

# ROAD DEF ROUND UP



# TEN

**TxDOT's best drivers compete in annual safety skills challenge.**



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COLUMN

## Summer travel is a breeze with TxDOT's help



**MARC  
WILLIAMS**  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR

from one of our travel centers, we've still got your back. Have a question about how the latest weather system in the Gulf is affecting highway conditions along Port Aransas? Get automated highway conditions 24/7 at [DriveTexas.org](https://www.drivetexas.org) or by calling the information line (1-800-452-9292). You can even speak to a travel counselor when our centers are open — which is from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. between Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day, and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the rest of the year.

Do you need a little vacation inspiration? No problem! We've also got a stable of publications highlighting destinations and activities year-round and publish almost 2 million copies of *Texas Highways* magazine annually. Articles might call your attention to a youth rodeo in Crockett, a bowl of Creole cuisine in Seabrook, or inspire you to stop off anywhere in-between.

That said, all the fun in the world doesn't mean a thing if you don't get there safely. That's why we've got 76 strategically located safety rest areas to encourage our drivers to catch a breather and recharge.

Want to know where the rest areas are along your route of summer travels before you go? We've got a map detailing their locations available for download that will help you plan your breaks. Go to Crossroads and search 'Safety Rest Area Guides' and follow the link.

Lastly: buckle up, don't text while driving, and pay attention to fatigue. Please find a rest area if you're tired. For all of summer's joys, TxDOT is here to Connect you with Texas and ensure you reach your most important destination: home. If you see one of our TICs this summer, be sure to pop in and say hi! ▼

**T**ourist attractions, cultural festivals and just seeing where the open road takes you are some of the time-honored traditions to get the most out of a Texas summer. I know many of you are already getting out on the roads with family and friends. As you pack up your car with plenty of water, sunscreen, snacks and maybe even a frisbee, a neighborly reminder to y'all: our Travel Information Centers (TICs) and Safety Rest Areas are here to support you and your family's journey.

We offer picnic areas, overnight parking and even video rooms to pique your travel appetite at ten TIC locations at all of Texas's major points of entry — it would be an understatement to say our TICs have come a long

way since their rollout in 1936 as "information huts" to direct visitors to the Texas Centennial World's Fair in Dallas. They were a hit with the public then and remain so to this day.

From Amarillo to Laredo, our TICs welcomed 1.2 million visitors last year. All told, travelers seeking out Texas travel info generated \$80 million in spending in 2023, adding \$5 million in state tax revenue and supporting the jobs of almost 800 Texans. We're also set up in Austin's Capitol Complex, and for those of you who love ghost towns there's the Judge Roy Bean Visitor Center in Langtry, located about 2.5 hours from Big Bend National Park and Marfa. Be sure to pick up a map and travel guide for your journey.

Even after you've departed

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## 8 ON THE COVER

TxDOT's best drivers showcased their skills in the annual competition for the title of 2024 State Dump Truck Roadeo Champion.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *TN has a new look! The things you know and love are still here, just with a contemporary look and feel. Check out the table of contents to find all your favorites.*

## FEATURED STORIES

- 12** Orange is your color: scenes from Go Orange Day around TxDOT
- 14** TxDOT bat habitat support taking off statewide
- 18** Foul weather brings TxDOT crews out in force

## NEWS AND NOTES

- 5** Employee marks half a century with Right of Way Division
- 10** Celebrating 50 years of *Texas Highways* Magazine
- 13** Amarillo District responds to wildfires in Panhandle
- 16** TxDOT workforce engagement at all-time high, survey shows
- 17** Employees get a sneak peak at Drive like a Texan campaign
- 17** State's newest safety rest areas open in Van Horn
- 22** TxDOT environmental staff members unplug from office
- 27** Never too old to start something new
- 31** Moxie Award recognizes Ginger Lux

## TN TRADITIONS

- 4** Shining Stars
- 20** Journey to Wellness
- 21** Where Am I?
- 21** TxDOT Calendar
- 23** Employee Q&A
- 24** News: All Across TxDOT
- 26** Innovation Insights
- 28** Milestones
- 31** Your Turn



## 6 I AM A... TRANSPORTATION ENGINEER



# TxDOT EMPLOYEES HELP DISTRESSED ECLIPSE MOTORIST



PARIS DISTRICT



Jaune Neal and Tim Smith helped a woman in cardiac distress during the April 8 solar eclipse. Photo by Tim McAlavy

**A** medical emergency during the recent astronomical event had a happy ending thanks to two TxDOT employees.

Shortly after April's solar eclipse, General Transportation Technicians Tim Smith and Jaune Neal noticed the flashing hazard lights of a parked car on the shoulder of SH 289 in Grayson County while on courtesy patrol in the Paris District. The driver was slumped over the steering wheel.

Smith and Neal turned around and parked their truck behind the vehicle. While Smith approached the vehicle on the passenger side, Neal stood behind their truck waving passing traffic around both vehicles.

"The passenger window was cracked a little, so I spoke to the driver and told her who we were and asked if she needed help," Smith said.

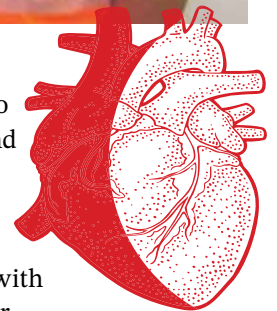
The woman said yes, relating earlier difficulties with heart problems. Smith called 911 and reported their location, then checked in with Maintenance Section Supervisor James Alexander.

Within a few minutes emergency responders arrived. They checked on the driver, removed her from the car and transported her to Baylor Scott & White Medical Center in McKinney. Meanwhile, the TxDOT pair directed traffic until the driver was safe and routed to the hospital.

Gunter Police Chief Danny Jones later called the Sherman Area Office to praise the two men for their emergency response.

Smith and Neal were among the many TxDOT employees checking roads on courtesy patrol that day.

"Tim Smith and Jaune Neal are great examples of the public service dedication of TxDOT employees," said Paris District Engineer Noel Paramanatham. "We appreciate greatly their willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty to help a fellow Texan in distress." ▼



"The passenger window was cracked a little, so I spoke to the driver and told her who we were and asked if she needed help."

— Tim Smith  
General Transportation Technician

Send information or any thank-you emails, letters or calls you or your colleagues receive to [TxDOT@txdot.gov](mailto:TxDOT@txdot.gov) so we can recognize TxDOT employee achievements.

# SETTING DOWN ROOTS FOR A HALF CENTURY AT TxDOT

RIGHT OF WAY DIVISION

From the grey aesthetic of the 1970s to the colorful, modern office of today, Nancy Johnson with the Right of Way Division has seen it all, working with every single director in their history. This year she celebrates 50 years working for the agency.

It's hard not to smile when talking with her. Currently a transportation funding specialist, Johnson said "she planted roots" at TxDOT right out of high school, joining the division responsible for coordinating land acquisition in the service of building or enhancing highways, while providing relocation assistance as needed.

Those roots have not only grown into a thriving career but branched off into a new generation. Her daughter, Austin District Contract Specialist Lauren Johnson, has been with TxDOT for 22 years.

Nancy Johnson tried retiring. After all, taking it easy is what you do after 36 years on the job. It only took one month and an unexpected revelation at the fridge for her to realize she needed to come back.

"I got up one morning and I always have a Dr Pepper," Johnson said. "I opened the refrigerator, got a drink out, opened it up, took a drink and I thought, 'Oh my gosh, something's not right.' I called my husband and I said, 'Oh my God, I haven't even been home a week and I'm already drinking.' I had gotten a beer out of the refrigerator instead of a Dr Pepper!"

With five decades of experience, Johnson is a well of wisdom. *TN* asked her a few questions about the history of TxDOT, what advice she has for the young and old, and why she's stayed with TxDOT all these years.



Nancy Johnson celebrates 50 years with the Right of Way Division. Photo by Lauren Johnson

## What was it like working for TxDOT in the 1970s?

"Everything, of course, was more manually done. We had ledgers. Everything was handwritten or we did keypunch. The decor has certainly changed. Everything was kind of army style, tan and grey. Finally in the late Seventies, they decided to make things better. That's when we upgraded to the harvest gold or blue."

## What's the biggest difference between working now and then?

"I think we're listening to the needs of the people out in the field more. Before we were mandating and were so structured that we maybe didn't always listen to the needs of the people doing boots-on-the-ground work. I think now we've kind of changed that to where we're listening more to them."

## What advice do you have for people starting their career?

"I know that the generation now is so much different than my generation, but if you're looking for a place to plant roots in and to plan for your retirement, I think TxDOT has a lot to offer."

