



Arkansas HIGHWAYS

SUMMER 2020

A PUBLICATION OF THE
ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION | MAGAZINE

Family, Engineering, Leadership

ARDOT's First Female Director

**MEET ARDOT'S NEWEST
Highway Commissioner**

**ARDOT ROAD CREWS:
Business as Usual**

**THERE'S A NEW
Deputy in Town**

Dear ARDOT Family,

Welcome to the Summer 2020 issue of the Arkansas Highways Magazine! Concerning COVID-19, everything is starting to slowly pick back up and a lot of you have returned to full-time on-site work. I hope everyone feels safe with the safety precautions that have been put into place. If you have any concerns, please let your supervisor know.

Two of the articles in this quarter's edition emphasize the good work our employees have done during the COVID crisis. I really enjoyed reading "ARDOT Road Crews: Business as Usual" and "ARDOT United: Doing our Part." I am so proud of ARDOT employees and everyone's great attitudes throughout this challenge. You are the best.

After a delay because of COVID-19, we are re-starting the process of educating the public about Issue 1 that will appear on the November 3, 2020, General Election ballot. Voting "Yes" for Issue 1 will result in the continuation of the ½ cent sales tax that was approved by voters in 2012 for state highway, county road and city street improvements. Voting "No" for Issue 1 will result in the expiration of this revenue stream in June 2023. A vote for Issue 1 is a vote for better roads. In the next Arkansas Highways Magazine, we will provide more details so that each of you can base your vote on the facts and maybe educate your family and friends as well.

I hope each of you are enjoying summer! I plan to spend some time on the lake, grill burgers, eat watermelon and make some homemade ice cream (while practicing appropriate social distancing of course 😊). It will be fall before we know it!

Until next time, please stay healthy and protect yourself and your coworkers by following the recommended COVID-19 safety precautions. Each of us ultimately can only be responsible for ourselves, but we can possibly make a difference by being a good example.

All my best,

Lorie Tudor, P.E., Director



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



FRONT COVER:
ARDOT Director Lorie Tudor

BACK COVER:
Wildflowers along U.S. Highway 167

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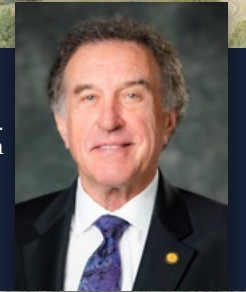
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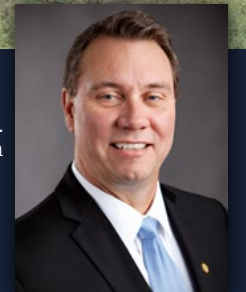


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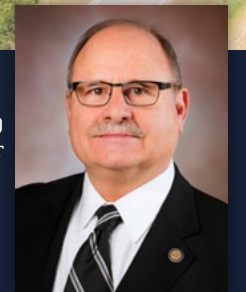
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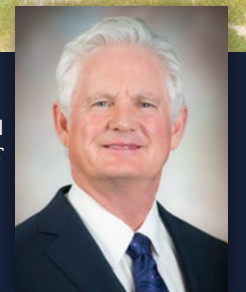
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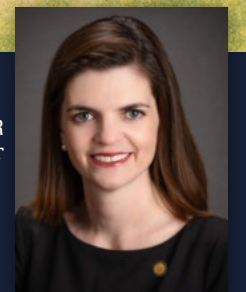
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PASSION & PUBLIC SERVICE

MEET ARDOT'S NEWEST HIGHWAY COMMISSIONER

BY BRITNI PADILLA-DUMAS



FOR MANY, THE YEAR 2020 HAS PRESENTED COUNTLESS UNFORESEEN CHALLENGES AND PROPELLED PEOPLE, BUSINESSES AND GOVERNMENT TO COMPLETELY ABANDON "NORMAL" OPERATIONS. THE SAME CAN BE SAID FOR ARDOT AND THE ARKANSAS HIGHWAY COMMISSION.

On March 3, 2020, Arkansas Highway Commission Chairman Tom Schueck passed away, leaving vacant more than just a seat at the table.

Governor Asa Hutchinson, bound by law to appoint a replacement within 30 days, selected Marie Holder of Little Rock to fill the ranks. Holder will serve the remainder of Schueck's tenure, which will expire January 14, 2021. Her

reappointment will begin January 15, 2021, and she will serve a full 10-year term.

"I began my career in Washington, D.C. where I learned the importance of transportation to improving the overall economic development of a state," Holder said. "Arkansas' transportation system relies on relationships built between our citizens, state government and the federal government. I am honored to be a part of that partnership."

"Throughout her career, Marie has demonstrated that she is a sharp businesswoman with a diversity of skills and talents," Governor Hutchinson said. "She is smart, she is talented, she

is tough and she is service-minded," he added. "She brings the perspective of a businesswoman, she brings the perspective of a mom and she brings the perspective of someone who is dedicated to public service." Holder is the third woman to be appointed to the Highway Commission since its inception in 1913.

"As the mother of two children—one of whom is a newly licensed sixteen-year-old—I will put safety first in every decision I make. As a businesswoman, I will work to promote our transportation system's fiscal responsibility and transparency," Holder added.

"I'm a Commissioner; my role is to act as a representative of the Arkansas

taxpayer," Holder explained. "I am there to ensure that Arkansans can travel across the state as safely and easily as possible. The Commission provides transparency by overseeing and communicating the work of ARDOT. It is our role to oversee the planning, construction and maintenance of Arkansas roads with an eye for fiscal responsibility. Most importantly, we look at long range planning and how each decision will impact the state's overall transportation system."

Holder has been president of Holder Consulting since 2015, a company that provides compliance and fundraising work. She has also been a member of the Arkansas Medical Board and a fellow of the Federation of State Medical Boards since 2016. Prior to her time with Holder Consulting, she worked as the executive director and communications director of the Republican Party of Arkansas and as the deputy press secretary for former U.S. Senator Trent Lott. Holder is also involved with her church and is a volunteer with Arkansas Children's Hospital Auxiliary and Girl Scouts of America.

"It's been quite a transition as a new commissioner, but it's been great," Holder said. "Lorie Tudor is our new Director and Robert Moore is our new Chairman. Of course, we've also been dealing with a global pandemic in the face of all of this change. I'm very proud to see ARDOT's reaction to the coronavirus and of their response in terms of keeping the supply chain open for emergency services and first responders, keeping our employees safe and keeping our roads maintained for the public. It's a challenge, but I know we're rising to it." ■



FAMILY, ENGINEERING, LEADERSHIP ARDOT'S FIRST FEMALE DIRECTOR

BY BRITNI PADILLA-DUMAS

IT ISN'T OFTEN THAT I GET THE CHANCE TO WRITE A TRULY MOTIVATING, INSPIRING STORY, SO WHEN THAT OPPORTUNITY PRESENTS ITSELF, I CAN'T HELP BUT TO SEIZE IT.

It's the 1990s. Adults used pagers and dial-up internet to access the World Wide Web. Kids (looking at you, millennials) played with Pogs, Tamagotchi and American Girl dolls. Meanwhile, one young woman in Arkansas decided to completely change her life.

