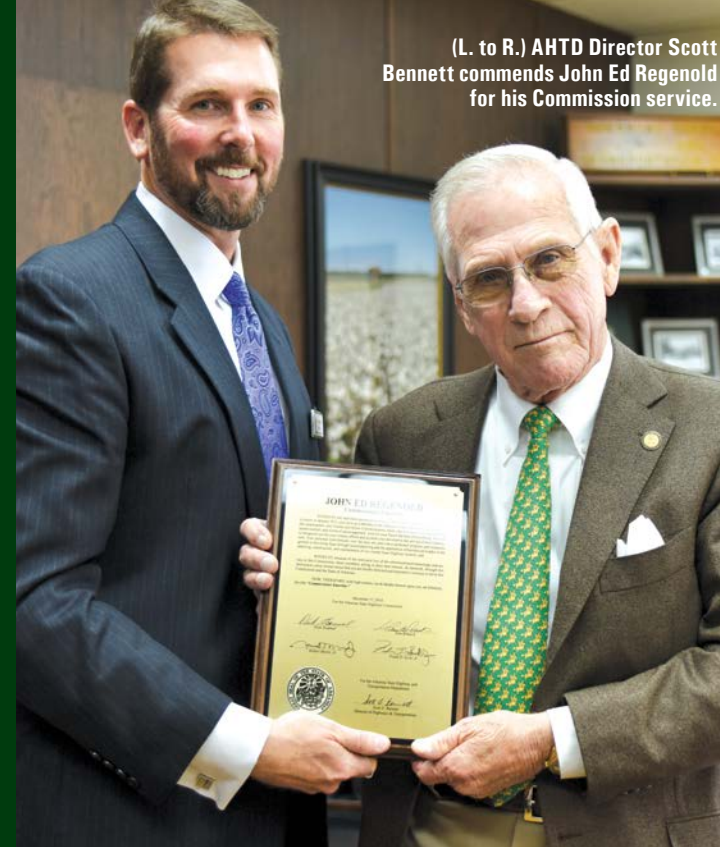
JOHN ED REGENOLD

COMMISSIONER BIDS FAREWELL TO AHTD

With the arrival of the New Year, John Ed Regenold's term on the Highway Commission comes to a close. Regenold was appointed to the Commission by Governor Mike Huckabee in 2005. He resides between Blytheville and Armorel in eastern Arkansas, and is the chairman of the Armorel Planting Company. Regenold sat down with *Arkansas Highways* editor David Nilles recently to reflect on his ten years of service and to discuss the future of transportation in Arkansas.

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INITIALLY, I THOUGHT IT WAS AS EASY AS SAYING I WANT TO BUILD A ROAD AND BAM-BAM-BAM, THERE IT WAS. I FOUND OUT PRETTY QUICKLY THAT WITH ALL THE PLANNING THAT GOES INTO IT, IT TAKES SIX TO SEVEN YEARS TO BUILD A ROAD.



(L. to R.) AHTD Director Scott Bennett commends John Ed Regenold for his Commission service.



(Above) Celebrating the completion of Highway 412 east of Paragould in 2010.



(Left) John Ed Regenold gives his first interview as Commissioner in 2005.

NILLES: *As you look back on your term as a Commissioner and more recently as Commission Chairman, has it been what you expected it would be when you first began?*

REGENOLD: I had no idea what it would be like, none whatsoever. I came to the Department for the first time to meet with then Director Dan Flowers. When I was finished visiting with Dan, I wondered what I was doing here. I didn't know what I was supposed to do in my role as a Commissioner. Soon, I started talking to the other Commissioners, including Prissy Hickerson who was Chairman when I came onboard. I talked to her often that first year and I think I finally began to understand what my role was. It takes a while to comprehend what there is to be done. It was a lot to learn. Ten years is a long time, but it's not long enough to really be able to learn everything. The biggest help I had was from Dan Flowers and Joe Barnett, who was the District Engineer in District Ten. They were both very helpful as was Ray Woodruff, the District Engineer down in District One. I also learned to depend on the AHTD staff and that was very important. They were a valuable asset as I got started. Those are the people who were very helpful to me.

NILLES: *How did your perception of how highways got funded and constructed change when you came onto the Commission?*

REGENOLD: When I came onto the Commission, one of the first things I learned was that we didn't have adequate funding for what we do. The money was not quite as plentiful as I thought it would be. I had no perception of how roads were financed or how they were built coming on the Commission. Initially, I thought it

was as easy as saying I want to build a road and bam-bam-bam, there it was. I found out pretty quickly that with all the planning that goes into it, it takes six to seven years to build a road.

I divide highways into two categories. I say you have the "wants and the needs." When you look at the wants, they are usually out of the question. And the needs, most of them are out too. So the wants just have to wait because you have to build where the needs are. As a Commissioner, you have to learn how to say "no" quite often. And it is always tough to do. If you don't learn how to say no you get yourself into trouble on this Commission.

NILLES: *What are some of the developments that have occurred during your term that you consider major highlights or achievements?*

REGENOLD: I think major developments during my term were the One-half Cent Sales Tax that passed and the GARVEE bond issue. The One-half Cent Sales Tax gave us enough funding to get through some tough times. That was a great help to the Commission. I thank Madison Murphy, our former Chairman, he worked so hard on that and was very instrumental in it passing. That's not to take away from anybody else, but I don't think it would have passed without Madison's hard work on the issue. And then I have to include the GARVEE Bond issue for our Interstate program. Those are two of the things that I think were the most important for our transportation system during my term.

NILLES: *Looking back over your ten years on the Commission, what specific highway projects were you glad to see completed?*

REGENOLD: All of the road projects, every single one we did. Starting in northwest Arkansas, through the One-half Cent Sales Tax, we are going to be able to put a third lane in each direction on Interstate 49 from Fayetteville up to Bella Vista. That's a great thing. Then you look over in eastern Arkansas, there are improvements on Highways 226 and 18. Then, down south you look at Highway 167. And consider Central Arkansas as well, you see the work that we are doing on Interstate 40 from Conway to Little Rock. Everything we have done has been great. We got a lot of things accomplished during my term. And there are additional projects under contract to be done in the future after I leave.

NILLES: *That leads to my next question... what highway projects would you like to see become a reality over the next ten years?*

REGENOLD: I would like to see an extra lane in each direction on Interstate 40 between Little Rock and West Memphis. I think that is the most important thing and I would love to see that come to pass. But we are limited on that because of the funding.

NILLES: *What do you think the answer may be to the funding question and how we solve the funding problem in the future?*

REGENOLD: I think the main thing we have to look at is the Road User bill in the upcoming legislative session. We tried to address the Road User bill in the last session but funding for education put a stop to that. They hit us pretty hard on that one. Road user revenue should be ours because it deals with automobiles, car batteries, tires... and anything else that pertains to automobiles. I think that is the first place you start. Then there are other ways you can do it. You might want to look at raising taxes, but right now, you focus on the Road User bill and try and get that passed.

NILLES: *In your ten years, you've had the opportunity to learn how things get accomplished at the Department and the chance to work with many on the staff. What is your overall impression of the staff at the AHTD?*

REGENOLD: It's a great staff and a great bunch of people. Let me tell you, this staff knows what they are doing. There's no

doubt about that. I look at Scott Bennett. He started at the bottom and worked his way up. He is a person that has a knowledge of all the facets of how the Department works. We've lost some good people but we have also replaced them with some good people. I think we have a staff that is top drawer. They do more with less funding than anyone I have ever seen. I would put them up against anybody in the nation. I also think we have great leadership in position.

NILLES: *How often in your term did you hear from people out in the community and across the State?*

(continued on page 8)



Commissioner Regenold speaks at the opening of the new West Memphis Welcome Center in 2013.

“ I’VE BEEN ON THE COMMISSION FOR TEN YEARS AND I LEARN NEW THINGS EVERY YEAR. AND THEN, WHEN YOU BECOME CHAIRMAN, YOU LEARN A LITTLE BIT MORE. ”



REGENOLD: You hear from people a great deal of the time. Lightheartedly, I can’t repeat in this magazine what some of them may have said. Most of them are kind though. Most people don’t understand the funding of highways. They may think they can ask for a particular new roadway or improvements and that the money is automatically there. But, there is no way you can do that. Various people may think that their highway needs are top priority. But, like I said earlier, you have the “needs” and the “wants” and you cannot do them all, you have to be able to say “no”. If you don’t learn to say “no”, you don’t belong on this Commission. I have made some friends and I have made some enemies. And sometimes your friends come to you and have “wants” and when you say no, it makes them mad. I don’t think you win friends or influence people on our Commission. You meet many new people.

I don’t think anybody can understand the operations of the Department unless they have been a part of it and learned it. I’ve been on the Commission for ten years and I learn new things every year. And then, when you become Chairman, you learn a little bit more.

NILLES: *Is a ten-year term long enough to learn all there is to learn?*

REGENOLD: You don’t learn everything there is to learn in ten years. You try to learn as much as you can and do the best you can with the knowledge you obtain. You have people in the Department that are a great resource and we, as a Commission, listen to our employees. Everybody can tell you something that you didn’t know. Then you can process that and decide how to use what you have learned. But looking back, I think ten years is enough time.

NILLES: *What advice would you have for the next Commissioner that is going to be coming on board?*

REGENOLD: I came on board and I sat there for two years. I said very little but I was learning along the way. I was soaking up knowledge. A lot of people think that when you come onto the Commission you have all the answers. I listened to the other Commissioners, I listened to the Department staff and I talked to District Engineers. They all helped me understand. You have to come onto the Commission with the idea that you are going to learn a great deal. If you think you come to the Commission with great ideas, you may learn that those ideas aren’t going to work. I asked every question I could ask. You may think it is a stupid question, but if you don’t know, ask. My best advice to someone coming onboard would be to stop, look and listen. You are going to learn a great deal in the next five or six years as you serve. There are rules to learn, regulations to get acquainted with, the funding challenge to try to understand and Federal highway policies to learn. There are also policies set by the Commission that you have to learn to understand.