## You've seen multiple administrations, what advice do you have for senior leadership?

"I think they're listening more to people's needs and to employees to help them grow. I think it's great that more people are given more opportunity. They should keep on just listening to the employees to make them aware of their needs."

## What has kept you coming back all these years?

"I guess the people I've worked with. I've had a lot of people who have mentored me and saw my potential and gave me the opportunity to build my career and encouraged me. I've had a lot of good people that have been there for me." ▼



Johnson started with TxDOT after graduating high school the 1970s. Photo provided by Nancy Johnson

# Ana Duncan

## I AM A... TRANSPORTATION ENGINEER

Ana Duncan, a transportation engineer with the Laredo District, began her career at TxDOT as a summer employee. After graduating from Texas A&M University with a degree in civil engineering, she returned to where she got her TxDOT start and has been with the Laredo District ever since. As an engineering assistant in the district's rotation program, she gained valuable experience in different areas. She became a licensed professional engineer in 2005. She is now the lead for the Project Management Section and the district contact for local government projects. Outside of work, she enjoys crocheting, cooking and spending time with her family. Her husband, Kenneth, also works for TxDOT. They have a daughter and two sons.

### **Describe what you do on a day-to-day basis as a transportation engineer.**

As a transportation engineer and project manager, I handle the overall development of my assigned projects. I prepare them for letting on-time and within budget. My day-to-day activities include communicating with the consultant design team and other district section staff to ensure the design is completed. I manage potential risks and solve problems as the project progresses. I also negotiate and manage the consultant contracts for each of my projects. I communicate with cities, counties and other entities to support the development of their federally funded projects. I support other project managers and offer guidance as needed.

### **What skills and abilities are the most helpful in this role?**

Being organized, understanding the technical aspects of the project, being open to other ideas and thinking outside the box are all good traits for this role. Communication is key. Knowing your audience and how to facilitate a discussion is an important skill. It's very important to be able to manage different projects at different phases of development all at once.

### **What would you want the rest of TxDOT to know about the Laredo District?**

Working at the Laredo District means working with family. We truly care about each other and work together to help each other get the job done. We look out for each other so that we stay safe and get home safely to our families.



### **What is the most rewarding part about being a transportation engineer?**

Knowing that through all the long hours, meetings, phone calls, field visits and unexpected hurdles, we are ultimately improving the movement of traffic and making the roads safer for everyone. Seeing the finished road or bridge where nothing existed before makes the job worth it.

### **What are some of the more challenging aspects of your job and how do you handle them?**

The challenging part of my job is that no two projects are the same and the risks and issues that each project brings cannot always be handled the same way. Trying to communicate and coordinate with multiple groups and finding solutions that fit the schedule and budget can also be challenging. ▼

**“Working at the Laredo District means working with family.”**

**-Ana Duncan**



# SAFETY IN ACTION

## JOHNSTON TAKES HOME ROADEO CROWN

In May, 56 of TxDOT’s best drivers executed their talents in a friendly districtwide competition for the title of 2024 State Dump Truck Rodeo Champion.

Held this year at the North Travis County Area Office in North Austin, the annual competition includes a pair of drivers from all 25 districts plus drivers from the divisions of Fleet Operations, Traffic Safety and Maintenance.

Established more than two decades ago, the annual event hosted by the Occupational Safety Division instills a sense of pride in, and supports a culture of safe vehicle operations as part of an ongoing commitment to reducing the number of vehicle incidents.



Honoring the top drivers from 2024: (l to r) Commissioner Alex Meade, State Dump Truck Rodeo winner Preston Johnston, runner-up Clay Houston and TxDOT Executive Director Marc Williams. Photo by Michael Amador



# “A lot of people see drivers, but I see leaders.”

– Lee Dhone, General Transportation Technician



Ethan Dhone (left) followed in his father's footsteps by making it to the finals of the State Truck Rodeo. Lee Dhone (right) won the event in 2002 and 2003. Photo by Jen Reel



Backing a dump truck through a course is just one of the skills tested in the State Dump Truck Rodeo. Photo by Jen Reel

Drivers face a slate of skills tests and can earn up to 350 points during the competition, incurring deductions for errors such as striking barrels/cones and crossing boundaries.

After the dust had settled and all the motors had shut off, the Atlanta District's Preston Johnston earned the title of 2024 State Dump Truck Rodeo Champion. Although if you ask him, he wasn't immediately sure his performance had clinched the top honor.

“When I got done, I told everybody I think I either scored a 270 or a 280,” said Johnston, an equipment operator with Linden County Maintenance who entered the competition as a first-timer.

When Clay Houston, a second-time competitor and maintenance section assistant for the Sanderson Maintenance Section in the Odessa District won runner-up, Johnston knew his math was wrong or he had won it.

“I was confident I had a decent score,” said Johnston. But I wasn't confident I had enough to win it.”

Ultimately, Johnston's 270 score proved to be the winning tally.

In a separate honor, four-time Rodeo driver Mark Kennedy took home the State Dump Truck Rodeo Excellence Award for best exemplifying

“the inspiration and the spirit” of the event. An 18-year veteran of the department, Kennedy is a general engineering technician for Traffic Operations for the Wichita Falls District.

The long-running Rodeo also included a TxDOT family thread with the participation of the Beaumont District's General Transportation Technician Ethan Dhone, a second-generation Rodeo finalist. His father, Lufkin Safety Officer Lee Dhone, won back-to-back titles in 2002 and 2003.

“A lot of people see drivers, but I see leaders,” said Lee, referring to what he witnessed at the safety skills event. He made the trip to support first-time Lufkin finalists Reid Westbrook and Gordy Steele.

As a bonus, he got to cheer on Ethan. “It was a full-circle moment for sure,” said Lee.

While growing up, Ethan saw the trophies that his dad brought home and saw how proud he was to compete in the event.

“I was nervous,” said Ethan. “But I just liked experiencing what my dad experienced at the Rodeos. It was a dream come true, you could say.”

Drivers competed in five exercises:

- **The vehicle inspection/load and tie-down:** Drivers have 12 minutes to find 10 defects on the trailer, the loaded equipment and the connection to the tow vehicle.
- **360° Walkaround:** Drivers complete a 360° walkaround of a dump truck and look for a planted potential dropped object.
- **Right-hand turn:** Drivers attempt a right turn in a 10-yard dump truck on a predetermined course without stopping or striking a traffic cone.
- **Left-hand turn:** Drivers must navigate a left-hand turn without hitting a cone or stopping. The objective is not to encroach into the oncoming lane on the vehicle's left without overly encroaching onto the shoulder or lane to the vehicle's right.
- **Spotter Exercise (included as part of the Left-hand turn):** The driver and spotter must back the dump truck through a course. Using hand signals, the spotter must guide the driver so they get within 6 inches of a barricade without hitting it.

Congratulations to all the winners of this year's State Dump Truck Rodeo! ▼

# CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF TEXAS HIGHWAYS

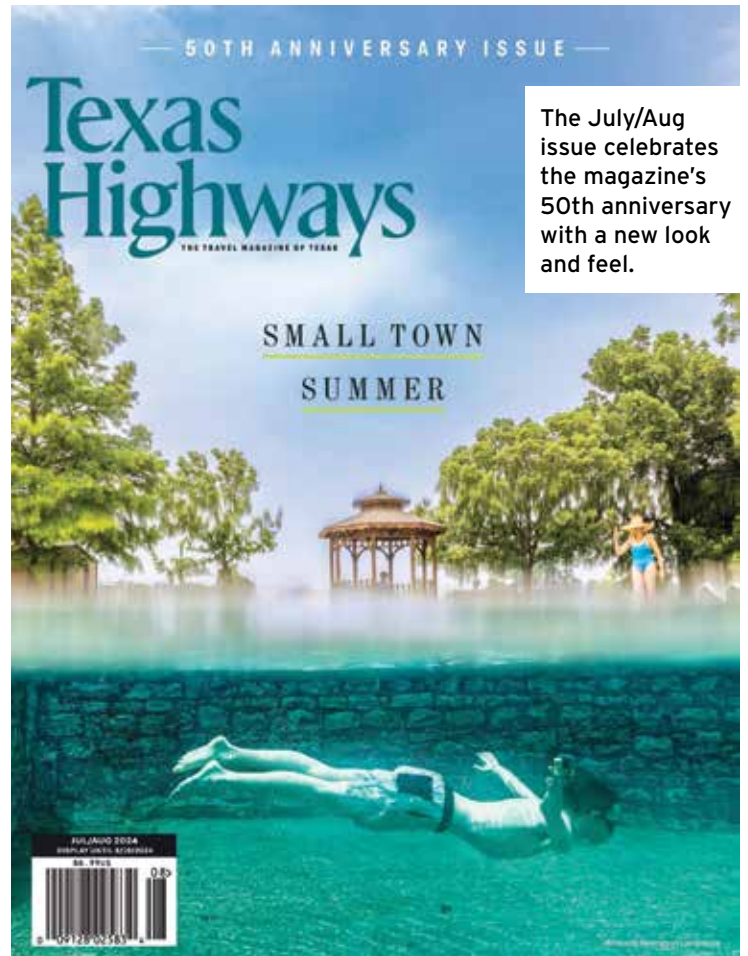
## TRAVEL INFORMATION DIVISION

Inspiring Texans and tourists alike with tips on cultural festivals or where to find the best piece of pie on a country road for a half-century, *Texas Highways* is turning 50 this year and celebrating the occasion with a new look in the July/Aug issue.