FAMILY

Lorie Tudor's story begins with a decision and unwavering determination. Like many women in the 1970s, Lorie never thought to study the mysterious goings-on of engineering. She graduated high school and attended Arkansas Tech

University with a plan to achieve a nursing degree. After one year, however, Tudor decided to focus her time and efforts into being a successful spouse and parent. She became a Clerk Typist for the Equipment and Procurement Division and began her career with the Department.

"I never was satisfied that I didn't finish college," Tudor said. "I knew that one day I would finish when the time was right. I'd been at the Department 13 years and had reached a point that I couldn't go much further without a college education."

Tudor decided to explore the possibility of becoming an engineer and began taking night classes in college algebra and trigonometry to test her mathematical skills.

"Who would have known that not only was I good at math, but I actually liked it," Tudor laughed. "My supervisors were very encouraging and gave me additional confidence that I

could do it. So, I took the plunge and quit my job!"

Yes, you read that correctly. She quit her job, with benefits, so that she could be a student. Let's not forget that she is also a wife and mother.

"I took all of my basics and a few other classes at UALR. I was able to take a lab at Arkansas Tech one summer. I took a history class at UCA in Conway. I was all over the place, getting as many hours as I could in Central Arkansas so that I could be home as much as possible," Tudor reflected. "Once I got all that I could, I began classes at the University of Memphis. It took me two summers and three semesters to graduate with a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering. I did commute as much as possible; not only was I determined to get this degree, but I was also determined to still be a good mom. I wanted it all and I didn't want to fail at anything."

For two years, Tudor fought for her dreams. If she had an 8:00 a.m. class in Memphis, she was up and at 'em at 4:00 a.m. She drove a beat up Honda Civic with no air conditioning...in Arkansas summers...with a three-hour one-way commute.

"I look back at those times and smile because they were good times. I was achieving something I'd always wanted to and it was worth the sacrifice. If I did have classes into the evening, or if I couldn't drive back, I would rent a dorm for the night for \$15. I had a desk, a clean bed and a shower, and I was on campus. What more could I want," she asked sincerely.

The fall of 1997 brought cooler weather, beautiful leaves and the University of Memphis' most recent Civil Engineering graduate, Lorie Tudor. She accepted a position with the Department in the Planning and Research Division, ironically making less money than she did when she left to seek an education.



Mid-1980s – Tudor working in Programs and Contracts

ENGINEERING

Tudor quickly rose through the ranks at the Department with her diligence and determination. She passed her professional engineer exam on the first try and successfully completed many large projects. Tudor spoke of one of the biggest projects in her career:

"At the time, we had an archaic, outdated system to predict our cash forecast. I was tasked to develop a new system. The project took two years and a tremendous amount of coordination between Information Technology and Fiscal Services. The new system we created is easy to use, easy to read and can generate various reports. I was able to learn so much during that process," Tudor said.

LEADERSHIP IN THE FACE OF COVID

"When I first found out that I was being appointed Director, I had fears and worries about certain things. I know that I have a lot to learn about public speaking and thinking on my feet in public. I knew I needed to step up and

improve on a couple of areas to be an effective Director.

"WELL," she laughed, "those worries seem so small, now! The day I took over was March 23rd and Covid had just become a reality in Arkansas. There was a lot of worry and fear about how bad it was going to be. My focus completely changed from myself and my ability to perform well to the employees of ARDOT and how I can best protect them. We're talking about people's health and safety, and decisions that were being made were extremely important. I wanted to be sure that our employees were being protected to the best of our ability.

"Some employees had to keep working to keep our essential services going. I worry about them, and I appreciate them, because we still have to keep certain things moving. I'm so grateful to them for their continued work during these conditions," Tudor added.

She also noted that becoming a new Director for a state agency in the face

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of a global pandemic has been a good learning experience.

"I think I've grown a lot as a person and as a Director. My focus is where it should be: on the employees and motorists."

ENCOURAGEMENT

When Tudor was graduating high school and considering a career, it was not common for women to pursue fields of engineering, science or math. Clearly, women can achieve goals, despite their circumstances. Lorie Tudor is the first woman to be the Director of the Arkansas Department of Transportation.

"If I can do it, anyone can do it. If you find your strengths and go for it, you will excel. Don't let anyone make you feel like you're not as good because of your gender. You are just as good, you are just as smart. I think women have a different perspective, but together with men, we can work and accomplish anything. Women must be confident in who they are and not be apologetic for being a woman. Be yourself, whomever that is. People will respond to your genuineness. You don't have to be someone you're not. That will take you far...that and studying. Hard work and having a dream go a long way."

PERSPECTIVE

Tudor encourages people to be themselves. She both sees and accepts people for exactly who they are. She is not someone who likes to brag or boast. If you ask her questions about herself, she will tell you that she's merely doing her job.

"My experience and background have made me extremely grateful. I do not take it for granted. I strongly feel the weight of this responsibility. I know that there is a purpose for me being here, because if you look at it on paper, I shouldn't be here. Sometimes I think, "What am I doing at this desk, how did this happen?" Deep down, I'm still that little clerk-typist that was struggling to



Lorie Tudor, ArDOT Director

make ends meet, living in what used to be a nursery school, behind my grandmother's house.

"I know going back to school was hard on my kids. It was hard on my husband. It was hard on me. But we made it through, and it taught them (and me) to persevere through times that aren't easy. Anything worth achieving is not going to be easy. It taught me to be very careful with my time and how important it was to not take my kids or my opportunity for granted.

"I'm grateful to the Commission

for giving me this opportunity. I sincerely want to do a good job for the employees of the Department. I know I have to earn their respect and their confidence, and I will do all I can to achieve that.

"I wish I could talk to every single employee and encourage them and thank them for what they do. I think about that often. I know there are so many of them that I've never met, and I just wish that was possible. I appreciate every single one of you. **Every. Single. One.**" ■



RANDY ORT, ARDOT'S NEWEST DEPUTY DIRECTOR AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, GREW UP AN AVID RAZORBACK FAN IN NORTH LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS. At that time, it was common in his neighborhood to hear honking if the Hogs had won a game. He enjoyed listening to the Razorback games with his family, especially if it meant blasting a car horn in the hour of victory.

Fifty years later, his passion for family and Razorback football remain resolute.

"I have a son, two daughters, a step daughter, five grandkids and a sixth on the way," Ort beamed as he gestured to his wall of family photos. "Those are the important things in life. I'm very proud of my job. I'm very proud to work here and to be a government employee. But that is all secondary to family."

Ort's mother passed away when he was a senior in high school, and his father followed two years later when he was



THERE'S A NEW DEPUTY IN TOWN

BY BRITNI PADILLA-DUMAS

attending college at the University of Arkansas.

"I decided I didn't want to be there anymore, so I dropped out. After a year of being out of school, I realized I needed that degree to do the things I wanted to do in life, so I went back to school. I was the first one in my family to get a four-year college degree. I knew that it was important to my parents that I get it, so it was important to me."

He began his career with the Department in 1988. His neighbor at the time, Chuck Freeman, encouraged him to apply for a job at the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department.

"I started out as a writer," he reflected. "I wrote for *Arkansas Highways*, helped handle press inquiries, and wrote a lot of press releases."