When I left that meeting with Dan Flowers the first day, I asked myself what am I doing here. I didn’t know enough, but you learn by doing and by listening to other people. The most important thing is to listen to your staff, your Director and your District Engineers. They know better than I do exactly what needs to be done. ■



AHTD staffers (Left) J.J. Hadley and (Below) Janette Thompson interview job applicants.

AHTD JOB FAIR

FILLING A NEED FOR WORKERS

BY DAVID NILLES

THEY STARTED LINING UP AT 6:30 IN THE MORNING AT THE AHTD CENTRAL OFFICE. THEY HAD COME TO ATTEND A DEPARTMENT JOB FAIR ON NOVEMBER 14TH. CONSIDERING THAT THE FAIR DIDN’T BEGIN UNTIL 9:00 THAT MORNING, THE EARLY ARRIVALS WERE AN INDICATION THAT THE DAY WAS GOING TO BE A HUGE SUCCESS.

Word went out on radio stations and in the local newspapers inviting those looking for work to attend the fair. Notice was also sent to workforce services, churches and agencies that work with minorities.

The day of the fair, long lines stretched across the building lobby and out the doors. Job seekers had come from as far away as Fayetteville to the north and Lake Village to the south.

“We were very pleased with the results,” stated Joanna McFadden, Section Head of EEO/DBE. “We didn’t think we would have such a good response.”

The goal of the Job Fair was to hire 40 to 50 new General Laborers to fill positions in AHTD District Six primarily. As many as 200 applicants could have opportunities statewide.

A total of 838 people came to apply for the open positions.

“The planned procedures for the fair worked very well,” McFadden added. “The three-step process included signing in and indicating applicants’ top 3 job location preferences, going through orientation and finally, filling out the application and interviewing.”

The Central Office auditorium featured 45 laptops where participants could sit down and fill out their application. Following that, 25 AHTD staff members met with participants to conduct interviews. A total of 616 job seekers went through the interview process.

Of those that are hired as General Laborers, each is required to obtain a Commercial Driver’s License (CDL). The new employees will take their CDL training in-house. Classes and testing are already underway.

“We started planning for the job fair on Halloween Day,” McFadden stated. “It was a partnership effort including the Equal Employment Opportunity Section, District Six and the Human Resources Division. The best thing about it was that everybody came together. We worked like one big happy family.”

The first job offers were extended around Thanksgiving.

“For those that received job offers, this may have been the ultimate gift for the holidays,” McFadden concluded. ■



Training for a CDL

Being hired after attending the recent Job Fair is just the first step for the Department’s newest General Laborers. Each person hired must also obtain a Commercial Driver’s License (CDL).

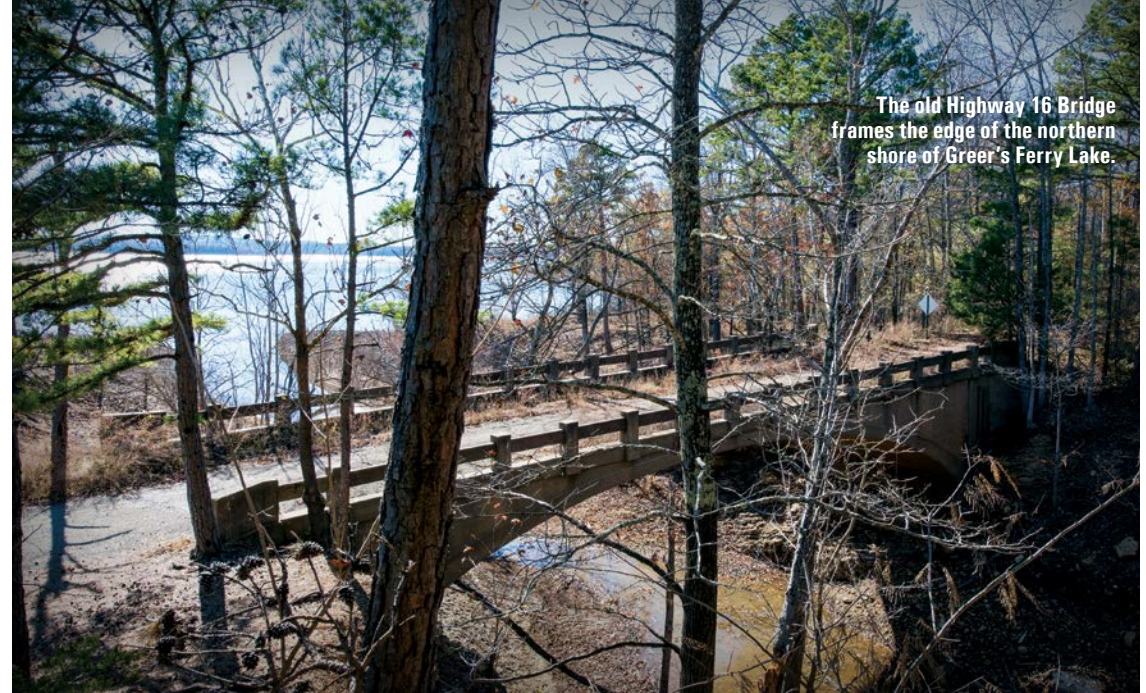
To help the new employees in District Six receive their license, the AHTD has provided in-house training. The CDL curriculum and testing have been coordinated by Tara Robinson, Training Coordinator for the Human Resources Division.

“The curriculum for the CDL training was drawn from the CDL Manual and from information researched on the Internet,” Robinson stated.

There are four sections to the written test: General Knowledge, Air Brakes, Combination Vehicles and Tank Vehicles.

“There is also a three-part driving test that includes a pre-trip inspection, a vehicle control skills test and the on-road driving test,” Robinson adds.

New General Laborers take the written exam and driving test at the Arkansas State Police Headquarters. If they don’t pass the first time, they are allowed to come back to the Department and do additional training. The class and exams can be completed within one week. ■



The old Highway 16 Bridge frames the edge of the northern shore of Greer's Ferry Lake.

UNIQUE BRIDGES ACROSS ARKANSAS

BY DAVID NILLES



This is the first in a series of articles that will feature unique bridges found across Arkansas. Some of them are historic, some feature unique construction and some still stand though they haven't seen traffic in ages. Over the next year, we will take a look at many of those bridges in the pages of Arkansas Highways.

LOCATED ON THE NORTHERN SHORE OF GREER'S FERRY LAKE IN CLEBURNE COUNTY IS THE OLD HIGHWAY 16 BRIDGE.

Constructed in 1936 under the Works Progress Administration (WPA), it is the only remaining example of a WPA-built concrete deck, closed-spandrel arch bridge in Arkansas.

Today, the bridge can be found down an old deserted road yet it remains in good condition and carries an occasional scarce vehicle, more than 70 years after its construction.

The bridge was designed by the Arkansas Highway Commission with N.B. Garver as the Bridge Engineer, assisted by Louie Thompson of Heber Springs. The contract for construction was awarded to prominent Heber Springs resident and contractor O.B. Robbins for \$17,428.

The bridge measures 78.5 feet in length and has a width of 24 feet. It opened to traffic in July of 1936.

The old Highway 16 Bridge was one of the best bridges in Cleburne County for many years. When it was built, there were no other bridges of its size and quality on the county road system.

Originally, the bridge carried traffic over the train tracks of the Missouri & Northern Arkansas (M&NA) railroad. This was the only overpass ever built over the M&NA rail line along its 178 miles in Arkansas. All the other crossings were

at grade level. The bridge stood 22 feet above the railroad tracks. M&NA ceased operation and the tracks were removed in 1949. Today, where trains once ran below the bridge, motorists will find water, a channel of Greer's Ferry Lake.

The bridge retains its original reinforced concrete materials. The only addition was a layer of asphalt from the paving of Highway 16 in 1954. The guardrail at the west entrance once featured a bronze plaque with information about the bridge, but chisel marks around its original location

suggest vandals removed it.

The structure was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2011. The bridge can be found on Edgemont Road (Highway 16) in Edgemont, just behind Janssen's Lakefront Restaurant. **▣**



HELPING THE MONARCH BUTTERFLIES:



Butterfly Weed
Asclepias tuberosa
Milkweed Family

THERE ARE CERTAIN TIMES DURING THE SPRING AND THE SUMMER MONTHS WHEN TRAVELERS ON ARKANSAS' HIGHWAYS HAVE NO DOUBT NOTICED BRIGHT AND COLORFUL AREAS OF WILDFLOWERS BLOOMING ALONG THE SIDE OF THE ROAD OR IN THE GRASS MEDIAN. Those flowers may be Purple Coneflowers, Showy Primrose or Black-eyed Susans. They and other varieties are all part of the wildflower mix that makes up the AHTD's wildflower program. The Department's program has helped beautify over 200,000 acres of highway roadsides. The program has helped reduce long-term maintenance costs, enhanced roadside wildlife habitat, provided an attractive roadside environment and preserved native plant populations.

Though not a part of the AHTD's wildflower program, there is a plant that is making headlines across the nation and is now being planted by the Department in a concentrated effort. It's milkweed, and the reason it is being planted is... the Monarch Butterfly.

The Monarch Butterfly population across the globe is declining. Compared to years past, fewer butterflies are crossing the United States as they migrate back and forth to Mexico.



Kayti Ewing, Environmental Analyst I, prepares to plant Milkweed seedlings along Interstate 430 in Little Rock.

The AHTD's Milkweed Management Plan

BY DAVID NILLES

In 2004, an estimated 550 million Monarchs completed the winter migration, while in 2013 only 33 million arrived. Further, between 2012 and 2013, there was a 43.7 percent decrease in the area occupied by the butterflies in their winter sanctuaries.*

After extensive scientific and environmental research, the major blame for the decline has been put on the loss of habitat. Disappearance of milkweed, a plant vital to Monarchs survival, is among that lost habitat. Milkweed is the only plant that Monarchs will use to lay their eggs on. It is also the primary food source for Monarch caterpillars. Despite its necessity to the species, the plant decreased 21 percent in the United States between 1995 and 2013.