Although the *Texas Highways* you know today made its debut in 1974, the publication's origins can be traced back to 1953 when it started life as *Construction and Maintenance Bulletin* — an internal publication for State Highway Department employees.

Six years later, Texas lawmakers gave the green light to the promotion of tourism by state agencies, an event that spurred the publication's name change to *Texas Highways* in 1959.

“That was a time when state officials started recognizing Texas as a marketable travel destination,” said Andrea Lin, director of the Travel Publications Section of the Travel Information Division. “Travel was becoming big business and state agencies were tasked to promote it.”



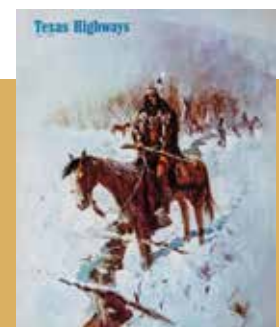
The July/Aug issue celebrates the magazine's 50th anniversary with a new look and feel.

Although still an internal magazine in the 1960s, stories on general travel started to weave their way into the picture until it graduated into a wholly consumer-oriented travel publication in May 1974 — the year Texas lawmakers declared *Texas Highways* the official travel magazine of the state.

Just three years later, the magazine achieved a following in all 50 states and global distribution in 48 countries.



*Texas Highways* started out as an internal publication called the *Construction and Maintenance Bulletin*.



The May 1974 issue was the first wholly consumer, travel publication.

“We still have subscribers in every state,” said Emily Stone, *Texas Highways* editor-in-chief.

The magazine started populating newsstands in the 1980s, followed by the inclusion of advertisements for the first time in 2002.

While the physical magazine boasts a monthly readership of 292,000, Lin said the reach of the publication extends well beyond the printed page.

“Today, *Texas Highways* reaches 14 million people each year through the magazine, newsletters, web and social channels,” she said.

Travel spending in Texas totaled \$94.8 billion in 2023, while generating \$193.8 billion in economic impact to the Texas economy, according to research by the governor’s office.

Although many people contributed to the success of *Texas Highways* over the decades, a key moment came in the publication’s history as legislators played a pivotal role with the sponsorship of a bill formally declaring the publication the official travel magazine. They are Reps. James Kaster of El Paso, Dave Allred of Wichita Falls and Sen. W.E. Snelson of Midland.

“That declaration really secured our position and gave us a firm foundation going forward,” Lin said.

Then there is Frank Lively, who served as the magazine’s editor from 1962 to 1990.

“Frank is really the father of *Texas Highways*,” said Lin. “He oversaw the transition from an internal, technical publication to a travel and tourism.

Lin credited Lively as the “enthusiastic visionary” of the magazine’s potential.

“He fought for the content and to make it a real magazine with professional staff,” she said. “He wanted it to be the *National Geographic* of Texas. His influence has been longstanding.”

Lively’s vision contributed to building a loyal and engaged readership that continues today.

“We are lucky to have incredibly loyal subscribers, many of whom have subscribed to the magazine for decades,” Stone said. “We still receive handwritten letters from readers on a monthly basis. They let us know when they like an issue or story and also when we get something wrong — they don’t miss a thing!”

Trust is a big part of that loyalty. *Texas Highways* readers see it as a trustworthy source of information.

“We’re very protective of the trust of our readers,” Lin said. “Our reader surveys have had remarkably consistent results over the years. We get extremely high marks across the board. It’s pretty remarkable. They know if we write about something, it’s worth visiting. The magazine is a cultural treasure for the people of Texas.”

Looking ahead to the next 50 years, *Texas Highways* continues to evolve. The July/Aug 2024 issue will debut a complete redesign in a special double issue that broke advertising records for the Travel Information Division.

“It’s the biggest issue we’ve ever published,” Lin said. “The last redesign



Frank Lively was editor of *Texas Highways* from 1962 to 1990 and helped make it what it is today.

was about 10 years ago, so it is good timing. We’ve refreshed our look many times over the years. We’re also changing our paper stock so it will be thicker and more matte. It’s a modern, premium look and feel to reflect contemporary styles in the industry.”

However, the content will continue to feature the best Texas has to offer in fun, inspiring ways. The magazine’s excellent articles and features have even caught the eye of the publishing industry. In 2021, *Texas Highways* was nominated for its first National Magazine Award, the Oscars of magazine publishing. Its competition in the category included big names like *The Economist*, *The New Yorker* and *The Paris Review*. Also from 2021, a piece from September’s “Cowboy Issue” was featured in *The Best American Magazine Writing 2022*.

“To have a state magazine be included in that company shows that our staff is on top of our game,” Lin said. “TxDOT should be really proud.” ▼



The look changed over the years, but readers always enjoy stories about Texas history like in the September 1989 issue.



“The Cowboy Issue” from September 2021 received national accolades.



*Texas Highways* now reaches 14 million people each year.

# ORANGE IS YOUR COLOR

## Scenes from Go Orange Day around TxDOT

As part of Go Orange Day on April 17, TxDOT staff wore orange to show their support statewide for work zone safety and to honor the families of victims who lost their lives in work zones. Employees sent photos of themselves and their colleagues wearing orange, which were posted online.



Lab employees in the Childress District get in the spirit of safety.



Marc Williams and the Maintenance Office Manager Course Trainers show off their orange.



Members of the El Paso District Construction Office wear safety orange at district headquarters.



Abilene District employees proudly support #GoOrangeDay!



The Hebbbronville Maintenance Office in the Pharr District goes orange.



Public Information Officer Lisa Tipton and Safety Administrator Candice Greenwood join their minion friend in promoting work zone awareness in the Brownwood District.



The Georgetown Area Office wears orange for National Work Zone Safety Awareness Week.



The Transportation Programs Division celebrates in orange at the Stassney Campus.

# AMARILLO DISTRICT RESPONDS TO WILDFIRES IN PANHANDLE



AMARILLO  
DISTRICT

Earlier this year, the Texas Panhandle was engulfed in the largest wildfire in the state's history, setting ablaze more than 1 million acres and forcing the evacuation of several small towns while setting the region's major city on edge as the fire crept closer. Amarillo District staff sprang into action immediately, helping city and county officials during the disaster while also providing support to impacted communities in its aftermath.

"Our employees provided fuel, barricades and traffic control for the firefighters during the fires," said Wes Kimmell, director of operations with the Amarillo District. "The firefighters worked to stop the spread with water and firebreaks. TxDOT's rights of way are natural firebreaks and the firefighters often made a stand in our roadways trying to beat the fires."

The spreading fire prompted the evacuation of several towns — including Canadian and Pampa — while also threatening a nearby powerplant and a nuclear weapons facility northeast of Amarillo.

"They were sending people all over the place," Kimmell said. "U.S. 60 was closed so there were only a few ways out — the traffic was a challenge."

As the fire ran its course, the blaze crept near the Panhandle's biggest city.

"It came close to Amarillo at one point, but the wind shifted," said Brent Lane, district maintenance administrator. "The city was like an ash cloud. The smoke was everywhere. Pretty scary."

After containing the fire, city and county officials asked the local TxDOT district to help with cleanup efforts



Amarillo District crews help with debris cleanup in the town of Fritch after devastating wildfires in February and March. Photo provided by the Amarillo District

around the town of Fritch, where an estimated 100 homes had been reduced to rubble, according to Lane.

"The damage was devastating," he said.

Since TxDOT employees are prohibited from entering private property, the district worked with local and state authorities to plan rubble removal and communicate the action to residents.

"Everyone had to move the debris to the edge of the property line so we could haul it off," Kimmell said. "We also had to follow state guidelines for disposal."

Spanning two 10-hour days and half a day, the district's cleanup effort collected more than 13,000 cubic yards of debris or roughly enough for 1,300 dump truck loads.

"We had 128 employees participating in the project, which is a good chunk of the people in our office," Kimmell said. "We had 68 dump trucks, 14 loaders, an excavator and other equipment. It involved a lot of effort."

In addition, the district had its own damage to address. The fire burned

guardrail posts, signs and other installations. Trees also burned and road blockages became more prevalent as the blaze spread.