After being a writer with the Public Affairs Office for about a year, Ort was tasked to manage the public hearings process.

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"That was a fantastic experience, getting to travel all over the state, conducting public hearings, meeting face to face with property owners and other people. The Public Affairs office dealt with the media day to day, but that's only one group of people. I was also very involved in the legislative process, so that's elected officials. But my greatest joy was interacting with the general public," Ort said. "I'm just so fortunate to have that background because it's helped me throughout my entire career."

Public Involvement, once part of the Public Affairs Office, moved to the Environmental Division. Ort assisted in the transition and then returned to Public Affairs, where he remained until 2015, when he was promoted to the Assistant Chief – Administration position.

"Former Director Scott Bennett gave me the opportunity to continue my career in upper management, and now Director Lorie Tudor has placed her faith and confidence in me to be her right hand. My goal is to assist in keeping her job as efficient as possible so that she can guide the Department in the right direction," Ort explained.

Ort is someone who leads by example and holds himself to the same standard in which he holds others. His down-to-earth demeanor and integrity are both genuine and contagious.

"I would not ask someone to do something for me that I'm not willing to do or haven't done myself. I like to encourage people. I want to encourage people to do their best, to maybe think outside of the box a little bit, and not be afraid to come to me with ideas. I want to make collaborative decisions and I like to seek other people's input," he said. "If I tried to do this job by myself, I would be an absolute failure. There's no question about it. Fortunately, we have experts here; encouraging them to do the right thing and bring me the right information, so that we are all working together...that's how we succeed."

Simply put, Randy Ort is a leader. Being the Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer may not have been anything he envisioned for himself, but he is exactly where he deserves to be.

"Take pride in what you do. I don't care what your direct role or direct function is. It plays a part in the big picture. Take pride in what you do and give it all that you've got."

"...and one more thing: WOO PIG SOOIE!" ■

”
**I WOULD NOT ASK
SOMEONE TO DO
SOMETHING FOR
ME THAT I'M NOT
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OR HAVEN'T DONE
MYSELF. I LIKE TO
ENCOURAGE PEOPLE.**



ARDOT ROAD CREWS: BUSINESS AS USUAL

BY DAVID NILLES

WHILE THE COVID-19 VIRUS HAS FORCED MANY ARDOT EMPLOYEES TO ADAPT TO NEW PROCEDURES AND TO WORK FROM HOME, DEPARTMENT MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION CREWS ACROSS THE STATE HAVE REMAINED IN THE FIELD DURING THE COURSE OF THE VIRUS.

"Our core responsibility remains to keep the highways open and safe, and our Maintenance crews are out on the roads daily to ensure that our highways can continue the safe movement of people and goods," said ARDOT Director Lorie Tudor. "To keep our employees safe, we have had to change the way we deliver that service."

ADAPTING TO CONDITIONS

To guarantee the health and safety of employees during the COVID-19 virus, several policies and procedures have been implemented. Among them:

- Hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes have been provided in all Department vehicles;
- Travel was limited to one person per vehicle, or two people wearing masks sitting diagonal from one another in a quad-cab truck with the windows open;
- No overnight travel, day trips only;
- No self-service at Department fueling stations – only the station attendants are to handle the fuel pump;
- To the extent practical, employees keep six feet distance from one another;
- Masks are worn when proper distancing cannot be maintained.

Resident Engineer Joe Plyler in District 7 had this to say about the Department crews he works with.



"I would like to commend everyone for the way they have stayed focused and kept such a cooperative attitude despite the disruptions, the daily changes and the adjustments to the way we've had to complete our assignments. I am grateful and feel privileged to be working with the people in our crew."

District 9 Construction Engineer Mitchell Archer believes Resident Engineer (RE) crews and Bridge Inspection crews have done a fantastic job adapting to the changing guidelines related to the COVID-19 precautions.

"Our crews' workloads have not really slowed down much, so they have simply figured out how to handle it and still limit exposure as much as possible. They have had to learn new methods of doing business, such as scanned daily delivery tickets instead of paper copies. Crews are staying on the front lines without complaining. They are troopers!"

In District 4, it has been business as usual, and then some, according to District Engineer Chad Adams.

"Due to reduced amounts of traffic on the roadway, highway contractors are able to work hours that weren't available previously to them. This means our RE Office employees have seen an increase in their workloads. Our Construction personnel and Bridge Inspectors are to be commended for adapting to the necessary health precautions and carrying out their work"

CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS MOVE FORWARD

Highway construction projects are progressing as long as the contractors are able to work.

"It is very important for our Construction oversight personnel to work with our contractors to ensure the quality of

(continued on page 12)



Bella Vista Bypass construction is just one of the projects progressing amid Covid19.

construction work,” Tudor stated. “Not only are the highway improvements needed, but our contractors are oftentimes small businesses. If our employees are not there, the contractor cannot work. It is important that we do our part to keep that segment of the economy, these small businesses, up and running.”

Changes involving jobsites include:

- Entering into a partnering agreement with contracting groups stating that all parties will adhere to precautionary guidelines established by major health organizations while working on highway projects;
- Allowing contractors to request longer working hours on some projects due to reduced traffic volumes;
- Allowing time extensions on projects if the contractor’s crew is impacted by COVID-19;
- Implementing paperless ticketing for deliveries to jobsites.

District 8 Engineer Jason Hughey reflected on the opportunity to move

ahead with construction projects.

“Our Resident Engineer staff has worked hard to continue providing important inspections on our construction projects. They have had to react to many changes, such as how they interact with the public, implementing new methods to obtain tickets for material delivered to the job site, how to hold meetings on the jobsite while maintaining safe social distancing and many more adjustments while continuing to make sure our projects are built correctly.”

“We understand that we have to continue to perform our core functions while protecting employees and citizens from the spread of COVID-19,” Tudor added.

A HELPING HAND TO TRUCKERS

“Some of our activities have been aimed directly at the trucking industry,” Tudor noted.

“It is so important to keep goods moving on our highways right now, and the closing of dining facilities has

“If our employees are not there, the contractor cannot work. It is important that we do our part to keep that segment of the economy, these small businesses, up and running.”

- Lorie Tudor, ARDOT Director

been very hard on our trucking industry partners – they have fewer options of places to stop for food or rest rooms.”

To help with this, ARDOT is keeping all rest areas open that have truck parking, and the agency has increased the cleaning and sanitizing frequency of the rest rooms at those locations.

“We were also the first state in the country to implement a pilot program that allows food trucks to operate on a limited basis at selected rest areas,” Tudor noted.



Arkansas is the first state in the country to implement a pilot program that allows food trucks to operate at selected rest areas to help truckers.

The move is an effort to increase food options for truck drivers during the COVID virus so they have a safe place to eat while carrying essential goods and aid to our communities. The two rest stops in Arkansas with food services included Social Hill and Big Piney.

Jeffrey Wells of Well’s Concessions served truckers at Social Hill.

“I’ve been in business for 17 years, but this is the first time I have ever opened shop in a rest area,” he shared.

“Business has been good. It is a good feeling to help out our truckers who have continued to drive their routes.”