Though deforestation and harsh weather can be partly to blame, the major cause of the disappearance of milkweed in this country is farmers' large scale use of herbicides that destroy the plant.

And this is where the AHTD steps in with what is called the Milkweed Management Plan. The plan has been put in place as an independent project due to the growing concerns of the Monarch Butterfly and milkweed populations.

"We were approached by the Botanical Gardens of the Ozarks to see if we could include milkweeds in our wildflower seeding program," comments Kayti Ewing, Environmental Analyst I.

"We haven't included milkweed seed because it is so expensive relative to other native wildflower seed and it has a low germination rate. Also, seed providers never have the amount the Department would need. One is more likely to get milkweed established by transplanting plugs, or one-year-old seedlings. And that is the route we are taking at the AHTD."

The goal of the AHTD's independent program is to plant a variety of native milkweeds across the State. There are 15 native species.

(continued on page 14)



"We hope to continue to plant milkweed plugs until we get milkweed populations established statewide," says Kayti Ewing, AHTD Environmental Analyst I.

"I recently planted 224 milkweeds back in June," she adds. "The plants are all in northwest Arkansas. I planted 160 along Highway 7 between Jasper and Harrison, 32 were planted along Highway 62 near Huzzah Creek and another 32 were planted along Highway 66, northeast of Leslie. I will revisit the sites this coming spring to see how well they are doing."

"We hope to continue to plant milkweed plugs until we get milkweed populations established statewide. I just ordered 672 more plugs. Milkweed plugs will be planted along our AHTD Wildflower Routes as well as in our mitigation areas."

Ewing has been planting plugs purchased from MonarchWatch. The organization offers native milkweed plugs grown from seeds collected from Arkansas plants.

"MonarchWatch is a wonderful supplier, however, we would eventually like to be able to grow our own milkweeds in the Department's nursery and transplant those across the State," Ewing adds.

And it's not just Arkansas that is getting involved with planting milkweed.

"I have read that several other state Departments of Transportation (DOT) are actively planting milkweed



plugs in highway right-of-ways including Iowa, Arizona, Kansas, Minnesota, Texas and Virginia," Ewing adds. "Minnesota's DOT has incorporated milkweed seeds into some of their seed mixes for roadside planting and planting in their mitigation areas."

Arkansas Highways readers can do their part to help the Monarch Butterflies as well. For those interested in planting milkweed, two websites offer valuable resources. They are www.monarchwatch.org and www.livemonarch.com.

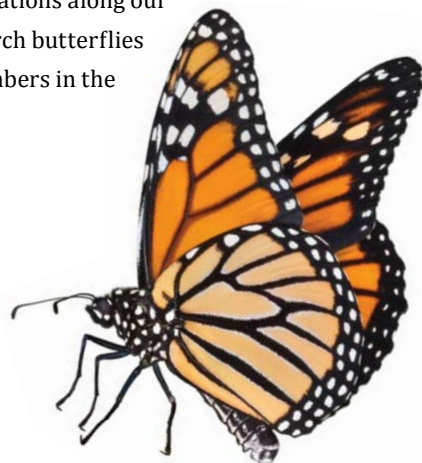
"Fall and spring plantings are the best for plugs," Ewing comments. "It is harder for the milkweeds to become established or even survive if they are planted in the summer heat. Milkweed species are perennial, so they come back every year!"

"If you are planting seeds, fall is the best time to sow. That gives them time to settle into the soil during the winter, and then have plenty of time to establish themselves before the summer heat. You can start your milkweeds indoors in seed starting flats or trays. Monarchwatch and Livemonarch both provide good growing instructions."

With Departments of Transportation and ordinary citizens across the country making the concentrated effort to do their part, the hope is that Monarch Butterfly population counts will soon be on the increase.

"Overall, there isn't a quantitative goal that the AHTD is striving to reach," Ewing concludes. "We would just like to establish milkweed populations along our roadsides and have Monarch butterflies visiting them in great numbers in the years ahead." ■

** Data provided by National Geographic online at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com>



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.

- * CHOCOLATE LOVERS' FESTIVAL: A complete world of chocolate appreciation will be featured at the 11th Annual Chocolate Lovers' Festival including cakes, cookies, ice cream, multiple dipping fountains, beverages and more. Chocolate novelty items will be on-hand as well. Vendors will showcase and promote their products while offering gourmet and homemade chocolate take-home samples to attendees from organic and household brand names and select boutique labels. • FEBRUARY 14
- * DAFFODIL DAYS: Celebrate the first signs of spring at Daffodil Days at Garvan Woodland Gardens. Over 250,000 bulbs of more than 260 varieties fill meadows and forest clearings throughout the 60 acre gardens of the University of Arkansas' Botanical Gardens in Hot Springs. • FEBRUARY 20 – MARCH 13
- * SURVIVAL SKILLS WEEKEND: For those that love the great outdoors, spend the weekend learning more about surviving in the wilderness. This weekend will be filled with survivor skill workshops such as map and compass, fire starting, shelter building and more! Advanced reservations required at 501-868-5806. • FEBRUARY 21 – 22
- * SONGS FROM THE FIELD: "Songs from the Field" tells the early story of Delta music, the story of field songs and field hollers, the songs of the enslaved peoples of the Arkansas Delta. The story of how slaves used music to transcend the oppression of slavery is told through text, photographs, sound effects, artifacts and several interactive elements. • FEBRUARY 27 – DECEMBER 31, 2016

JANUARY 24
RICKY SKAGGS AND KENTUCKY THUNDER
University of Central Arkansas
Reynolds Performance Hall
Conway, AR

FEBRUARY 7
TEXARKANA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA POPS III – FROM THE HEART
Perot Theatre
Texarkana, AR

FEBRUARY 14 *
CHOCOLATE LOVERS' FESTIVAL
Inn of the Ozarks Convention Center
Eureka Springs, AR

FEBRUARY 20 – MARCH 13 *
DAFFODIL DAYS
Garvan Woodland Gardens
Hot Springs, AR

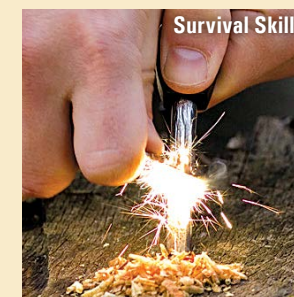
FEBRUARY 21 – 22 *
SURVIVAL SKILLS WEEKEND
Pinnacle Mountain State Park
Little Rock, AR

FEBRUARY 22
THE RHYTHM OF THE DANCE WITH THE NATIONAL DANCE COMPANY OF IRELAND
Arkansas State University – The Fowler Center
Jonesboro, AR

FEBRUARY 27 – DECEMBER 31, 2016 *
SONGS FROM THE FIELD
Delta Cultural Center
Helena, AR



Daffodil Days



Survival Skills



Field Songs



KRISTIN ESQUIVEL



(L. to R.) Senior Mechanic Dale Smith, Senior Mechanic Byron Bristow, Senior Mechanic Johnny Satterwhite, Shop Supervisor Jamie Kelley and Mechanic Kristin Esquivel.

The AHTD's First Female Mechanic

BY DAVID NILLES

WORKING ON MACHINERY IS NOTHING NEW

TO KRISTIN ESQUIVEL, an AHTD employee in District Five in Batesville. She's been around engines and machinery since she was a child. The only thing unique about it is the fact that she is the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department's first female Mechanic. It's a position she has held since October of 2014.

"My Grandpa was a good mechanic," Esquivel stated. "I was always around him growing up. He worked on tractors, trucks and sawmills. I was always helping him so I've been around it my whole life."

Esquivel grew up in Batesville. After working at Townsends Poultry Plant for ten years and then Williams Equipment Company, she came to the AHTD in the fall of 2012.

"My first job here was as a General Laborer," she adds. "I fit in well and knew it would be a secure job. I liked it and learned quickly."

After four months in the General Laborer position, Esquivel was promoted to a Single Axle Truck Driver.

"I grew up on a farm so it wasn't difficult driving the single axles. I had driven one-tons and other trucks on the farm."

When she became a Skilled Trades Trainee her previous mechanical experience began to come in handy.

"Coming over as a Skilled Trades Trainee was a good opportunity for me. It's where I was introduced to the work we currently do in the District Five shop," Esquivel recalled. "I was learning how to pull motors and transmissions. It was something different every day.

Now, as a Mechanic, I am replacing valves, brake drums, brakes, motors and transmissions. It has been more hands-on training than anything else.

"The job has its challenges, but in the process, I am always learning something new. I think my favorite thing to work on is the heavy equipment such as the diesels."

A few things are different from when she was growing up and fixing machinery the old-school way.

"You never really learn everything because it is all computerized these days and it is constantly changing," Esquivel states. "From tractors to the newer trucks, they are all serviced using computers. Some of the guys here know more about it because they have worked in auto dealerships before. They have helped me out a lot with the new technology."

There are seven other Mechanics in the District Five shop, all males. And how has it been working with the guys in the shop? "I enjoy it and I like working with them. They are all good to me. They pick on me but I wouldn't have it any other way. It tells me they like me enough to pick on me."

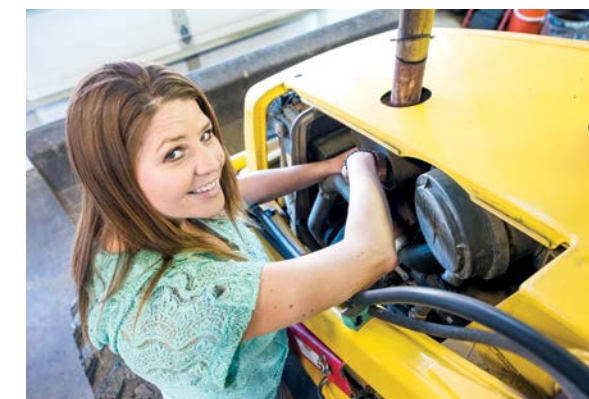
When she isn't at work keeping things running, Kristen stays busy at home. She has two children: Devin, 12 and Keydence, 6.