"The fire jumped interstates," Kimmell said. "The winds were outrageous and spread the fire faster."

Following containment of the fire and the start of cleanup and recovery efforts, district employees sprang into action.

"We are really proud of all our crew members," Lane said. "They are always ready to stand up and do what's necessary. They came in without question and took care of the job quickly. The people in town were great, too. They moved their debris to the edge of the right of way and helped us out a lot."

The Amarillo District's response marked the first step in rebuilding the community.

"Our employees accepted the challenge of assisting with the cleanup even as we all faced this widespread destruction," Kimmell said. "It was impressive to be a part of." ▼

# TxDOT BAT HABITAT SUPPORT TAKING OFF STATEWIDE

**Artificial roosts are increasingly important for bats as defense against deadly disease**

As TxDOT Travel Information Centers statewide gear up to host the tourists of summer's peak travel season, we are also extending our hospitality by completing Austin's largest-ever accommodation for its most famous visitors: bats.

This summer, TxDOT will install an additional 18 artificial roosts or "bat boxes" at the Walnut Creek Bridge along I-35 to offset the impact of construction on a pair of bridges that once offered cozy crevices to the Brazilian free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) — one of the 32 bat species found in Texas.

"We wanted to give the bats alternate roosting habitat so that when we excluded them from the habitat under the Wells Branch Parkway and Howard Lane bridges, they would have somewhere else to go," said Austin District Environmental Specialist Tracy White.

The record-breaking installation of a combined 36 boxes is part of the I-35 Capital Express North project, a \$606 million Texas Clear Lanes effort to decongest Austin. It includes adding a lane in each direction along a stretch of I-35 and the reconstruction of six bridges. TxDOT installed the first 18 bat boxes in spring 2024.

White said it can take some time for the bats to find their new accommodations, adding that site selection is typically governed by distance from humans and proximity to constant water sources to ensure easy access to food including a nightly bug buffet that includes pesky mosquitoes.



I-35 Capital Express North crews install new bat boxes under the rebuilt Walnut Creek frontage road. Photo by Jessica Duverney

## Bat Roosts Catching on Statewide

With future bat boxes already part of projects planned for this decade and the next, usage and popularity of the roosts is expanding from its Central Texas roots into several corners of Texas — Lufkin District in the west, Fort Worth, Lubbock and Amarillo in the north, and Corpus Christi to the south.

Recognized by TxDOT with the Environmental Achievement Award in 2018, the agency's 2019 bat box debut along I-35 in Waco was the result of a brainstorm between Design Division, Austin and Waco districts and Bat Conservation International.

Construction of large bat boxes typically runs in the \$3,000 to \$4,000 range and measure 4' by 4' by 2' — each capable of providing roosting and maternity colony opportunities for thousands of bats.

The latest Austin installations will support the Brazilian free-tailed bats, which live up to 11 years in the wild and use their seasonal residency in Texas to birth and nurture their young pups.

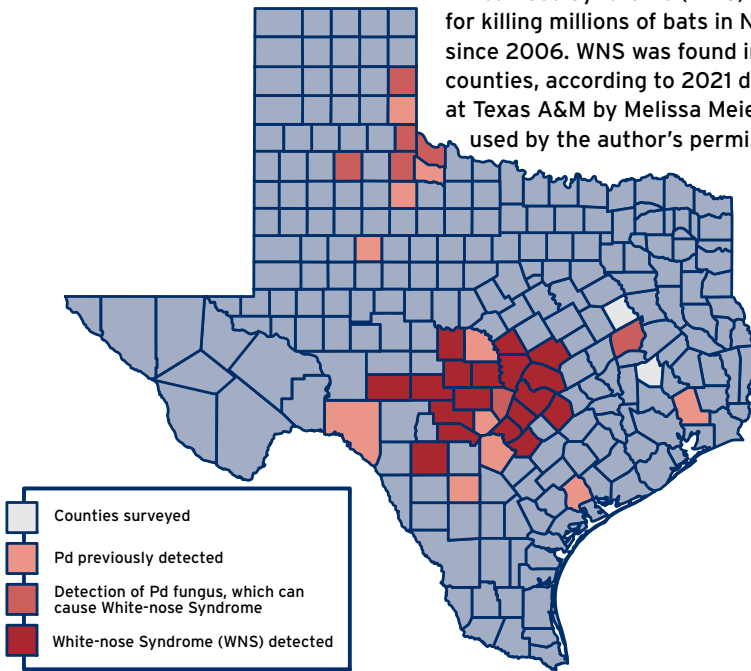
Also known as Mexican free-tailed bats, the official Flying Mammal of Texas soars at speeds up to 99 miles per hour. Mother bats give birth to single pups in June or July followed by long-distance flights in search of food, consuming approximately her own body weight in insects.

“TxDOT bat stewardship efforts are highly important and have only gained in importance with the spread of White-nosed Syndrome through the northeast United States.”

— TxDOT Environmental Planners John Young Jr. and Lauren Young



White-nose Syndrome (WNS) is responsible for killing millions of bats in North America since 2006. WNS was found in 18 Texas counties, according to 2021 doctoral research at Texas A&M by Melissa Meierhofer. Data used by the author’s permission.



### Bat origins story

TxDOT’s bat connection traces its roots to the 1980 rehabilitation of Austin’s Congress Avenue Bridge — an effort which included the installation of box beams which created the crevices that bats love.

Word got out quickly in the bug-eating and flying mammal community. It wasn’t long before the bridge became host to the world’s largest urban bat colony. TxDOT’s support of bat research began in the 1990s, a decade that included the Laredo installation of a “bat dome” over a culvert to offer crevices to a segment of the local population.

### Bats under threat

The need for bat-supporting habitats is increasingly critical following Texas’s first confirmed case in 2020 of White-nose Syndrome (WNS), a deadly fungal disease that has already wiped out millions of bats in North America since 2006.

“TxDOT bat stewardship efforts are highly important and have only gained in importance with the spread of White-nose Syndrome (WNS) through the northeast United States,” TxDOT Environmental Planners John Young Jr. and Lauren Young said in a joint interview.

Although there are no reported mass die-offs from WNS in Texas, cave bat populations in the Panhandle

and Central Texas are projected to experience a 75% and up to 50% reduction respectively over the next ten years, according to predictive models.

WNS was found in 18 Texas counties, according to doctoral research conducted at Texas A&M by Dr. Melissa Meierhofer, who is now part of Bat Lab Finland at the Finnish Museum of Natural History.

Caused by a fungus (*Pseudogymnoascus destructans* or Pd) which grows in cold and damp places, WNS causes bats to exhaust fat reserves during hibernation. That prompts an early exit from their refuge to go looking for food during harsher mid-winter conditions, when bats have a harder time finding food or withstanding exposure to cold.

Young Jr. and Young said the bats who call the bat boxes under the bridges and culverts home spend shorter periods in prolonged hibernation by checking-in and checking-out year-round from an involuntary state of inactivity — known as torpor — which carries the added health benefit of remaining more active.

“This is thought to help bats mount a defense to the fungal disease,” they said.

With future bat box projects planned in Austin, Amarillo and Corpus Christi, TxDOT’s bat support is showing no signs of slowing down, especially at the original 2019 Waco installation under

the Salado Creek and Lampasas River bridges along a five-mile stretch of I-35.

“Last year we got phone calls from the public in regard to the question of bat guano under the Salado Creek bridge,” said James Norment, environment coordinator, adding that Maintenance Division staff took care of clean-up shortly thereafter.

### Inspiring new projects

The Waco installations would help set a trio of Corpus Christi projects in motion —including the expected fall 2024 installation of six roosts underneath the I-37 bridge following a successful trial installation of six bat boxes two years prior.

As it just so happened, Corpus Christi Environmental Coordinator Kimberly Amy was friends with the person responsible for the Waco installation. That meant she had the design plan sheets, special specifications and the exact details.

That connection and proof of concept, she said, proved pivotal in her pitch to include the roosts in the new higher-elevation I-37 bridge that started work in 2021, followed by box installations in 2022.

“This is not something I would have necessarily felt comfortable doing on my own if I didn’t have those good working relationships with other districts,” Amy said.



The Corpus Christi District first installed bat roosts underneath the I-37 bridge in 2022 and will install another six this fall. Photo by Kimberly Amy

While some bat boxes are installed in response to construction, the Corpus Christi roosts are one of TxDOT's examples of proactively creating infrastructure to support future populations. Other projects planned for that city include an installation along U.S. 77 west of Sinton and another along FM 2441.