In addition to making food available, the Arkansas Highway Police have been handing out masks to truck drivers at weigh stations, and some commercial vehicle regulations have been waived or relaxed per orders of the President and Governor.

A SPIRIT OF WILLINGNESS

District 10 Engineer Brad Smithee shared what he called “a spirit of

willingness” among his employees.

“We have seen where we may have had a person in one of the high risk categories that needed to stay at home,” he commented. “On some occasions, these have been positions with very specific skills and training that left us in potentially difficult situations to figure out how to carry on. We have had numerous people step forward and volunteer to work shifts to help us through this time. Each did so without being asked, they could have stayed at home, but instead these wonderful staff members were willing to help!”

District One Engineer Cannon Callicott believes everything his crews do has been affected to some degree, and yet his employees find a way to continue.

“Overall, I think our crews have done remarkably well under these conditions. It has been a drastic change to the way we do business and our usual mind set. I couldn’t be prouder of our employees and their response to this event.”

The quote below by Charles Swindoll stays on Joe Plylar’s refrigerator at home.

“While I often struggle with my attitude, I’m glad I work with people who recognize how critical a role attitude plays in completing ARDOT’s work successfully.”

“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failure, than successes, than what other people think, say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company...a church...a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace. We cannot change our past...or the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitude.”

- Charles Swindoll

ARDOT • United

Doing Our Part

BY DAVID NILLES

IT HAS BEEN, PERHAPS, THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE THAT ARDOT HAS EVER FACED. Ironically, it has not involved a funding hurdle, a highway design or project construction.

The COVID-19 virus has forced everyone around the globe to adapt to a new way of doing things.

The contagious nature of the virus has forced most ARDOT employees to work from home. Essential employees, and those on job sites, have taken extra precautions to ensure their safety. One thing is for sure, though many of us are working farther apart, these new circumstances have brought us closer together.

In addition to performing regular job duties, the COVID-19 virus has required many ARDOT staffers to go beyond the normal call of duty as we adapt to the many changes.



- The Equipment & Procurement Division (E & P) secured five-gallon buckets of hand sanitizer from a local distillery and arranged to have the buckets delivered to each ARDOT District. District Engineers then contacted local suppliers of small bottles. The bottles were filled and placed in every Department vehicle possible. It was great to see our District Offices working together to ensure each District had plenty of sanitizer. E & P Division Head Danny Keene and his staff

acted quickly, as did Safety Officers Ross Maestas, Travis Nelson and Jayson Thompson who volunteered to deliver the buckets around the State. That is teamwork!

- A volunteer mask-making project was initiated early on. Dozens of employees (plus a couple of family members) have been busy making hundreds of masks. Due to a shortage of elastic, our E & P Division purchased a large number of ponytail holders. Thanks go to Nativ for donating several boxes of fabric. Employees from Human Resources delivered materials to those volunteers who needed them, and delivered finished masks where they were needed the most around the State.
- A "Heroes of ARDOT" Facebook page was created as a means of staying in touch with fellow Department employees and to recognize, encourage and connect with one another during this difficult time. ARDOT staff have been sharing stories of extraordinary acts of kindness and recognizing those who have gone beyond the call of duty.
- The Maintenance Division has been coordinating closely with the State Emergency Operations Center led by the Arkansas Division of Emergency Management (ADEM). Several ARDOT Districts have been designated as regional sites by ADEM to ensure medical supplies, pharmaceuticals and personal protective equipment (PPE) are transported to all corners of the State. ARDOT employees have been driving trucks, operating forklifts and hauling pallets of PPE into our facilities. These regional sites are where County and local officials have been coming to pick up their PPE

for first responders. In addition, ARDOT trucks and truck drivers have been the sole delivery providers to take these materials "the last mile" (which means from the stockpile facility to some hospitals and other medical facilities).

- Daily loads of hand sanitizer from L'Oréal have been delivered to medical facilities across the State as well as to the Arkansas Department of Corrections with security escorts provided by Arkansas Highway Police officers.
- ARDOT's janitorial staff has made the rounds regularly cleaning and sanitizing Department rest rooms and public areas.
- In addition to coming together to fight the virus, employees in District 10 helped the citizens of Craighead County with cleaning up storm debris from the recent tornado, using Department dump trucks and equipment to load and haul vegetative and structural debris to dumping locations in Jonesboro.
- Director of Human Resources, Crystal Woods, has stayed in touch with ARDOT's entire staff through daily emails. She has provided words of encouragement, news of the latest developments and recognition of staff members answering the call of those in need. She has even shared tips with parents about how our kids can continue their schoolwork, overcome their fears and stay healthy.
- ARDOT's Highway Police Division has been working

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Arkansas Highway Police handed out masks to truckers at area rest stops.

Dozens of employees (plus a couple of family members) have been busy making hundreds of masks.



Patrick Thomas brought ARDOT attention to a storybook developed for and by children around the world which shares tips on how to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.



Travis Flowers put together information related to virtual meetings via several different services.



with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to distribute 100,000 surgical masks to truck drivers at weigh stations and rest areas across Arkansas. This is a multi-state effort, which involves the distribution of one million surgical masks across the country.

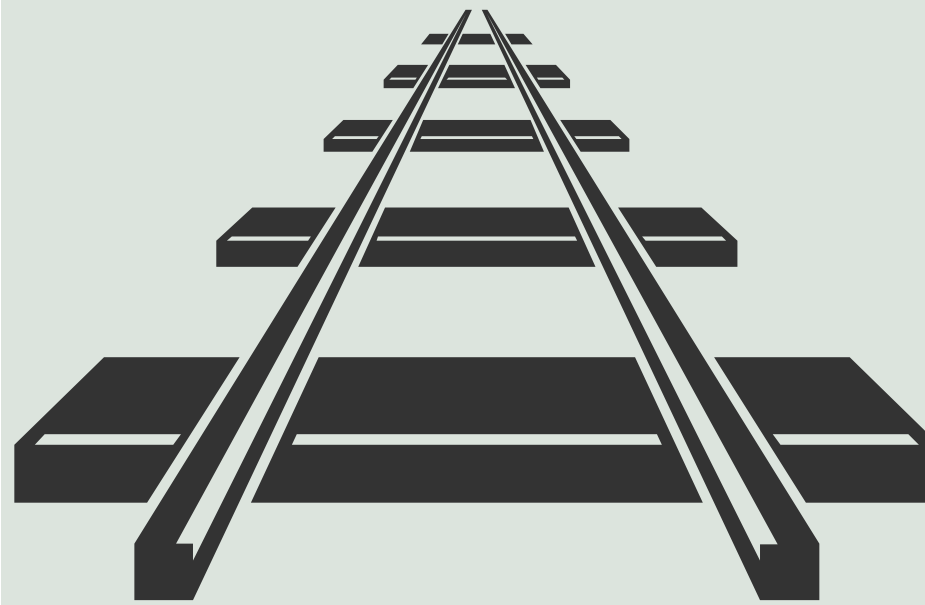
- ARDOT's Workforce Development Coordinator, Patrick Thomas, provided a storybook to be shared electronically with children of ARDOT staffers. Titled *My Hero Is You*, it was developed for and by children around the world and shares tips on how to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- District 8 Human Resources Specialist Travis Flower put together information related to virtual meetings via several different services (Zoom, WebEx, Telegram and GroupMe) in order for Department personnel to conduct meetings when necessary. He also provided best practices for planning a successful virtual meeting.