"My kids live outdoors," she stated. "I love being in the woods with them mudding or four-wheel-riding. We also love to deer hunt, turkey hunt and fish."

And as for the future, Kristin had this to say, "I plan on staying here. For any other females interested in becoming a Mechanic, I would say if the interest is there, they should do it. It's really easy to pick up."

"We are very proud of Kristin," states Bruce Street, District Five Maintenance Engineer. "She is a hard worker and has a great 'can do' attitude."

As for the dirt and grime associated with the job... "I don't mind it. It all washes off," she added with a smile. ■



In addition to his duties for the AHTD, Banks is active in the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). He is also a Registered Professional Engineer.



EMANUEL BANKS

AHTD'S NEW DEPUTY DIRECTOR AND CHIEF ENGINEER

BY DAVID NILLES

IN DECEMBER 2014, EMANUEL BANKS BECAME THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR AND CHIEF ENGINEER FOR THE ARKANSAS STATE HIGHWAY AND TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT. IT IS ANOTHER STEP FORWARD FOR BANKS, WHOSE CAREER AT THE AHTD BEGAN IN 1987.

Banks grew up in West Memphis and later attended the University of Arkansas where he received a degree in Civil Engineering.

"My curiosity about the construction of roadways and bridges began in the 10th grade," stated Banks. "I had a desire to learn more about engineering, and eventually that led me to civil engineering. Ultimately, around 11th grade I made the determination that I wanted to become a civil engineer."

Banks spent several summers working as an intern for the AHTD in West Memphis before college graduation.

"Those summer opportunities were a good way to learn more about the Department," Banks adds. "I realized I had a curiosity about how we actually went about building those projects out in the field. That led to me wanting to learn more and more about design, so when the opportunity came for me to consider coming to work fulltime at the Department, my request was to come to work in Roadway Design."

Banks' first position with the Department was as a Design Engineer. He had no idea that one day he would be serving as the AHTD's Deputy Director and Chief Engineer.

"I wanted to learn as much as I could about the designing of highways and what was involved in that process," he adds. "I was young and fresh out of college. I probably didn't have in my mind that 27 years later I would be where I am today."

Along the way, Banks has held many positions. Among them, Advanced Construction Field Engineer, Assistant Resident Engineer, Resident Engineer, Staff Construction Engineer, District Engineer and State Construction Engineer. He became Assistant Chief Engineer for Operations in 2008 before assuming his new role.

(L. to R.) Former District Engineer Joe Shipman and Emanuel Banks worked onsite at the Interstate 540 workzone in 2013.



(L. to R.) Director Scott Bennett presented Emanuel Banks with his 25-Year Service Award in 2012.

Today, as Deputy Director and Chief Engineer, Banks' role has expanded far beyond just the design phase of a project.

"I now have the opportunity to oversee the entire engineering process from cradle to grave then ultimately maintaining that. There are so many elements of engineering that go into the completion of a highway. In this case, we are talking about the planning phase, the design phase and ultimately the construction and maintenance phases."

Banks looks forward to the challenge his new role brings.

"We share the same goals as all of the other transportation agencies across the country," he comments. "That is, trying to build and maintain infrastructure to handle the capacity or traffic that is using our roadways. There are other elements to the equation as well. Road building affects economic development for businesses;

it affects local land owners who must have adequate access to their property... whatever the case may be in regards to the local community, we must meet the need. The concepts are pretty much the same for all transportation agencies. Each is geared toward trying to satisfy the needs of the customer, and in our case the customer is the traveling public."

As the new Chief Engineer, Banks will bring a new perspective and new ideas to the position.

"I think one of the biggest trends you will see in the years ahead is a heightened emphasis on preservation. We will be focusing on the most effective ways to maintain our existing system. For instance, what can we do to extend the life of pavement? What kind of things can we do to insure that a particular roadway is going to last its serviceable life and possibly

beyond what is expected."

As far as particular construction projects that are in the works in the next couple of years, Banks has a few in mind that he is looking forward to being a part of.

"I think two of the biggest ones we are going to be working on in the immediate future are right here in the Little Rock-North Little Rock area," he comments. "The Broadway Bridge is a project that is going to be very important for this area, a very significant project. And thereafter, will be the Interstate 30 River Bridge. Both of these are in downtown Little Rock and North Little Rock and are going to be signature projects. I believe there will be some innovative things going on with those jobs. You have contractors that will come in and be working under very tight time constraints. We are going to have to be conscious of the impact

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on area traffic so that we can minimize the disturbance. In addition, there are also local dynamics in the area such as the right of way constraints, or the restrictions to the footprint that we will be building in. These issues are going to be a challenge.”

In addition to specific construction projects, Banks feels that in the years ahead, the Department may be placing additional emphasis on the people that make up the staff.

“As far as our AHTD staff is concerned, I think one of our priorities will be an emphasis on more well-developed training for management and supervisory staff. Training to make sure that our employees are the best that they can be. We want them to have the skills to effectively work with their staff and give that staff the tools they need to most effectively get the job done.

“We are looking at a landscape now within the Department where we have lost a lot of senior level supervisors that had 30 or 40 years of service in many cases,

I think one of the biggest trends you will see in the years ahead is a **HEIGHTENED EMPHASIS ON PRESERVATION**. We will be focusing on **THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS** to maintain our existing system. For instance, **WHAT CAN WE DO** to extend the life of pavement?”

This has provided an opportunity for some of our younger employees to move up to supervisory level positions in a very short time period of perhaps five to ten years. Have we properly equipped them? Are they prepared and have we given them the tools and training needed to be a leader? That’s one of the things that I would like to see us put an emphasis on. We all know how to carry out the business of building highways, but how do we lead employees most effectively? I think that will help as we give more encouragement to our staff,

getting them motivated to do their best work and work harder than ever.”

On a larger scale, Banks was asked how the Department can most successfully recruit new college graduates that hold engineering degrees.

“I think the biggest advantage that we offer here at the AHTD is stability. There is always a demand for our industry and what we provide. There is always going to be a need for better highways, Interstates and bridges. Whether we are building new roads, modifying existing roads or just maintaining what we have, that need is always going to be there. And I think when you are talking to young engineers coming out of college, the idea of coming to an agency that offers a long-term, stable career is attractive.

“And then you have to consider the excellent benefits that are offered with a career here. New graduates should consider our health benefits, our dental plan and elements associated with retirement. It’s a total package when you look at what our Department has to offer, it is well worth considering.”

Those newly graduating students need only look as far as Banks to see an example of how successful a career can be at the AHTD. His career reflects hard work, loyalty to the Department and ultimately, success. That’s a track record that should impress anyone considering their future in engineering. ■



(Above) Emanuel Banks joins a group of highway officials at a Work Zone Safety Awareness news conference.



? IN THE ROAD AHEAD

WHAT'S THAT

BY DAVID NILLES

If you’re traveling into Smackover, Arkansas, on Highway 7 you’ll see it. It stands in the middle of the intersection at Highway 7 (7th Street) & Broadway. It’s a traffic light. But not *just* a traffic light — it’s Arkansas’ only “center of the road” traffic light. What’s unique about it? It literally is situated in the center of the intersection, sitting on top of a pedestal.

Chances are you may have never seen one like it. In fact, it’s so unique, in 2011 the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Office nominated this, the State’s last remaining pedestal mounted signal, to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Smackover Chamber of Commerce website even features it on its homepage.

Years ago when intersections were controlled by a single traffic signal, many were installed on pedestals in the middle of the intersection. Often called “dummy lights”, the pedestal-mounted signals

indicated the center of the intersection and also served to separate opposing traffic.

As for how long the one in Smackover has been standing, Smackover Mayor Bobby Neal had this to say, “I’m 73 years old and that light has been there since I was a kid. My guess would be that it went up in the 1930s.”

There are only a small number of the “dummy lights” still in operation in the United States. Three are located in New York. After one was knocked down by a vehicle in the city of Coleman, Texas, city fathers decided to reconstruct and