### Future Projects

Meanwhile, up in the Panhandle, Environmental Planner Max Graff said the Amarillo District will build off the success of boxes already in place along the U.S. 60/83 Canadian River Bridge. Between three to six new roosts will be a part of a McClellan Creek bridge project that will go out to let in 2027, according to Graff.

Future Austin projects include 24 boxes along the underside of the I-35 pedestrian bridge over Lady Bird Lake sometime in the 2030s for the Capital Express Central project and six on the I-35 northbound frontage road over Onion Creek for the Capital Express South.

Even in parts of Texas where roosts have yet to take flight, enthusiasm abounds.

"We do not currently have any bat boxes on our bridges, but I am very interested in implementing them on our projects in the future," Odessa District Environmental Project Planner Holly Brady said.

Meanwhile back in Corpus Christi, Amy said that looking for ways to support Texas bats is now standard procedure.

"What we're doing from a planning level perspective is that as bridge projects come up where we identify them as being a good candidate for a bat box, we're going to include them now," said Amy. "That's now just part of the way we develop projects." ▼

*Additional reporting by Antonio Lujan*

## TxDOT WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT AT ALL-TIME HIGH, SURVEY SHOWS

TxDOT employees are highly engaged in their workplace, according to the recent results of the biannual Survey of Employee Engagement.

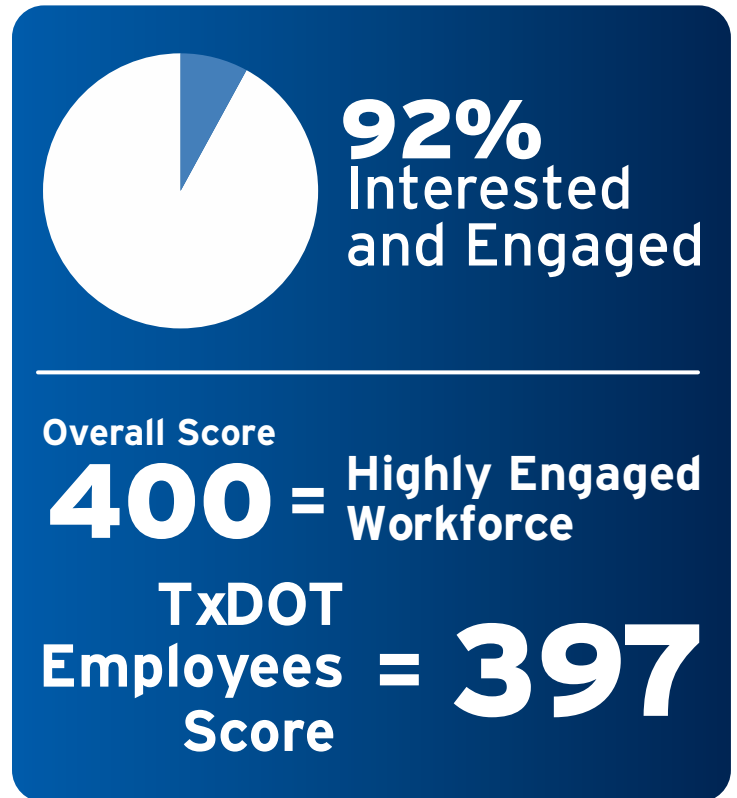
The survey garnered a robust response from TxDOT employees, with 80% of employees sharing their thoughts on their job, work environment and leadership. That's an increase of 25% compared to the last survey.

An overall score of 400 is considered a sign of a highly engaged workforce. TxDOT employees tallied an impressive 397. The most recent figures reflect an overall jump of 15 points from the last survey — the largest increase since TxDOT workplace perceptions were first measured in 2010.

"Each district and division will be putting together action plans based on the survey data that you provided," said TxDOT Executive Director Marc Williams in a video message to employees. "I look forward to using this valuable feedback to make TxDOT even better."

Administered every two years by the Institute for Organizational Excellence at the University of Texas, the survey serves as the primary source of information on employee perceptions of the workplace and organizational management at TxDOT and hundreds of other organizations.

The full results of the survey are on the Human Resources Division's Crossroads page. ▼





# EMPLOYEES GET A SNEAK PEEK AT TxDOT'S NEWEST CAMPAIGN

## COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

It's an exciting time for safety at TxDOT. A new campaign will launch at the end of this year, and TxDOT employees get to be the first to preview all that's in store.

Initiated by the Communications Division, the Drive like a Texan™ campaign is all about saving lives. By reminding everyone in Texas to show the same respect to others when they're behind the wheel that Texans already experience when they meet face-to-face, we can positively change the behavior of drivers, and make Texas safer for all.

When Texans interact with each other at the grocery store, pass each other on the street, or say hello at the park, we're well known for showing kindness to one another. We help those in need no matter the time or place. It's an ethos — and social norm — that's often missed by those after they leave Texas. Drive like a Texan is all about inspiring Texans to practice those core values we all share when they're behind the wheel as well.

Over the next few months, TxDOT employees will get an exclusive sneak peek into campaign content before it launches publicly statewide. Some elements of the campaign will make you

The Drive like a Texan™ campaign is all about saving lives. Photo by Jen Reel



laugh. Others will touch your heart. But every single story, message and image are about helping us remember who we are as Texans — while saving lives in the process.

Check out the Drive like a Texan campaign's Crossroads page for the latest video releases and to sign up for email updates. And always remember to Drive like a Texan — Kind, Courteous and Safe. ▼

## STATE'S NEWEST SAFETY REST AREAS OPEN IN VAN HORN



### EL PASO DISTRICT

In June, TxDOT replaced a pair of safety rest areas outside the Culberson County city of Van Horn with two larger facilities along I-10, offering an increased opportunity for operators of trucks and commercial vehicles to take a break from the wheel and recharge up to 24 hours.

Serving as a rest area between El Paso and San Antonio, the new facilities are among TxDOT's largest pit-stop offerings, capable of accommodating up to 58 trucks and 27 cars. They are part of a broader effort to lessen the likelihood of a sleepy driver taking to the road and potentially endangering other travelers.

"Driver fatigue is a major cause of serious traffic crashes across the state," said Brent Johnson, Roadside Facilities Section director.

An average of 25 fatigue or asleep at the wheel crashes occurred daily on Texas roads between 2014 and 2023, resulting in a combined 1,525 fatal



The El Paso District opened two new safety rest areas in Culberson County in June. Photo by Lauren Macias-Cervantes

crashes and the loss of 1,754 lives over those ten years.

"Our safety rest areas are strategically placed on the highway system to help drivers fight fatigue by enticing them to stop, rest and enjoy amenities before continuing with their trips," Johnson said.

El Paso District Engineer Tomás Treviño highlighted the careful consideration that went into selecting the location, design, context and construction of the sites.

"As someone who drives the I-10 corridor frequently, I am especially excited about the additional spaces for commercial vehicles that I often see parked in widened areas of the interstate or along access ramps," Treviño said. "The new safety rest areas will not only

help make for safer trips with state-of-the-art amenities, but also shine a light on the historical regional importance to visitors passing through.

"This includes educational exhibits on the Butterfield Overland Mail Coach Trail, the Guadalupe Mountains, and contributions to space travel with Blue Origin. I'm sure many visitors will also appreciate the shaded playground and available Wi-Fi."

Looking ahead, the safety rest areas will soon be part of the I-10 Truck Parking Availability System, offering truck drivers real-time info on available public truck parking sites along I-10.

Visitors can stay at safety rest areas up to 24 hours. The district will keep the former rest areas in Van Horn for commercial use. ▼

# CREWS OUT IN FORCE IN RESPONSE TO MULTIPLE STORMS

**H**eavy rain hit Texas hard this spring, affecting communities throughout the state, especially in Central and East Texas. The rain inundated areas already soaked with water, causing flooding and damaging roadways.

Tornadoes and strong winds struck Houston, causing widespread power outages. A recent storm in Houston led to TxDOT mobilizing crews from across the state to help with recovery efforts.

Thanks to crews from Houston and multiple parts of the state, TxDOT was able to clear debris and help repair and restore power to over 100 traffic signals.

As that metro area recovers, other areas hit by flooding are working to return to normal. Over the past several weeks, TxDOT crews in multiple parts of the state monitored roads, cleared debris, repaired damages and helped keep drivers safe.

“It’s been a long couple weeks for communities impacted by these storms,” Emergency Management Coordinator Matthew Heinze said. “We are here to help in any way we can, and our crews out there work hard to ensure roads are clear and safe to drive.”

TxDOT works closely with its state partners in response to storms, including the Texas Department of Emergency Management.

Between May 1 - 21, 736 roads closed due to flooding and 135 locations had flood-related damage across the state.

The flooding washed out or collapsed

complete sections of roadways in some areas. When that happens, crews work quickly with cities and counties to close the road and let everyone know as soon as possible. TxDOT then coordinates a detour and works on repairs.