I just want to say thank you to management for your support, thank you to our front line supervisors for your leadership and thank you to each and every employee whether working remotely or working on site," stated Crystal Woods, Human Resources Division Head.

"Everyone continues to do their part and pull together; it's such a wonderful thing to be a part of."

ARDOT Director Lorie Tudor reflected on Department staff's focus over the past several months.

"I'm proud of each and every one of our employees for stepping up to not only take care of the public, but to also take care of each other. We are striving to do our part in these unusual times." ■



PAULETTE RICE: Coordinating Arkansas' Railroad Crossings

BY DAVID NILLES

AS ARDOT'S RAILROAD CROSSING COORDINATOR, PAULETTE RICE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR COORDINATING ALL OF THE DEPARTMENT'S RAILROAD ACTIVITIES IN ARKANSAS UTILIZING STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING. That may seem like a large task considering there are 2,464 public at-grade railroad crossings in the state. In addition, there are currently 229 active construction jobs that include railroad involvement. Fortunately, Rice loves her job.

"I was hired by ARDOT in April 2015 as the Transportation Planning and Policy (TPP) Division Administrative Assistant," Rice shared.

"In 2017, I transitioned into the TPP/ Multimodal and Project Planning Section as Railroad Coordinator Assistant, and stayed in that position for two years. In 2019, I accepted a new role at ARDOT as Project Manager within the Information Technology Division.

"During my first year of service as Project Manager, I realized how much I was missing railroad coordination; I thought about it every time I traveled across a rail crossing. In 2020, I accepted the vacant position within TPP as Railroad Coordinator."

RAILROAD CROSSINGS EXPLAINED

A quick tutorial in railroad crossings

reveals that an at-grade railroad crossing is one that exists at street level, meaning the railway and roadway intersect. There are two types of crossings.

Some at-grade crossings, known as **active crossings**, have traffic control devices that provide a visual and audible advance notice of the approach of a train. These include flashing-light signals (both mast-mounted and cantilevered), bells, automatic gates and active advance warning devices.

At-grade crossings with only signs and pavement markings are considered **passive crossings**.

Of Arkansas' 2,464 at grade crossings, 35% are active and 65% are passive.



(L. to R.) Paulette Rice, Railroad Crossing Coordinator and Renee Cordell, Railroad Coordination Assistant.

(continued on page 18)

DID YOU KNOW?

There are 210,000 railroad crossings in the United States. Trains need a length of 18 football fields of track to reach a complete stop.

7 SIMPLE STEPS FOR SAFELY NAVIGATING RAILROAD CROSSINGS



Stop, look both ways, and listen. Remember that trains always have the right of way.

Make sure you have room to get across. Once you enter the crossing, keep moving.

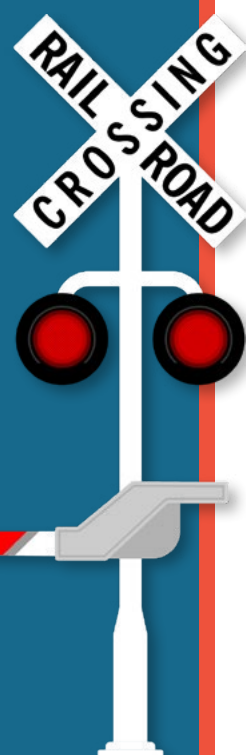
Stop 15' away from flashing red lights, lowered gates, a signaling flagman or a stop sign.

Never try to drive around a lowering gate. Never ignore signals, and always use caution.

Before you begin to cross, wait for gates to fully raise and for all lights to stop flashing.

Never assume that there is only one train coming from a single direction.

If your car stalls in a crossing, get out of there and call the number on the sign, or 911.



RAILROAD CROSSING SAFETY AND SECTION 130 FUNDING

There are more than 200,000 grade crossings in the United States. Individual states, not railroad companies, are responsible for evaluating grade crossing risks and prioritizing grade crossings for improvement.

Under the Section 130 Program of the U.S. Department of Transportation, more than \$230 million in federal funds are allocated each year to states for installing new active warning devices, upgrading existing devices and improving grade crossing surfaces.

"Section 130 funding is designated specifically for the elimination of hazards at public, railway-highway grade crossings in the State of Arkansas," Rice explained.

Thanks in part to the Section 130 federal program, grade crossing collisions were down 37% in the U.S. between 2000 and 2018. Continued dedicated funding of this program will mean more injuries averted and more lives saved at grade crossings.

CARRYING OUT THE GAME PLAN

"Our rail coordination activities include preliminary assessments/diagnostics at our crossings, managing the timely execution of highway-railroad agreements and supplemental agreements, preliminary engineering agreements, railroad construction and maintenance agreements, and special provisions associated with any public crossing in the state, not just those on the State Highway System," Rice shared.

"I don't do all of this coordination alone. I work alongside our Railroad Coordination Assistant, Renee Cordell. Renee supports many of these activities with me. We are the Railroad Coordination team."

THE HAZARD RATING

"In the community, Renee and I work with county judges, city mayors, city and county road supervisors, and the various railroads operating in Arkansas," Rice explained. "Consultants may be involved with city-initiated work. Renee and I are getting more involved with those jobs as well."

ARDOT's Rail Coordination team maintains an inventory of data for all public rail crossings across Arkansas, along with their unique characteristics such as type of crossing (at-grade, overpass, or underpass), location, current safety equipment, type of surface, as well as safety statistics. Using this inventory data, each crossing is objectively compared to all other public at-grade crossings around the State, resulting in a ranking

called the Hazard Rating. Rice explained how a rating is obtained.

"The Hazard Rating is a calculation that uses average daily traffic at a crossing, crashes at the crossing in the past 15 years, the number and kinds of tracks present, and the number of through and switch trains per day at a specific crossing location."

Railroad crossings can be assessed for future safety equipment upgrades using their Hazard Rating.

PROVIDING CROSSING SAFETY UPGRADES

As Federal funding is renewed each year, ARDOT typically increases the number of active crossings. There is a great deal of work that goes into making upgrades happen.

"All data must continually be updated in our inventory system," Rice shared. "Traffic information is provided by ARDOT's System Information and Research Division, and crash data is obtained from Federal Railroad Administration reporting."

"Once the data is updated, calculations update the Hazard Ratings and produce a list of crossings with the highest ratings. We sift through the ones that cannot be updated based on location restraints, and also pull out the ones that have jobs already in progress. Once we have the approved list from our Division leadership, then we pull all the documentation together and coordinate diagnostic meetings at each site so the railroad engineers, our District Engineers and the local road authority representatives can determine the requirements for the upgrade."

"When we have completed diagnostics reviews, we must ensure any required funding match is available and then submit a Minute Order to the State Highway Commission for approval."

An important component of railroad crossing upgrades is the required 10% non-federal match to go with the Section 130 funding. For crossings along the State Highway System, ARDOT provides the matching funds. This can sometimes be a challenge for local partners (cities and counties). The ability to match the Federal funding is one of the factors that goes into the final prioritized list of crossing projects.