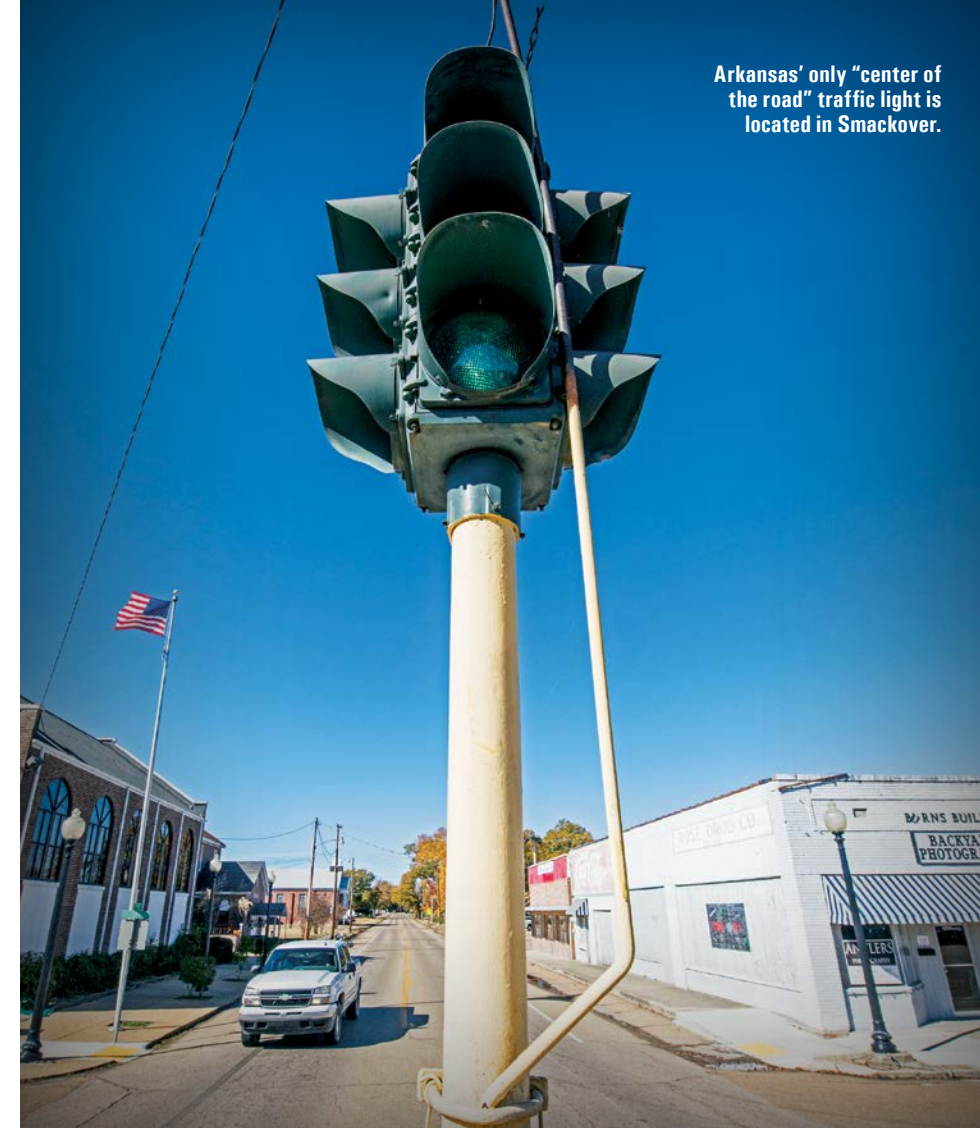
preserve its last two dummy lights in the name of historic preservation.

“The one here in Smackover has been hit a bunch of times, but as far as maintenance, we have had very little trouble with it,” Neal added.

With heavier traffic flows today, there have been calls for these types of traffic signals to be taken down due to the potential for collisions, but because of their historic value, they have remained at their locations controlling vehicles passing through their intersections.

Not only is the one in Smackover unique to Arkansas, it also lays claim to being “the oldest working traffic signal in the U.S.”

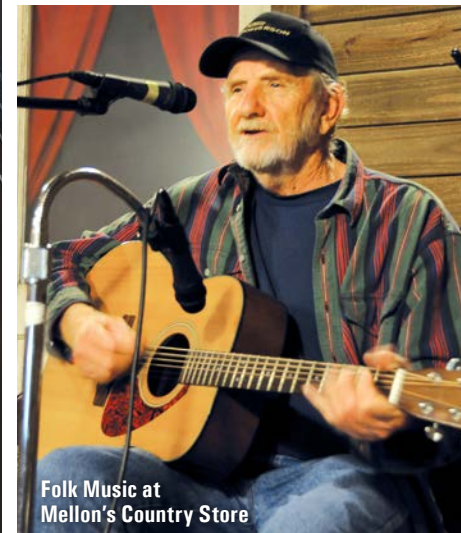
Considering that role and its historic value, chances are the light at Highway 7 & Broadway will be there for many more years to come. ■



Arkansas’ only “center of the road” traffic light is located in Smackover.



Basket Weaving



Folk Music at Mellon's Country Store



Handmade Pottery

WEEKEND

ROAD TRIP: HEART OF THE OZARKS

BY DAVID NILLES

North Central Arkansas is the destination for this month's trip along an Arkansas highway. Our travels take us to Stone County and the Ozark–St. Francis National Forest.

Driving north on Highway 9 brings motorists into Stone County where the beauty of the Ozark Mountains begins to become evident. The highway eventually leads to the town of **Mountain View**¹, known as the "folk music capital of the world."

In fact, it won't take you long to hear that music! You can find musicians playing in the city park, just northwest of the square, any evening of the week. Or music may break out on a street corner or a front porch on the square for those with time to just sit and listen. Hometown musicians with banjos, guitars, dulcimers and fiddles play old folk songs of the

Ozarks. There are also several music theaters in the area. Each November, the Mountain View Bluegrass Festival is held featuring musical acts from around the country. If mountain music is appealing to your ear, this is the place in Arkansas to find it.

In addition to music, the area around the Stone County Courthouse is the heart of a diverse shopping district and home to a variety of furniture, gift and antique shops. Be sure to visit **The Ironworks**², a store well-known for heirloom quality hand forged-iron home furnishings made right in the Ozarks. If you're hungry while in the square, try **P.J.'s Rainbow Café**³.

The restaurant features home style, southern cooking and, on the magazine crew's visit, enormous cinnamon rolls came out of the kitchen at dinner time, just in time for dessert!

Once you have taken in the sights and sounds of Mountain View, travel west out of town to the **Ozark Folk Center**⁴, a unique State Park and the country's only facility devoted to preserving Ozark music, crafts and heritage. The Center features a Crafts Village with over 20 artisans demonstrating Ozark Heritage crafts and the everyday skills used by Ozark Mountain people in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These skills have become Arkansas heritage crafts — basket weaving, broom making, blacksmithing, pottery making, jewelry making, weaving, quilting, wood carving,

soap making, candle making and more. Between April and November, the park offers visitors a chance to experience the living tradition of Ozark craftsmanship and visit with the people who make their living with these crafts. The Center is not just a fun way to spend the day with the family, but a learning experience as well. The Craft Village is open Tuesday through Saturday. Just like in Mountain View, Ozark music breaks out at the Folk Center as well. American folk musicians of regional and national renown perform at the Ozark Folk Center's evening concert programs and entertain park visitors during daylight hours.

The Folk Center offers diners **The Skillet Restaurant**⁵ and for overnight visits, there are attractive cabins and a swimming pool welcoming guests.

And when it comes to adventure, one in the treetops waits at **Loco Ropes**⁶, a high ropes course located at the Folk Center, just across the parking lot. Test your skills on the high wire adventure rope course with three different segments and then ride the zip line through the trees. There is also a rock climbing wall and the HotShot FreeFall for those with a sense of adventure.

To reach the Folk Center from Mountain View, travel Highway 14 northward out of town for about a mile. Then turn left on Highway 382 and follow the signs.

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Loco Ropes





For those with a love of outdoor adventure, the area around Mountain View offers hiking and bicycle trails.

The Syllamo Mountain Bike Trail⁷ is one to be recommended. It stretches over thousands of acres of the Ozark National Forest, and offers riders changing scenery and beautiful views of the White River, the Sylamore Creek valleys and the Ozark Mountains. The trail is one of the finest purpose-built mountain bike trail systems in the country and has been designated an “Epic” ride by the International Mountain Bicycling Association.

Arranged in four intertwined loops, the 50 miles of trail provides options for an all-day ride or an enjoyable hour or two. To reach the trail from Mountain View, travel Highway 5/14 northward. Access the trails from several trailheads along or just off Highway 5: Syllamo Trailhead is on Highway 5, and the White River Bluff or Scrapy Mountain trailheads are on Green Mountain Road.

Next stop on our road trip is the unique and fascinating **Blanchard Springs Caverns⁸**, one of the most spectacular and carefully developed

caves found anywhere. In addition to the caverns, the campgrounds at Blanchard Springs offer some of the most beautiful scenery in northern Arkansas. First stop at Blanchard Springs, however, is the visitor center. Here you can purchase tickets for a cave tour.

There are three different tours offered. The Dripstone Trail travels through two huge rooms filled with an incredible variety and number of crystalline formations — sparkling flowstone, towering columns and delicate soda straws. This short, easier trail takes visitors almost half a mile through the caverns. The Discovery Trail is a little longer and follows the path of the first explorers through large

water-carved passages, under the natural entrance, along the cave stream, and through enormous, naturally decorated rooms. This longer, more strenuous trail is 1.2 miles long but even so, it won't tire the average guest. A third offering is the Wild Cave Tour. This one takes visitors off the asphalt paths and through the undeveloped sections of the middle level of the cave. For this trail, come prepared to get dirty and have a unique, fun time. On this one, visitors will climb very steep slopes, crawl on hands and knees, pass under low ceilings and travel through red clay seeing areas most cave fans don't have a chance to see.

Once tickets are purchased, elevators take visitors underground to where all three trails begin. The trip down below is 216 feet, or about the height of a 21-story building. This incredible living cave stays a constant 58 degrees year round so you may want to take a jacket. An educational video is shown in the theater before the tours begin.

Back on ground level after the tour, head to the area down the hill from the caverns for more adventure. Campgrounds, hiking trails and picnic areas wait along North Sylamore Creek.

Lovers of the outdoors will enjoy the campsites. The scenery takes in the surrounding hills and many of the sites are spread out along the creek. There is plenty to do in the campground area. Down from the campsites is a popular swimming hole with a rocky beach. It's perfect for cooling off on warm sunny days. Bring lunch and enjoy the picnic area. It features a grassy, wide open area for football, softball or tossing the Frisbee. A huge rock bluff featuring a rock shelter at its base can be found here.

For fishing enthusiasts, trout fishing is available in picturesque **Mirror Lake⁹**. The setting is beautiful whether you catch a fish or not. A long wooden dock stretches along the lake making access easy.