While there was no major damage to bridges, TxDOT closely monitored bridge conditions and roadways across the state.

Other work TxDOT crews performed statewide as part of our response to the storms included:

- Clearing debris in drains before the storm which helps provide relief during heavy rain events.
- Monitoring road conditions, looking out for flooding and damages.
- Removing debris over the road.
- Inspecting road damage and working on current and long-term repairs. In some areas crews have repaired all flood-related road damage.
- Repairing damaged traffic signals
- Providing real-time updates to [drivetexas.org](http://drivetexas.org) to help keep Texans informed.

TxDOT prepares all year long for events like these. Our crews are ready to respond. When water rose and began to flood roadways, TxDOT was ready with traffic control measures and kept the public informed about closures and alternate routes.

Thank you to all our employees who responded to these storms! ▼





Heavy rain and flooding in May washed out this section of FM 2989 in the Bryan District.



The Houston District opened its Emergency Operations Center in response to the storms.



Bracken Creek in the Lufkin District flooded FM 227 as rain inundated areas already soaked with water.



# UNLOCKING LEGAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT



“I used Texas Legal services after my mother passed away to probate her estate,” said Melissa Ogle, Human Resources generalist lead with the Austin District. “It was simple to find a lawyer to handle the case. Texas Legal saved me thousands of dollars. I would highly recommend it to others needing legal assistance.”

Texas Legal also partners with Balance Pro, a nonprofit money education organization, to offer free financial literacy resources. Articles, videos and financial calculators are available online to any state employee at no charge with no membership required. Monthly webinars and personalized financial coaching empower employees to manage their finances effectively. Plus, employees can receive free financial counseling on a variety of topics from debt to credit reviews to foreclosure prevention.

**Employees can receive free financial counseling on a variety of topics from debt to credit reviews to foreclosure prevention.**

Navigating legal and financial matters can be a daunting task. At TxDOT, we provide employees with access to resources that offer peace of mind and support during challenging times. Through partnerships with Texas Legal and Alliance Work Partner’s Employee Assistance Program, we give employees useful tools to address legal and financial concerns efficiently.

As a statewide, nonprofit legal benefit plan, Texas Legal offers state employees comprehensive legal benefits plans at discounted rates from \$16 to \$40 a month. Members can choose from a statewide network of participating attorneys. Whether it’s estate planning or family law matters, Texas Legal ensures access to expert legal guidance without the burden of exorbitant fees. These resources can transform lives.

Employees can also get legal and financial advice through the Employee Assistance Program, which offers LawAccess, a service through Alliance Work Partners that assists employees and their immediate family in addressing legal or financial issues. It includes free 30-minute consultations with licensed attorneys and certified consumer credit counselors. The consultations are limited to one per issue per year. Whether it’s drafting a basic will or managing personal finances, the program provides resources by phone or online. LawAccess is available at no charge to TxDOT employees, anyone living in the employee’s household, and any children aged 26 years and younger.

At TxDOT, we recognize that employees are our most valuable asset. By equipping them with legal and financial resources through Texas Legal and the Employee Assistance Program, we reaffirm our commitment to their well-being and success. With these resources at their disposal, our team members can focus on achieving their professional goals and leading fulfilling lives both inside and outside the workplace. ▼



Join Texas Legal by visiting [texaslegal.org/join](https://texaslegal.org/join). Online financial resources are available at [texaslegal.balancepro.org](https://texaslegal.balancepro.org).



Financial coaching is available by phone at 888-456-2227 using “TxDOT” as your member ID.



To get started with LawAccess, visit [awpnow.com](https://awpnow.com) and use the code “AWP-TXDOT-1751.”



Here is a photo depicting an identifiable landmark you may have seen in your travels around Texas. If you think you know what this is a photo of or know where it was taken, send an email to [TNideas@txdot.gov](mailto:TNideas@txdot.gov). Deadline for submissions is July 26.



## Identified:



Congratulations to our first identifier Craig Burgan (DAL).

Last edition's photo featured the Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area in Rocksprings. The cavern is home to one of Texas' largest colonies of Mexican free-tailed bats.

Others identifying the photo were Kim Deal (LFK), Keith Tinsley (BMT), Clover Clamons (ENV), Peggy Miller (TRV), Joseph Hagler (LFK), Rich McMonagle (ADM), Tracy Lane (FTW), Kevin Seider (SAT), Rosa Cuevas (LRD), David Scheel (SAT), Heather Sinclair (ODA), Catherine Wolff (TPP), Alex Bell (FTW), Darren McDantiel (TPD), Chris Cowen (SJT) and Adrian Rodriguez (retiree).

# UPCOMING TXDOT EVENTS

**July 4**

**Independence Day**  
(All Agencies Closed)

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**July 5**

**Day After  
Independence Day**  
(Minimal Staff Required)

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**July 30**

**Transportation  
Commission Meeting**  
(Austin)

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**August 22**

**Transportation  
Commission Meeting**  
(Austin)

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**August 27**

**LBJ's Birthday**  
(Minimal Staff Required)

# TxDOT ENVIRONMENTAL STAFF MEMBERS UNPLUG FROM OFFICE

ENVIRONMENTAL DIVISION

Environmental project planners and specialists took part in a field training on natural and cultural resources in April.



In late April, 25 members of TxDOT’s West Texas environmental staff left the hum of their computers to listen to nature, wildlife experts and Native American tribal representatives as part of a field training on natural and cultural resources to strengthen ties with colleagues and the environment they protect.

The excursion for environmental project planners and specialists to the Davis Mountains region included visits to country and state parks, prairie dog towns, Comanche Springs, the University of Texas at Austin McDonald Observatory and other settings for a close-up view of plants, lizards, birds, bats, the spring source for the Edwards Aquifer and more.

“Getting the opportunity to learn about these resources from experts and see them yourself — versus behind a computer screen — is vital for professional development and improving your job performance as environmental staff,” said Rebekah Dobrasko, Environmental Affairs section director, Cultural Resources.

The training is expected to foster a deeper comprehension of the resources TxDOT is charged with protecting — as required by law — and how our projects may impact them.

“When we understand this, we are able to provide better input to our project engineers and designers,” Dobrasko said.

In that vein, the Mescalero Apache and the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo tribes spoke to the group, sharing their history and the important places, plants, animals and other natural resources revered for their significance.

Holly Brady, an environmental project planner for the Odessa District, singled out those interactions as a highlight of the trip.

“This isn’t something we get to experience every day, and it gave me a better understanding of why it is important that we coordinate with these groups for certain projects,” she said.

That interactivity speaks to TxDOT’s commitment to building relationships with tribes as part of a consultation process guided by the National Historic Preservation Act. That law helps identify and determine any potential effect of a

project — and to minimize its impact — on prehistoric archeological sites, cemeteries and other places of cultural significance.

Also part of the trip was a visit to the bat-occupied underside of a bridge on SH 17 over Frazier Canyon offering a glimpse of the protected resources.

Staff listened to a Texas Parks & Wildlife Department official speak on the White-nose Syndrome’s deadly impact on hibernating bats, and how to identify endangered and threatened species in Texas.

“The visit to the bridge underpass and the presence of bat communities was an eye-opener,” said Adrian Aguirre, an environmental specialist for the El Paso District. The experience, he said, highlighted the importance of thorough environmental reports prior to construction and the role of effective management to minimize a project’s impact on the habitat of protected and endangered species.

Bridget Dawson, a project planner for the San Antonio District, lauded the experience for adding to her knowledge base and for its regenerative qualities.

“It’s easy to get bogged down in the mundane of our jobs — the changing laws and regulations, trying to remember the changes, redoing project clearances that are affected by these changes, and so on and so forth,” she said.

“This environmental field training course was a grassroots revival of passion for everything that led the TxDOT environmental staff to this profession in the first place — our love for nature and the desire to better understand, protect and preserve it.” ▼



# ARAFAT HUSSAIN

## Utility Permits Coordinator



LUBBOCK  
DISTRICT

**A**rafat Hussain, a utility permits coordinator with the Lubbock District, originally hails from Houston. He graduated from Texas A&M University-Kingsville with a degree in electrical engineering and moved with his wife and young daughter to Lubbock five years ago. He has been with TxDOT for more than a year. In his free time, he likes to garden, fish, hunt, play chess and spend time with his family. Hussain also enjoys traveling and playing cricket.



Photo by Dianah Ascencio

### What is your favorite destination to visit in the summer?

The Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It is just spectacular how they built this giant structure with the tools of that time.

### What is something your friends would be surprised to know about you?

I can speak five languages.

### Crunchy peanut butter or smooth?

Not a big fan of peanut butter. I would rather have toast with cream cheese.