"From the point of identifying the crossings for potential upgrade to getting an agreement signed by the railroad to complete the safety equipment installation, the entire process can take a minimum of four to six months," Rice added.

It is a great deal of work, but Rice and Cordell successfully get the job done with the final result of their efforts being safer railroad crossings for motorists across Arkansas. ■



Railroad overpass under construction in southwest Little Rock



Railroad Crossing in Ward

ARKANSAS' SCENIC BYWAYS:

Taking the Scenic Route

BY DAVID NILLES

Arkansas is the Natural State. Our highways provide incredible vistas that feature lakes, rivers, mountains, forests and much more. Within our borders are a select few highways that stand at the top of the list when it comes to great scenery and local flavor. They are Arkansas' Scenic Byways. This series looks at each one, allowing you to pick a favorite, chart a course and hit the open road.

ROUTE: State Highways 10, 23, 71 and 96

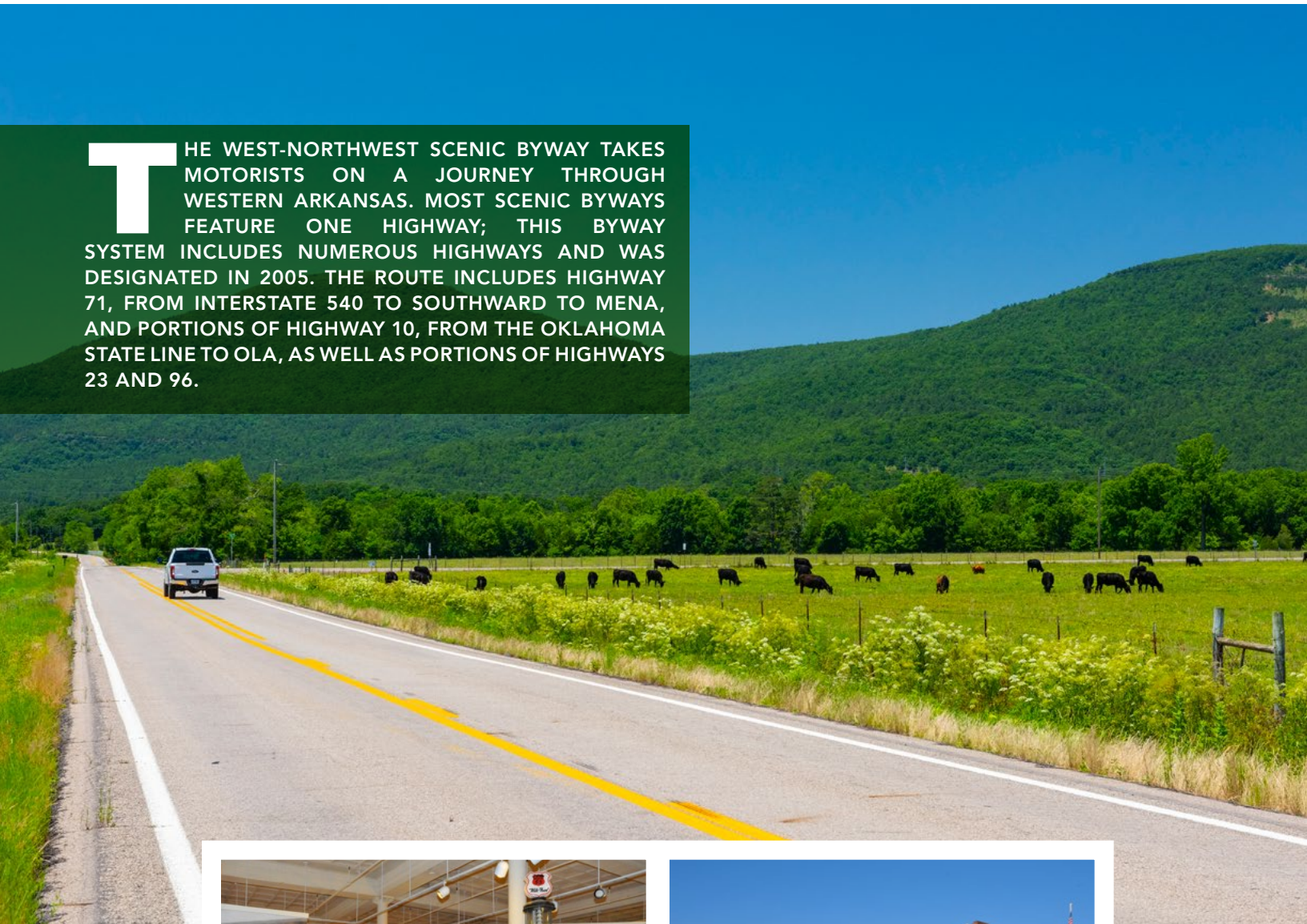
POINTS: Fort Smith to Hackett, Hartford, Mena, Ola

LENGTH: 261 miles



River Valley Nature Center

THE WEST-NORTHWEST SCENIC BYWAY TAKES MOTORISTS ON A JOURNEY THROUGH WESTERN ARKANSAS. MOST SCENIC BYWAYS FEATURE ONE HIGHWAY; THIS BYWAY SYSTEM INCLUDES NUMEROUS HIGHWAYS AND WAS DESIGNATED IN 2005. THE ROUTE INCLUDES HIGHWAY 71, FROM INTERSTATE 540 TO SOUTHWARD TO MENA, AND PORTIONS OF HIGHWAY 10, FROM THE OKLAHOMA STATE LINE TO OLA, AS WELL AS PORTIONS OF HIGHWAYS 23 AND 96.



A display at the Fort Smith Museum of History



National Historic Site in Fort Smith

The West-Northwest Scenic Byway system originates in the city of Fort Smith and branches out to the east and south. Much of the scenic route lies within the Ouachita National Forest. It travels over the Ouachita Mountains, the only mountains in North America that are oriented east-west.

Before traveling the Byway, spend time in Fort Smith. There are plenty of sights to see including the **FORT SMITH MUSEUM OF HISTORY**, the **RIVER VALLEY NATURE CENTER**, the **REGIONAL ART MUSEUM**, the **FORT SMITH NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE** and much more. The city was featured in the May 2014 issue of *Arkansas Highways*.