Beyond Mirror Lake just a few hundred yards is a short, paved hiking path that follows beside a creek to a natural opening in the cavern. This beautiful, short stroll brings you to a small waterfall that spills from inside the cavern into the creek. It is one of the most photographed sights in

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Blanchard Springs Caverns
Photo Courtesy AR Parks & Tourism

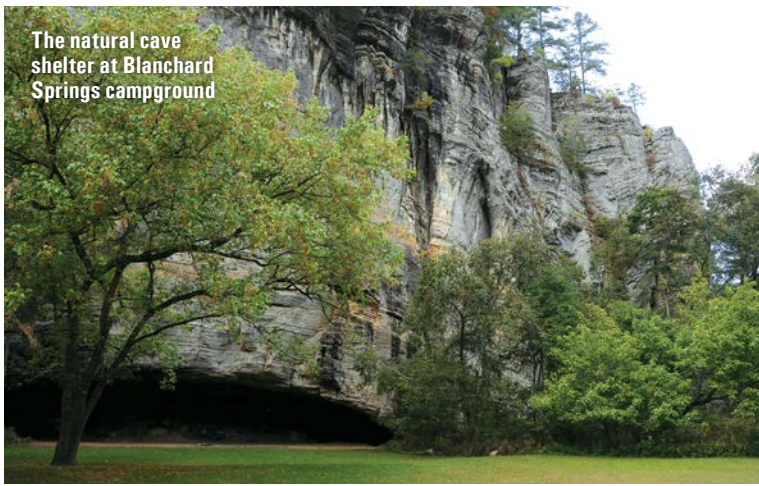
TO SEE THE UNIQUE BEAUTY OF **BLANCHARD SPRINGS CAVERNS** VISITORS MUST TAKE A 216 FOOT TRIP BELOW GROUND — ABOUT THE HEIGHT OF A 21-STORY BUILDING!



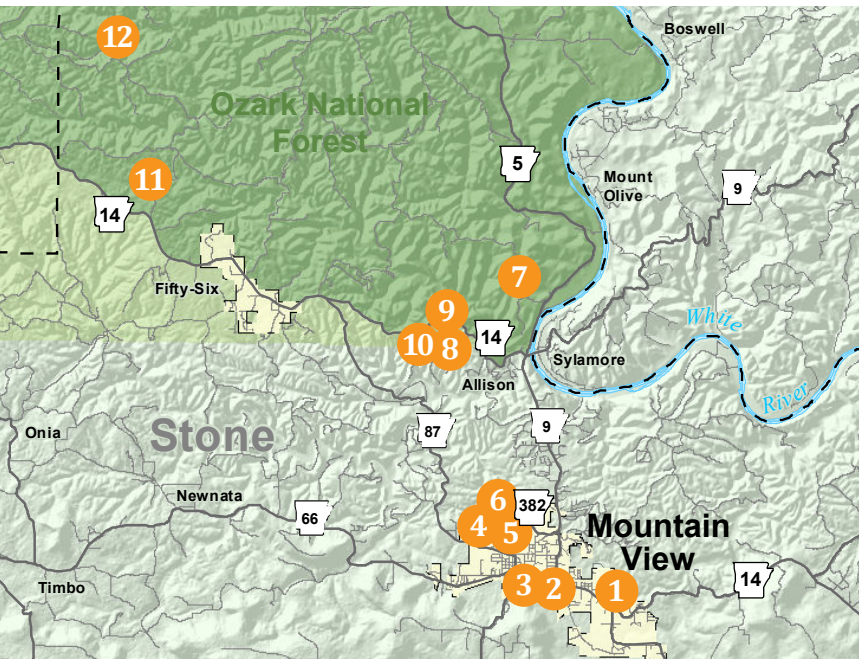
Syllamo Mountain Bike Trail
Photo Courtesy AR Parks & Tourism



Mirror Lake



The natural cave shelter at Blanchard Springs campground





The Baltimore deck truss bridge over North Sylamore Creek

the area and well worth the short walk. Other hiking trails can also be found in the campground area, one takes hikers up a mountain side for a beautiful view of **Sylamore Creek**¹⁰ and the valley below.

It's easy to spend the entire day at Blanchard Springs, but even more fun would be an overnight stay. It's one of the most scenic spots in north Arkansas and has plenty to offer.

To reach the caverns, travel seven miles north of Mountain View on Highway 9 and then six miles west on Highway 14. Highway 14 in this area is known as the **Sylamore Scenic Byway**.

Leaving Blanchard Springs Caverns, our road trip travels west on Highway 14 to two recreation areas that are ideal for camping and hiking.

The first is **Gunner Pool Recreation Area**¹¹. Gunner Pool offers a campground stretching along the scenic North



Gunner Pool Recreation Area

Sylamore Creek. Twenty-seven campsites with grills and tables await campers. There are bathrooms and fresh drinking water as well.

The area was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s. It's the old site of an actual CCC camp. Over 2,200 young men went through what was then known as Camp Hedges, home of Company 743. As many as 170 enrollees worked here at one time. Little remains of the original camp but the beauty of the area will make you want to stay awhile.

What does remain is a **Baltimore deck truss bridge** built in 1931 by Lyle & McWilliam Contractors. It is the only Baltimore deck truss design in Arkansas. A plaque on the end of the bridge names the AHTD Highway Commission Chairman at the time as Dwight Blackwood and C.S. Christian as the engineer on the project.

To arrive at the recreation site, watch for the Gunner Pool sign on Highway 14 and turn right onto the gravel road. Travel three miles into the camping area.

Just a few miles farther up the road is **Barkshed Recreation Area**¹². This area was also built by the CCC. Thirty foot high bluffs line the confluence of Cap Fork Creek and North Sylamore Creek. Several camping sites are available up on a rise and there is one down by the water as well. Fire rings and tables are included at each site. Barkshed offers three hiking trails through the area. To reach the site, travel on Highway 14 past the Gunner Pool sign and watch for the Barkshed sign. Turn right on Cartwright Road.

This brings us to the end of our weekend road trip in Stone County. But as is often the case, with so much to do, this one could easily be made a week-long trip. ■

DISTRICT 9

CONSTRUCTION



CORNER

Crews are busy in Benton County widening six miles of Highway 62 to five lanes. The improvements are located east of Bentonville, stretching from Avoca to Garfield.

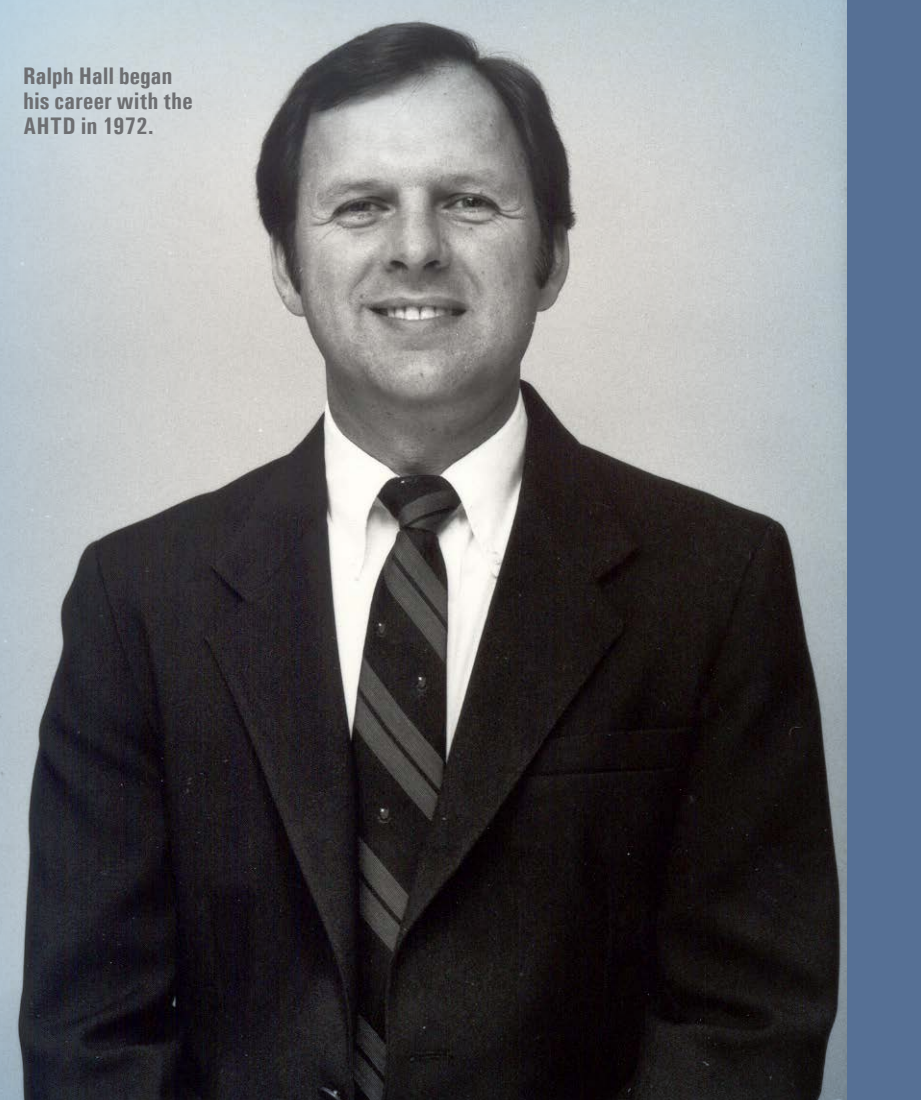
The contract was awarded to Nabholz Construction Corporation in October of 2013 for \$24.5 million. Work began on the improvements in late December of that year.

The project is approximately six miles long and contains one bridge built by stage construction. When completed, the 254-foot bridge will be one continuous composite W-beam unit. The bridge and new highway will feature an 11-foot median, four 12-foot lanes and 8-foot shoulders. The improvements are being completed on the existing route and on new location.

Crews are approximately halfway finished with construction. Work should be completed by the fall of 2015. ■



Ralph Hall began his career with the AHTD in 1972.



RALPH HALL

retires after 42 YEARS with the AHTD

BY DAVID NILLES

WHEN RALPH HALL BEGAN WORK AT THE ARKANSAS STATE HIGHWAY AND TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT, A GALLON OF GAS WAS 55 CENTS, MARK SPITZ WOULD SOON WIN SEVEN GOLD MEDALS AT THE SUMMER OLYMPICS AND "THE GODFATHER" WAS IN MOVIE THEATERS.