### What plants do you like to grow in your garden?

I grow vegetables including tomatoes, okras, cucumbers, zucchini and squash.

### What are your favorite spots to fish?

Loyola Beach and Corpus Christi.

### What is your favorite sport?

I grew up playing cricket. In Lubbock, I formed a cricket team along with some college students. We play on weekends.

### What sport would you compete in if you were in the Olympics?

I would compete in shooting and badminton.

### Which do you like best, salt water or freshwater fishing?

Saltwater fishing all the way. I like to fish at night. The cool breeze from the ocean takes my stress away.

### What is your favorite thing about being outside?

Fresh air. Beautiful sky. I enjoy everything from sunrise to sunset.

### What is your favorite fish to eat?

Tilapia and speckled trout are my favorite fish of all time. The way my mom and my wife cook them is so delicious.

### What is a family tradition you enjoy?

My extended family often gets together in Galveston. We fish, sit around a campfire and eat lots of food.

### Would you rather have free lawn service or free house cleaning for a year?

I like to do both myself but given a choice, I'd take free house cleaning.

### Tell us a favorite childhood memory.

My cousin and I would go to our own lake to fish all day long. Next to the lake were fruit trees. We would climb the trees, pick fresh guavas and mangos and eat them. ▼



# ALL ACROSS TxDOT

## What You Need to Know



TxDOT took home Emergency Management Agency of the Year this spring. (l to r) Front row: Suzanne Gyngard, Matthew Heinze, Missy Lowe and Leighann Heine. Middle row: Gordon Harkey, James Stevenson, John Taylor and Jared Browder. Back row: Chris Henry and Charles Nesloney.

### MAINTENANCE DIVISION

## TxDOT named Emergency Agency of the Year

TxDOT was recognized as the Texas Division of Emergency Management Agency of the Year for 2024, receiving the honor at the annual Texas Emergency Management Conference in May. The award recognizes outstanding support by an agency to the communities of Texas during disasters. The conference serves as an annual forum to share best practice, exchange ideas and encourage collaboration among emergency management professionals.

“This award is extremely prestigious as it is a competition of all agencies that respond to emergencies, not just state agencies,” said Matthew Heinze, emergency management coordinator. “It was a privilege to accept this award

on behalf of all the fine folks that make TxDOT great during emergencies. This award goes to all TxDOT districts and divisions, from the dedicated crews in the field to all the dedicated staff that support and lead during emergencies operations.”

Hosted by the Texas Division of Emergency Management, the conference attracts over 3,500 elected officials, first responders, emergency managers and decision makers statewide and across the nation. The Texas Emergency Management Awards recognize the accomplishments of those in the emergency management field in Texas during the past year.

“The awesome thing about TxDOT is that people are willing to answer the call to help, no matter the time or day,” said Heinze. “Each and every one of the outstanding employees at TxDOT are such a key part in the success of TxDOT during emergency response.”

Winners were selected based on various criteria for each category, but

each ultimately proved their leadership, courage and dedication to serving their communities during times of disaster.

“The personnel executing the mission during all emergency events are the real recipients of this award,” said Maintenance Division Director James Stevenson. “Whether it’s the boots on the ground maintenance employees, the mechanics that keep the equipment going, the safety folks that keep us going home in one piece, or the other fantastic people in the districts and divisions who are integral to supporting those frontline efforts, we cannot get our job done without everyone pulling together. You are all fantastic and I am very grateful to be a small part of this outstanding agency.”

### COMPLIANCE DIVISION

## Durkop named new Compliance Division Director

Cheryl Durkop is the new director of the Compliance Division. She has served as director of the External Audit and Advisory Services Section in the Compliance Division since 2019, acting as the primary liaison between TxDOT and external auditors as well as overseeing the planning, execution and reporting on external audits and advisory service engagements. She joined TxDOT in 2017 as a senior auditor. Previously, she worked with the Texas State Auditor’s Office. She is a graduate of Texas A&M University, a Certified Internal Auditor and a Certified Fraud Examiner.





The Dallas District celebrates improvements to the Irving Interchange: (l to r) City of Irving Council Member Brad LaMorgese, City of Irving Mayor Rick Stopfer, Texas Transportation Commissioner Robert C. Vaughn, City of Irving Council Member John Bloch and Dallas District Engineer Ceason Clemens. Photo by Michael Amador

## DALLAS DISTRICT

# Irving interchange project transforms congested corridors

A congested triangle of highway interchanges in North Texas is becoming a distant memory after a massive overhaul of the corridors wraps up in Irving.

The Irving Interchange surrounds the old Texas Stadium site in the Dallas District and is where SH 183, SH 114, Loop 12 and Spur 482 intersect. Outdated cloverleaf designs, narrow highways and growing traffic demands caused significant delays for commuters and travelers, landing the location a spot on the Texas Clear Lanes Congestion Relief planning list.

For the past decade, TxDOT has steadily made improvements in the corridors leading up to this \$301 million project. To make the junctions function, this phase included the construction of ten new direct connectors, 22 new overpasses and nearly five miles of widened highway lanes and new pavement. Work started in 2020 and all new bridges and lanes opened to traffic in spring 2024.

To celebrate the transformation, local and state leaders joined TxDOT in May to cut a ceremonial ribbon and view the changes. As traffic flowed in the surrounding corridors, Texas Transportation Commissioner Robert C. Vaughn commented on the impact the Texas Clear Lanes program is making.

“Reducing congestion in our metro areas through Texas Clear Lanes is an

ambitious task, but we’re committed to following Governor Abbott’s direction and working with state and local leaders to make a difference for drivers,” Vaughn said. “Since 2015, this new congestion relief program now has \$75 billion of non-tolled projects that are completed, under construction, or planned.”

## SAN ANTONIO DISTRICT

# San Antonio District breaks ground on Loop 1604 North expansion Project

The San Antonio District commemorated the start of construction on Segment 4 of the Loop 1604 North Expansion project with a groundbreaking ceremony in April. The \$218 million segment of the Texas Clear Lanes project aims to improve mobility, reduce congestion and enhance safety along four miles of Loop 1604 between U.S. 281 and Redland Road in north Bexar County.

With the turn of a shovel, Texas Transportation Commission Chairman J. Bruce Bugg, Jr. led the ceremony where he was joined by TxDOT Executive Director Marc Williams, Bexar County Judge Peter Sakai, Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Chair-Elect Rebeca Clay-Flores, Bexar County Commissioner Grant Moody and TxDOT San Antonio District Engineer Charles Benavidez.

“Today, we’re breaking ground on another Texas Clear Lanes project designed to get Texans out of gridlock

and back to the things they want and need to do,” said Chairman Bugg. “The Loop 1604 North Expansion is a transformative project that will bring the improvements needed to increase mobility and reduce congestion now and in the future.

Segment 4 of the Loop 1604 North Expansion will expand the mainlanes from a 4- to 10-lane expressway, add high-occupancy vehicle lanes in each direction, improve intersection operations, and construct bicyclist and pedestrian accommodations along the frontage roads.

## YOAKUM DISTRICT

# Yoakum District breaks ground on upgrade to U.S. 59

The Yoakum District held a groundbreaking to mark the official start of the U.S. 59 Segment 2-Wharton project in May. The segment will be part of the future I-69 corridor.

The project will upgrade U.S. 59 to rural interstate standards from SH 60 to FM 961. As part of the upgrade, the project will replace bridges over the Colorado River and the North and South Reliefs. In addition, it will reconfigure two interchanges at FM 961 and FM 102 and install a new interchange at a segment of FM 1301. The 7.8-mile improvement project has a budget of \$343 million and is expected to be completed in five years.▼



The Yoakum District marks the start of improvements to U.S. 59 in May. Photo provided by Yoakum District



# FORT WORTH DISTRICT USING HIGH-TECH SOLUTION TO REDUCE SECONDARY CRASHES



The Fort Worth District recently launched a new way to quickly identify traffic problems and reduce secondary crashes, improving traffic management and road safety.

The high-tech innovation uses existing cameras and technology to provide early warnings to drivers about potential hazards, giving them time to slow down and prevent accidents.

“We’re very excited to have tested and proven this technology in our traffic management center, and we hope it continues to help us be more efficient in our operations and decreases the number of crashes on our roadways,” said Theresa Poer, the district’s director of Transportation Operations.