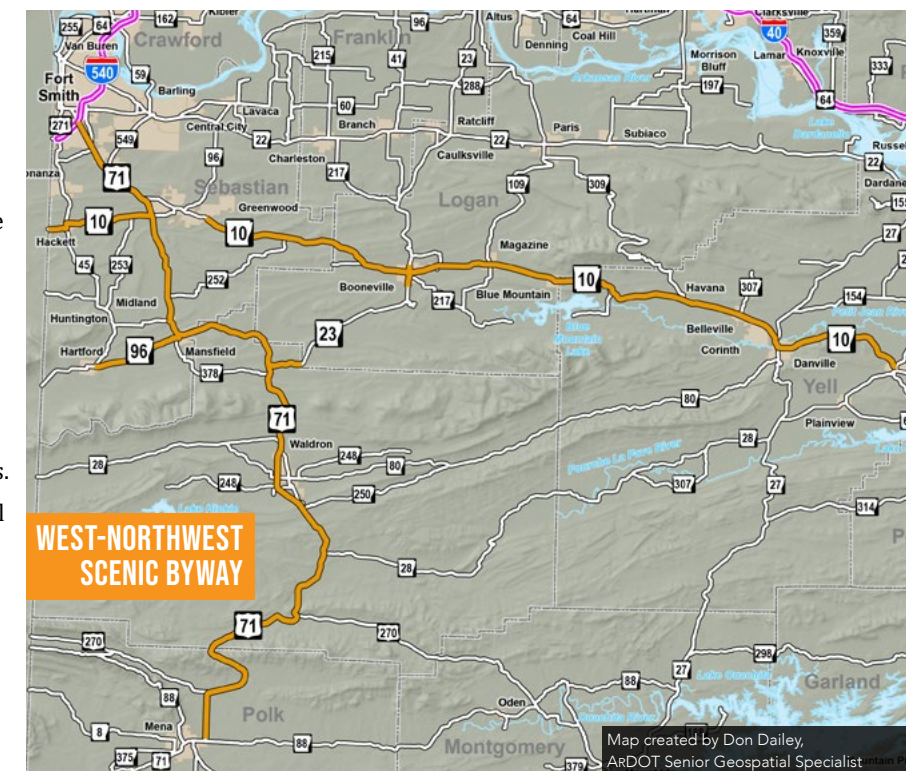
The southern leg of the West-Northwest Scenic Byway heads south out of Fort Smith on Highway 71. A 15-mile journey brings you to the junction with Highway 10. Turning west on Highway 10 brings you to the town of Hackett where you get a peek of the Ouachita Mountains to the south.

Better views of the mountains can be had by continuing south on Highway 71 for ten miles to the junction of Highway 96 at Mansfield. After turning west on Highway 96, it only takes a few seconds to begin enjoying the high peaks of the Ouachita Mountains. The two-lane highway takes motorists through pasturelands as it parallels the mountains. Within a few miles, the peaks appear on both sides of the roadway. The eight-mile drive leads to the town of Hartford where this portion of the byway ends. For the adventurous, the views along the additional four miles to the Oklahoma border are just as impressive.

Back on Highway 71, driving to the south brings travelers to the junction with Highway 23. Traveling the highway to the east takes you through rolling hills and pasturelands featuring plenty of wide-open vistas.

Driving further south on Highway 71, motorists will see more spectacular views of the Ouachitas as they travel down the roadway to the city of Mena.

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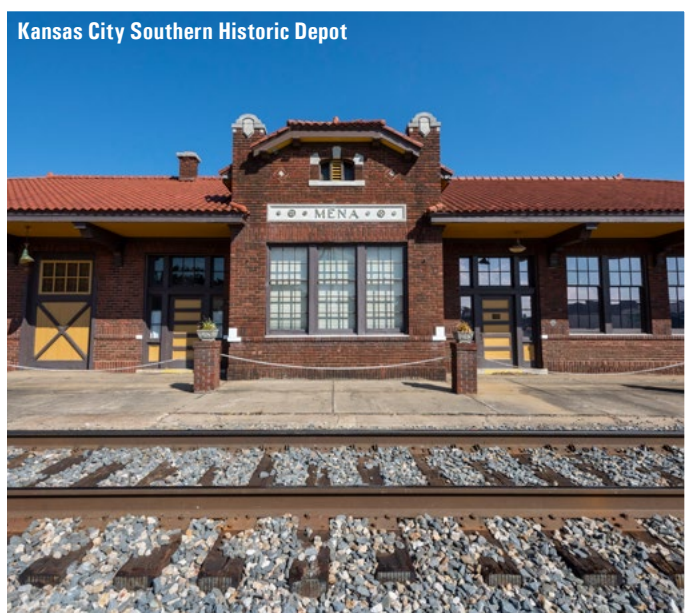
Queen Wilhelmina State Park

A trip into Mena should begin at the **KANSAS CITY SOUTHERN HISTORIC DEPOT**. Completely restored in 1987, the depot serves as a museum with an exhibition of the local area's history inside. There is also a room showcasing memorabilia from the popular radio series *Lum n' Abner* that aired from the 1930s to the 1950s. Creators Chester Lauck and Norris Goff modeled the show on the small town of Waters, Arkansas, near where they grew up. The Depot is located at 524 Sherwood Avenue and is an excellent place to get information about the area. Do not miss the shops across the street when you leave.

For a touch of nostalgia, drive by **MIKE'S PLACE**. Locally owned by car enthusiasts, this 1928 restored Esso station houses a wide variety of petroleum memorabilia, neon dealer signs, gas pumps and has classic automobiles ranging from modern Corvettes to old Cadillacs. It is worth swinging by the station at 423 Mena Street to peek in the windows. A vintage Studebaker dealership sits right behind the Esso station and has more road history from the past.

Mena serves as the gateway to the Talimena National Scenic Byway. The Byway is featured in the March 2015 issue of *Arkansas Highways*.

Traveling the Talimena Byway for thirteen miles leads to **QUEEN WILHELMINA STATE PARK**. The park offers campsites, picnic areas and trails atop Rich Mountain, Arkansas' second highest peak. There is also a lodge offering beautiful views for overnight guests.



The eastern leg of the West-Northwest Scenic Byway leads motorists out of Fort Smith on Highway 71 and turns east onto Highway 10 after approximately 16 miles. The Ouachita range appears to the south after a few minutes. Just east of Booneville, motorists will discover their first glimpse of Mount Magazine, the largest mountain in Arkansas at 2,753 feet. Upon reaching the community of Havana, Highway 10 connects with Scenic Highway 309, which leads to the top of Mount Magazine. Here motorists will find **MOUNT MAGAZINE STATE PARK** featuring beautiful views, hiking trails, campsites, cabins and the Lodge at Mount Magazine. Scenic Highway 309 is featured in the Summer 2004 issue of *Arkansas Highways*.

From Havana, the scenic byway section of Highway 10 continues eastward to Ola with numerous views of Mount Magazine. ■



Archivist Bill Schulze: THE MAN WITH THE PLANS

BY DAVID NILLES

IMAGINE ALL OF THE CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS THAT THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION HAS DESIGNED AND COMPLETED THROUGH THE YEARS. AMONG THEM ARE HIGHWAYS ON NEW LOCATION, WIDENING PROJECTS, BRIDGES, EVEN A TUNNEL.

Once these projects are completed, the design plans for them have to be stored somewhere. And that "somewhere" is into the hands of Bill Schulze, ARDOT's Microfilm Archivist in the Human Resources Division.

Schulze has been with the Department for 19 years and has served as archivist since 2008. His world of archives are found on the second floor of the Central Office in an area surrounded by concrete block walls and a heavy metal door for fireproofing.

"The primary goals of this department from the 1960s until the 2000s was to photograph and archive construction and bridge drawings and occasionally other necessary documents and store those documents on film," Schulze explained. "At the time, film was considered the only recognized archival media at ARDOT. Every one of these millions of film images are stored in the archive and are different based on the film, the equipment, the exposure, the technician, the processing and the storage of the film."

"My role as archivist has changed in many ways over time and is considerably more since the inception of the microfilm department," Schulze shared

The bulk of ARDOT's film archives is made up of construction plans drawn before 2000.