It was 1972. Hall had recently graduated from the University of Arkansas and was about to embark on a lifetime career with the AHTD.

Arkansas Highways magazine editor David Nilles recently sat down and visited with Hall about his career and 42 years at the Department.

NILLES: *What were your expectations upon graduating from college and coming to work for the Highway and Transportation Department as a Civil Engineer II?*

HALL: After being in school, I was looking forward to gaining some practical experience on the job. I also saw coming to work here as an opportunity to get my Professional Engineer's license. Then, I really thought I would move on to private practice or the construction industry.

NILLES: *After finishing the orientation program, you were assigned to District 1, RE 14 in West Memphis. Did you ease into the job well?*

HALL: I was the first graduate engineer to ever work in the West Memphis RE office and there was surely a lot of skepticism from my coworkers. They were all very experienced, and at times they would test me — maybe to see what I knew; but, more likely to let me know what they knew. I was so green and young and they were so good to me.

They are all retired and some have passed away. But, I remember the names and faces of all 18 of my coworkers like it was yesterday.

In 1976, Hall was promoted to Civil Engineer IV or Acting Resident Engineer to the just established RE 12 Office in Forrest City. Over the next several years, he would also work at RE Office 61 in North Little Rock and serve as Resident Engineer.

NILLES: *You had jobs at several RE Offices early in your career and then as Staff Construction Engineer. Were you learning along the way?*

HALL: I was like a dry sponge that can soak up to 20 times its weight in water. There was so much to learn at each new position and I just tried to soak it all in.

In 1983, Hall was promoted to Assistant District Engineer in District 6 and in 1984, he moved to the position of Staff Construction Engineer at that District. He was promoted to Division Head of Materials and Research in 1985.

NILLES: *How did it feel to become Division Head of Materials & Research? Was there a sense of accomplishment?*

HALL: I had experienced road construction with the common materials — soil, aggregates, asphalt and concrete; but, until then, I didn't know of the chemistry and physical properties that really made them work. That was quite an education. And, I've got to say that I never felt a sense of accomplishment upon being promoted to a new position. That always came as I was leaving that job and I would look back on how much I had learned and how far I had come since that first day on that particular job.

NILLES: *You became District Engineer of District 6 in 1988. How would you describe that job?*

HALL: A District Engineer has the opportunity to experience real job satisfaction. He can see a need, instruct that it be addressed — whether it be to clean out a pipe, mow a troubled spot, or build a roadway — and can feel an accomplishment when the job is completed. And, while funds, labor and equipment are limited, there can be greater satisfaction when the resources are limited.

District 6 is in a unique position. It gets a lot of oversight from the Central Office, and yet, it has a lot more access to the resources that are offered by the Central Office. I tried to take advantage of both.

In May of 1994, Hall became the Assistant Chief Engineer for Operations.

NILLES: *How did responsibilities broaden as you became an Assistant Chief Engineer (ACE)?*

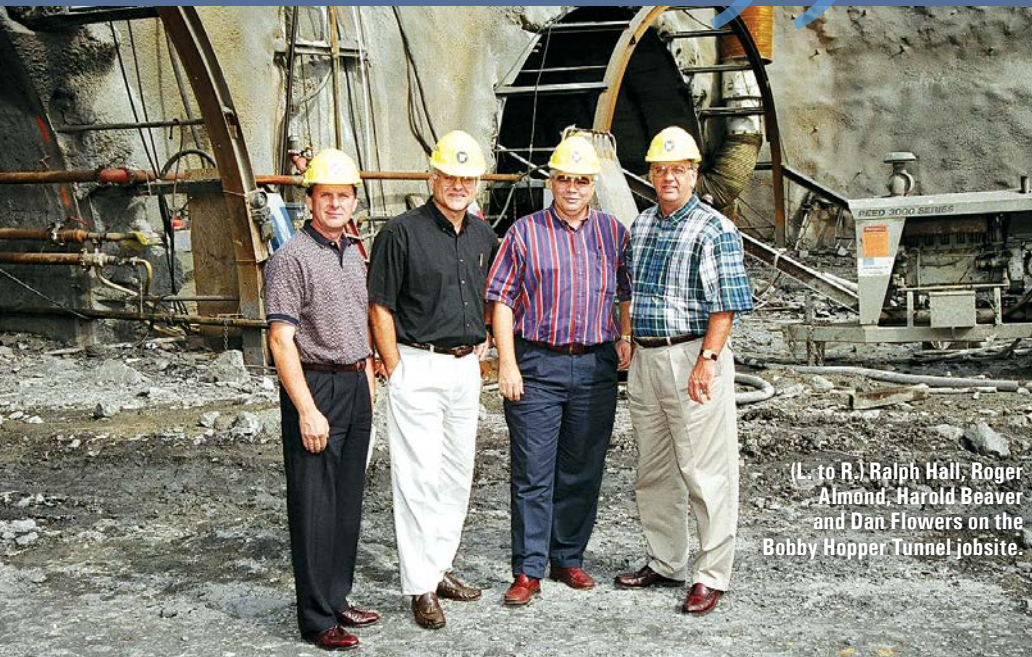
HALL: Moving to an ACE wasn't as big a jump development-wise as other positions had been. Using an artist as a metaphor, they were just giving me a larger canvas to apply the knowledge and skills I had acquired up to that time. That was the time I really began to understand that my role was not to solve problems; but to assist everyone else to make sure they have the tools and knowledge to succeed in their jobs.

NILLES: *In 2014, you were promoted to your present position as Deputy Director and Chief Engineer. Was it a big adjustment moving into that position?*

HALL: The big awareness to me was to see how diverse the problems can be at the Department; but, with each problem there was always an opportunity to assist others; to learn and develop and to improve operations at the Department.

(continued on page 30)

AN ENGINEERING DEGREE DOESN'T MAKE AN ENGINEER BY ITSELF. IT ONLY SEPARATES THOSE THAT HAVE AN APTITUDE FOR BECOMING AN ENGINEER FROM THOSE THAT DON'T.



(L. to R.) Ralph Hall, Roger Almond, Harold Beaver and Dan Flowers on the Bobby Hopper Tunnel jobsite.

NILLES: What are some of the more memorable projects you have worked on in your years at the Department?

HALL: There aren't any construction projects or road improvements that stand out to me. It's more the operational improvements that I either developed or have been involved with that I am most proud of and that will be the most long-lasting for the Department.

NILLES: Can you name a few that stand out?

HALL: I would include the SiteManager Program; the Roadside Vegetation Management and Litter Control Program, along with an expanded wildflower program; the Workforce Management System, which is a modernized time keeping system; SuperPave Mix Design Systems; Hiring and Promotion Management System; our Contractor Quality Control; our two Interstate Rehabilitation Programs and our Connecting Arkansas Program.

NILLES: As you look back on your career, what are the biggest changes you've seen in highway construction and how engineers do their job?

HALL: Of course, that would have to be the technology involved. The better understanding of how materials work, equipment advances, GPS, laser systems, nuclear systems, computers, servers, they all fit into the changes over the years. Each and every one of these has been important to our work and getting the job done.

NILLES: What project would you like to see begun or completed in the next five or ten years?

HALL: Looking ahead, I hope the Department can continue overall operations improvements, but for the pure physical infrastructure improvements, I am looking forward to the reconstruction of the Interstate 30 corridor in downtown Little Rock. I'm disappointed that I will miss the challenges and experiences my co-workers will gain on that project.



An avid horseman, Ralph Hall plans to spend time in the saddle during his retirement.

NILLES: For engineering students graduating with their degree today, what advice would you have for them?

HALL: An engineering degree doesn't make an engineer by itself. It only separates those that have an aptitude for becoming an engineer from those that don't. A new graduate is only starting his or her education in engineering. That is one of the reasons there is a four-year apprenticeship program required before you can take the tests to become a Professional Engineer. That should be the ultimate goal for everyone interested in becoming an "engineer".

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

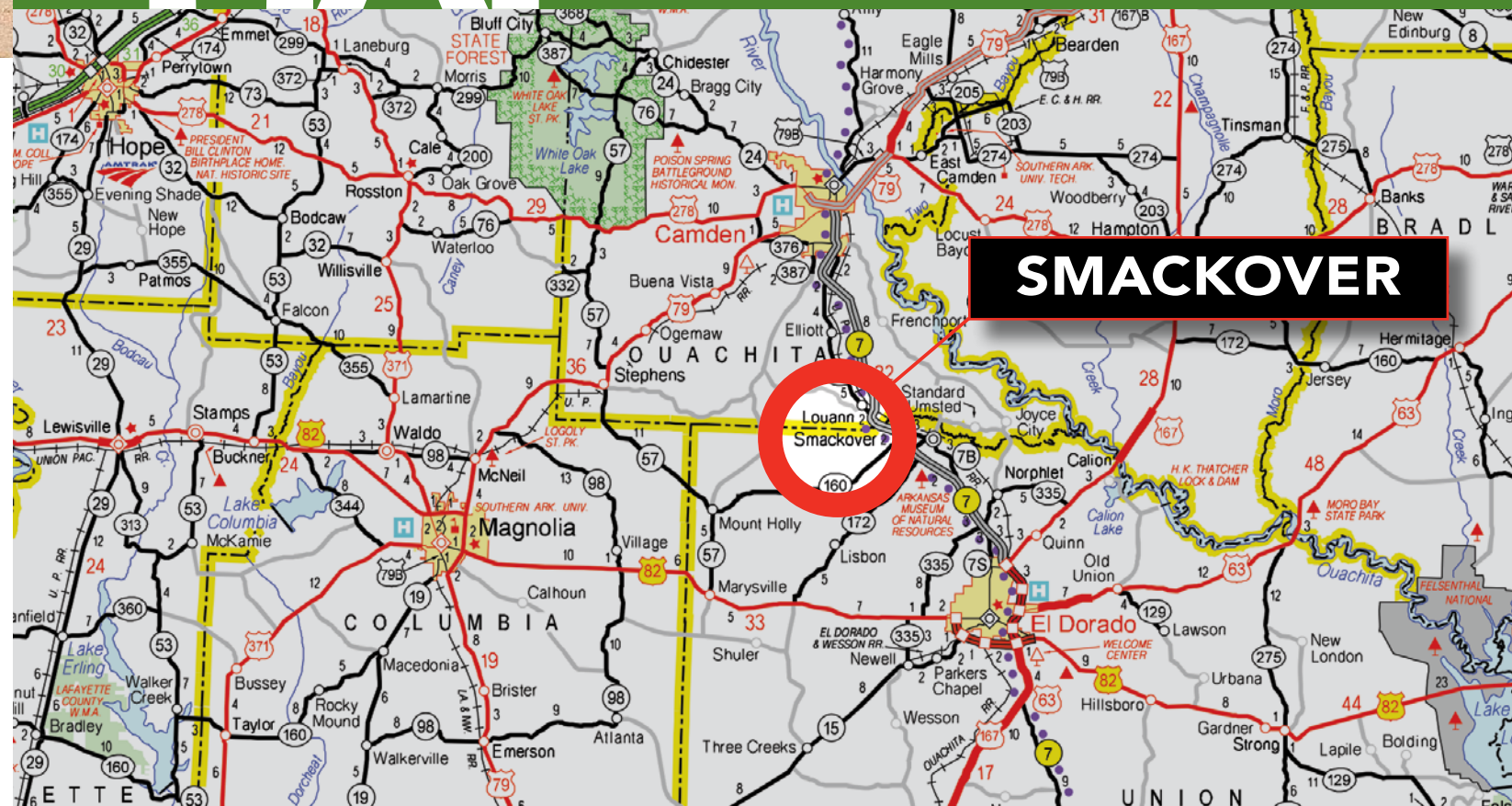
HALL: There are so many that I can't point to one single person. I'd say that I'm a composite of everyone I've worked with during the last 42-plus years and there have been a lot of wonderful people that I have worked with.

NILLES: As you enter retirement, what plans do you have?

HALL: For the last 42 years and 9 months, time has been such a limiting factor in enjoying things with my family and friends. Now, Ann and I have the time that we've always needed for major activities. We have several things planned in Europe, we can spend more time with our horses — taking cross country rides out west, taking flying lessons and more simple things like taking cooking and Master Gardner classes... I'll be busy. ■

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?



SMACKOVER

LOCATED IN SOUTH CENTRAL ARKANSAS IN UNION COUNTY IS THE TOWN OF SMACKOVER, WITH A POPULATION OF APPROXIMATELY 1,900 RESIDENTS. THE TOWN'S SUCCESS CAN BE TRACED TO THE OIL BOOM OF THE 1920S.

The area was originally settled by French hunters and trappers in the early 1800s. The settlement was named Sumac Couvert, translated "a covering of sumac". When land grant settlers moved into the area in the 1830s, the name was anglicized to Smackover.

The city became an agricultural and lumber community in the years that followed. However, in 1922, one of the nation's largest oil reservoirs was discovered. Within six months, the small town had grown to a population of 25,000. It was definitely a boomtown, in which thousands of drillers discovered oil with

a 95 percent success rate. The town flourished, however, by the early 1930s oil production had decreased, as did the town's population.

Today, oil still plays a major role in the town's vitality. Half of the town's population still depends on the oil industry. Smackover hosts the annual Oil Town Festival every summer celebrating the city's oil boom heritage. If visiting the area, be sure to visit the Arkansas Museum of Natural Resources, which preserves the State's oil history.

Among the noted celebrities from Smackover is Clyde Scott, an All-

Southwest Conference football player for the University of Arkansas in the 1940s. He went on to play for the Philadelphia Eagles and the Detroit Lions.

Another native who achieved great things in football was Wayne Hardin. Hardin served as head football coach at the United State Naval Academy from 1959 to 1964 and at Temple University from 1970 to 1982. He led Navy to appearances in the Orange Bowl and the Cotton Bowl.

Of special interest, Smackover proudly claims to have the only "center of the road" traffic light in the state of Arkansas.* ■

*See related story on page 21



SPECIAL EVENTS

AROUND THE STATE

BY GLENN BOLICK

NEW INTERSTATE 49 SEGMENT Connects Arkansas and Louisiana

November 10th was a special day for two states as the final segment of Interstate 49 was officially dedicated and opened to traffic connecting Texarkana and Shreveport.

Several hundred people gathered at the state line as officials from both states made comments before a simultaneous ribbon-cutting that opened the new Interstate in both directions.

Arkansas State Representative Mary P. "Prissy" Hickerson, a former ten-year member of the Arkansas Highway Commission, has been instrumental in the development of Interstate 49 between the two states which has been discussed for some 30 years.

"Arkansas has invested \$436 million to construct Interstate 49 from the state line to Highway 71 just north of Texarkana," said Hickerson. "Including the Loop, some 21 projects have been involved in completing the 42 miles."

AHTD Director Scott Bennett thanked Hickerson for her years of dedicated service

on the Highway Commission and in the Arkansas Legislature in his opening remarks.

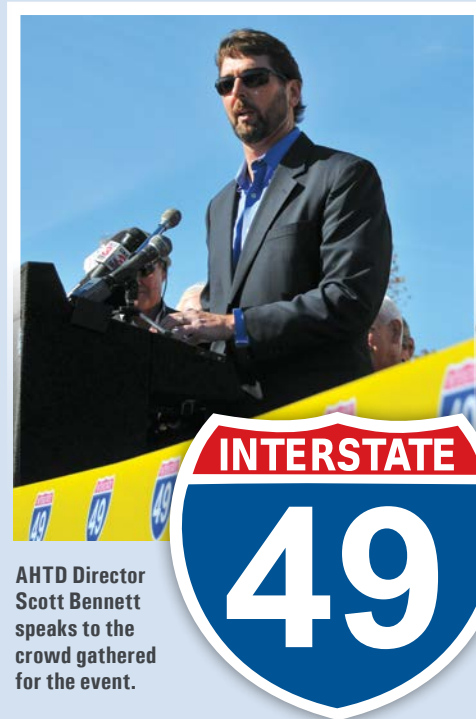
"Representative Hickerson, we dedicate a lot of our Arkansas highway projects," said Bennett, "but it's not every day that we open one of this magnitude."

Before the final segment was completed, the route was known as Highway 549. The Federal Highway Administration recently designated the entire route as Interstate 49. About 200 'Arkansas 549' signs have been replaced with Interstate 49 signs.

Earlier this year, Interstate 49 signs replaced Interstate 540 signs from Interstate 40 near Alma north to the Missouri state line.

"A total of \$1.2 billion toward the Interstate 49 corridor in Arkansas has either been completed or is under construction along the western border," noted Bennett. A new section, referred to as the Chaffee Crossing, will open near Fort Smith in the spring of 2015.

Interstate 49 is a congressionally-designated High Priority Corridor that will



AHTD Director Scott Bennett speaks to the crowd gathered for the event.

eventually connect Kansas City, Missouri, to New Orleans, Louisiana. In Kansas City, Interstate 49 will connect with Interstate 29 to create a 1,700-mile, uninterrupted Interstate from Winnipeg, Manitoba in Canada, through the heart of America to New Orleans. Once completed, Interstate 49 will intersect nine east-west Interstates.

The traditional ribbon-cutting ceremony had an interesting twist as "Louisiana ribbon" and "Arkansas ribbon" spanned the roadway from shoulder to shoulder. With "Welcome To" signs in the background, officials from each state counted down and cut the ribbon to open the new road to both states.

District 3 crews began the process of opening the new road to the public once the ceremony concluded. Louisiana crews did the same in their state. ■

Local and state officials cut the ribbon and open the new section of Interstate 49.



Prairie Grove Bypass DEDICATED IN OCTOBER

Highway Commissioner Dick Trammel and AHTD Director Scott Bennett joined a large crowd of local officials and business leaders on October 29th to officially dedicate the completion of the new Prairie Grove Bypass. Mayor Sonny Hudson greeted the crowd with opening remarks and hosted a luncheon afterwards.

Director Bennett noted that this project was actually the first work assignment he had when he joined the AHTD in 1989. "Mayor Hudson and I both have a lot of history with this project."

After that 1989 planning study was authorized, the Department determined that the bypass was feasible. After various

stages of development, construction got underway in 2011 with a \$5.2 million contract for grading and structures, and in 2013 a \$10 million base and surface job was awarded to APAC-Central to complete the project.

Commissioner Trammel noted, "In Benton and Washington Counties there are about 30 projects with a total cost of \$110 million underway with an estimated \$455 million more on the way in the near future."

Trammel closed by thanking the public for their support in voting for two recent highway programs that have enabled the Commission to spend close to an additional \$3 billion on highway improvements. ■



(L. to R.) Prairie Grove Mayor Sonny Hudson, AHTD Director Scott Bennett, Commissioner Dick Trammel and Executive Director of Arkansas Good Roads Transportation Council Bill Ramsey.

Local dignitaries and AHTD representatives celebrate a new interchange on Interstate 40.



NEW INTERSTATE 40 INTERCHANGE AT LONOKE Opens with Dedication

Lonoke area officials have a long, successful history of working with the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, and they came out to show their support with an "indoor" dedication of the new Interstate 40 Interchange in Lonoke on December 5th.

Highway Commissioner Tom Schueck, former Senator Bobby Glover, and others, were on site getting ready for the dedication when the rain came blowing in and forced the event indoors. Lonoke Mayor Wayne McGee, Lonoke County

Judge Doug Erwin, JP Bill Ryker and Chamber Director John Garner were among the hosting party.

"The idea for this new Interchange goes back to 1998," said Commissioner Schueck. "It took awhile to get it done, but this new \$7.9 million project now connects Highway 89 to the Interstate instead of just going over it."

The City contributed twenty percent of the cost of the project that included minor widening of Highway 89 from Interstate 40 to Highway 70. ■



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