"I have seen plot drawings dating back to the 1800s," Schulze

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shared. "I have no clue how many documents exist between the cards and the roll film. Over a million is a kind estimate."

GOING DIGITAL

The processes that it took to microfilm ARDOTs documents have been many, as the years have progressed. At first, it was done with basic cameras and later a myriad of methods and devices that were current to the technology of the time.

"I would love to know what a lot of those processes were. Today, we have a very different way of archiving our documents," Schulze noted.

Zoom forward to the technology available in 2020, and the goal of the archive library has changed. Schulze shared the new direction.

"We stopped microfilming plans in roughly 2009. At this point, my goal is to digitize our drawings and other microfilmed information and post them for use on the Reproduction Archive server. The Reproduction Archive, which was originally designed to hold files acquired from microfilmed images, has become much more than that. Today, it holds digitized construction sets and contracts that have never been and will never be microfilmed."

The task of digitizing the decades of material in the archive library is daunting. Over the course of the 60 plus years documents were being committed to film, countless different technicians and administrations were responsible for performing this task and no record of what they did or why they did it exists today.

"There is a plethora of competing filing systems for the construction plans, some of which I am only now discovering," Schulze commented. "The microfilm in my area is primarily construction plan sets and bridge drawings but I have many things that I have yet to even address as we digitize the archives."

CONSTRUCTION PLANS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Construction plans contained in the archives are available to ARDOT engineers and staff when information needs to be referred to for one reason or another. It is just a matter of getting in touch with Schulze. He receives requests for information on a regular basis.

"At this point, most requests are done through email or over the phone," Schulze shared. "I will get a message asking if I have anything on a particular job number and if I

do, I scan it and focus on getting the best image from the film that I can. Then I post it for staff on the Reproduction Archive server."

Once on the server, staff can reference the information they are looking for.

Without a doubt, if there is information that is needed on a project from the past, Schulze is the "go to" person on staff and he can get it to Department engineers quickly.

When he isn't providing plans from projects past, he is on task making order of the many documents preserved down through the years, digitizing and filing them in their proper location. Schulze recently reflected on the task at hand.

"I have several careers of work to do in this archive and a few more years at best to do it." ■



Caitlin Brown, Office Assistant in the Environmental Division



A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND THREADS

BY BRITNI PADILLA-DUMAS

EMBROIDERY...[EM-BROI-DUH-REE] TRY SAYING IT AS FAST AS YOU CAN, FIVE TIMES. (I HOPE YOU ARE MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN I WAS—IT STOPPED SOUNDING LIKE A REAL WORD VERY QUICKLY.)

The earliest surviving embroideries are Scythian, an ancient people of Iranian descent that later settled in modern-day southern Ukraine, from 400 – 200 BCE. In 1964, an archaeological excavation in Russia revealed the remains of a Cro-Magnon wearing a hat, fur and boots, all decorated with rows of beads. Scientists believe he was alive 30,000 years ago. Ancient artifacts from China, Egypt and Greece all depict people wearing garments adorned with [em-broi-duh-ree].

Fast forward to today, the first century of the 3rd millennium, the Information Age, and you'll see that the art of decorating fabric with thread is still thriving.

Caitlin Brown, an Office Assistant in the Environmental Division, has an interesting hobby of creating custom embroidery pieces.

"I started embroidery about two years ago. A friend of mine

was having a baby and I decided to make something for the nursery," Brown explained.

Brown claims that she is not an artist, but her works suggests otherwise. Designs run the gamut from cartoons to architecture, shadow-puppets and vintage post cards. She even plans to turn a few projects into a series.

"One of my favorite projects was the Buckstaff Bathhouse in Hot Springs. I made the building black and white and used the blue awnings as a pop of color. I eventually want to embroider all of the bathhouses and hope to have them featured at a local coffee shop in Hot Springs (my home town)."

So far, Brown has created scenes from cartoons, uplifting quotes, decorated clothing and crafted hand-made patches that even caught corporate attention.

"My boyfriend is a unique person that enjoys silly things and he requested that I make him a pizza patch for a hat. The CEO of Marco's Pizza tried to trade pizza for his hat," Brown laughed. "I wasn't sure if he was serious, but I have the materials to make him one, anyway."

(continued on page 26)



96 likes
APRIL 23



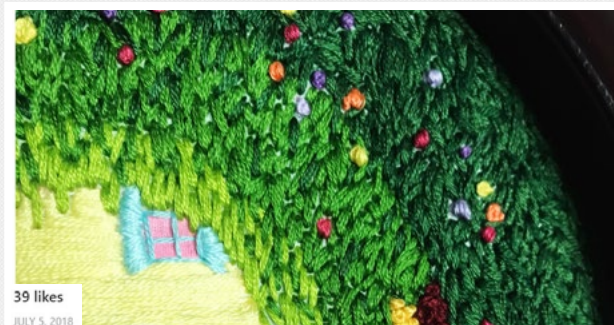
169 likes
JANUARY 25, 2019



54 likes
AUGUST 4, 2018



41 likes
OCTOBER 26, 2011



39 likes
JULY 5, 2018



Brown says that she accepts commissions from friends and strangers. After being featured on THV-11 around Christmastime, she had a few people reach out to her through social media and request embroidery work. She now uses Instagram, Facebook, and most recently, Etsy, to showcase and sell her art.

"All of my projects are hand-embroidered. If I don't have a commission, I just find something that speaks to me in that moment and I will map it out on my iPad using an app. I draw the picture onto the fabric and the thread is like my paint. It's a calming, relaxing hobby for me. I like that it's an instant-gratification style product, and it's unique. This is for me."

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, Brown had plans to make her usual appearances at Handmade in the Heights and Harvest Fest in Hillcrest, two festivals that showcase local restaurants, arts and crafts.

"I recently made one of binoculars with the word 'look;' the O's are the lenses of the binoculars. I got the idea from Mr. Rogers. He would always say, "Look for the helpers." It's supposed to remind us that, in a time of need (like now), if you look, you will see people working to help others. That's what all of us are going through right now with COVID-19, and this is my commemorative piece for that." ■

DISTRICT 9

CONSTRUCTION

CORNER



An uphill slide on Highway 377

Crews in Searcy County are at work on Highway 377 between the communities of Magic Springs and Slicker to make slide repairs to the roadway.

Excessive rains that have occurred over the past 12 to 18 months were the main cause of two slides that are located within a 1.4-mile section of the highway.

The slides began occurring during the summer of 2019. One slide was an "uphill" slide with material moving down toward the highway and covering it up. It originated several hundred feet above the highway. The second is a "downhill" slide that had material moving away from the road, causing part of the highway to break off.

ARDOT maintenance crews arrived on location when the slides occurred and worked to keep the roadway safe and open to traffic through the fall of last year. Temporary traffic signals were installed to control the one lane that is open to traffic.

A contract was awarded in September of 2019 to Marion County Paving, LLC for approximately \$1.6 million to make permanent repairs. Crews are in the process of stabilizing the roadway and making repairs to the pavement. Improvements to the highway are estimated to be complete this summer. ■



A downhill slide in the same vicinity



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