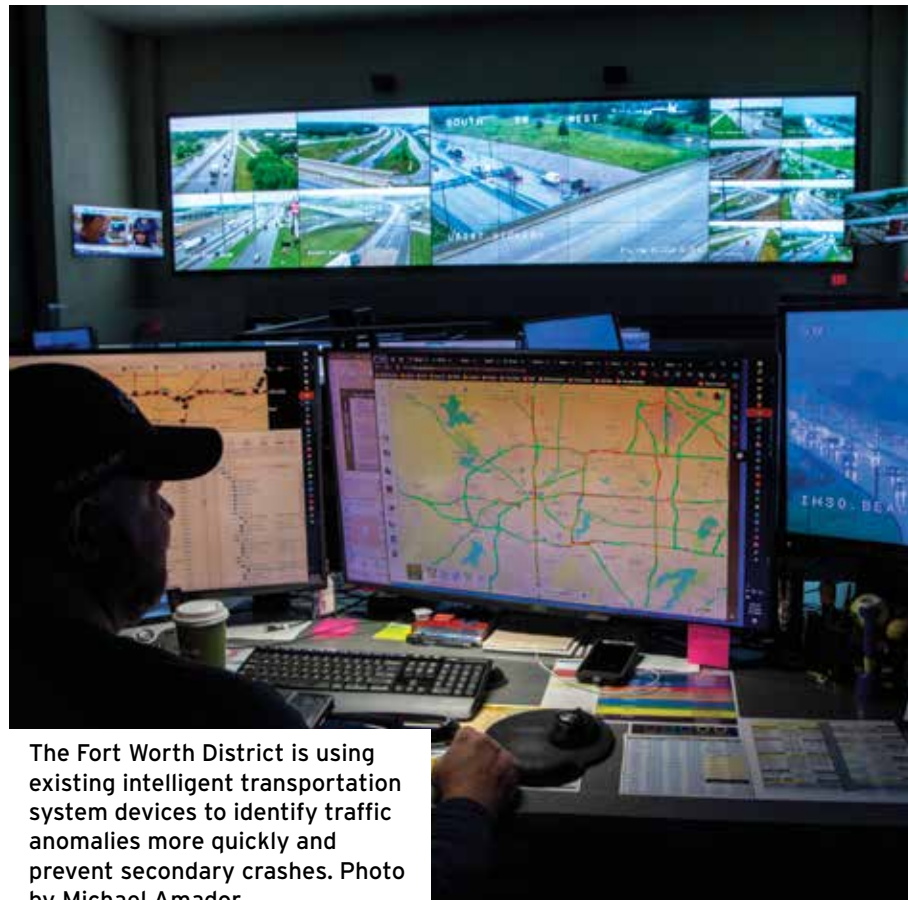
The five-month pilot project led by the district’s TransVISION Center detected 574 pedestrians walking along a five-mile stretch of I-30, using existing cameras and sensor equipment to identify traffic irregularities and by extension, the presence of secondary crashes.

According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), a secondary crash occurs in the immediate vicinity of a scene or within the queue — in either direction — resulting from an earlier crash. Research shows these crashes typically occur physically near the primary crash, with 30% of them occurring at the same time.

Secondary crashes also complicate traffic management, putting responders and other road users at additional risk, and increasing delays.

The district looked to improve that dynamic after TransVISION noticed a significant lag between roadway sensor data visible to traffic management center operations and reports from drivers about traffic slowdowns and potential hazards.

**A secondary crash occurs in the immediate vicinity of a scene or within the queue — in either direction — resulting from an earlier crash.**



The Fort Worth District is using existing intelligent transportation system devices to identify traffic anomalies more quickly and prevent secondary crashes. Photo by Michael Amador

Looking ahead, radio-controlled and connected portable message boards will be deployed as part of a planned pilot to heighten communications with the public. Pivoting off the success of the earlier effort, the district is also planning to enlist the innovation for use along the freeways throughout the most densely-populated areas of Tarrant County.

The advance-warning system is the result of ongoing collaboration

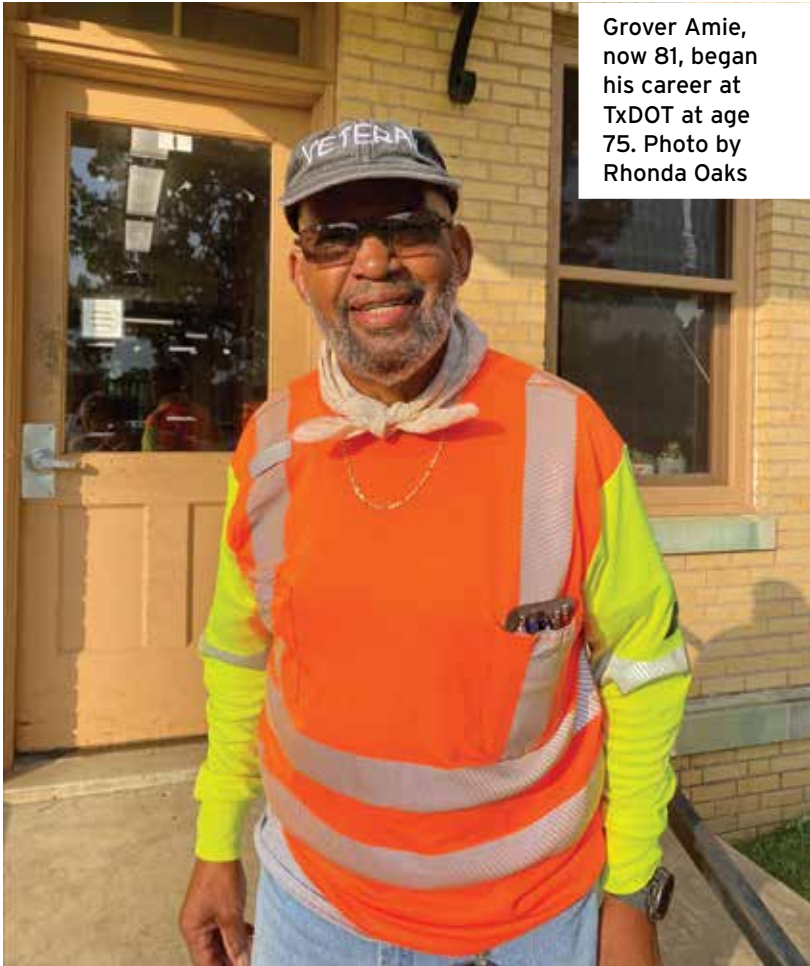
among the Fort Worth District and the Information Technology, Research and Technology Implementation, Traffic Safety, and Strategic Initiatives and Innovation divisions, as well as the Texas A&M Transportation Institute.

To learn more, contact Theresa Poer. Find other district and division innovations on the Innovative Transportation in Texas page on TxDOT.gov. ▼

# NEVER TOO LATE TO START SOMETHING NEW



LUFKIN  
DISTRICT



Grover Amie, now 81, began his career at TxDOT at age 75. Photo by Rhonda Oaks

Grover Amie is quick to tell you he loves to work and that TxDOT is the best job he has ever had. Grover turns 81 in July. He said age wasn't even a consideration when he applied for a job opening at 75.

Now a construction inspector for the Lufkin Area Office in the Lufkin District, Amie was ready for a new challenge after establishing his professional pedigree working at engineering firms in Houston and Lufkin. Spurred by a co-worker's mentioning of the TxDOT opportunity, the second time proved to be the charm in his application to join the Lufkin District. It's a natural extension of what he's done previously.

"I don't think a lot about my age," Amie said. "I had experience with other companies doing some of the same things before I was hired at TxDOT. I just look forward to getting up every morning and going to work."

Amie said he has one thing on his mind when he drives into a work zone each day.

"My biggest concern is making sure everybody stays safe and we all go home at the end of the day," he said. "I enjoy helping others. I look out after the guys, and they look out after me. I love working with my crew and we point out things each day that help keep us safe."

Amie knows about challenges. He is a U.S. Army veteran, serving from 1967 to 1969. He then served in the Army Reserves after active duty. But one of his daily challenges now is staying safe with more distracted drivers in and near the work zones.

"I think we all have to watch and be really mindful of what is going on around us," he said. "There have been times when I have stopped someone from stepping into a dangerous situation. There have been times, they have done it for me."

He said keeping engaged in the work is an essential part of staying motivated and staying young.

"I just really love the job," Amie said. "I have been truly blessed because I really enjoy what I am doing and have no intention of getting old anytime soon." ▼

"I enjoy helping others. I look out after the guys, and they look out after me. I love working with my crew and we point out things each day that help keep us safe."

— Grover Amie  
Construction Inspector

# MILESTONES

## MAY SERVICE AWARDS

### ABILENE

- 40 Rondale Worthington
- 25 Julie Rogers  
Vallerie Wende
- 20 Bobby Lowack
- 5 Ryan Carrigan  
Andrew Fuller

### AMARILLO

- 50 Lonnie Parr
- 20 Walter Donais
- 10 Nathan Sater
- 5 Daneil Wallace II

### ATLANTA

- 20 Garris Ivory  
Scotty Jackson
- 10 Terrance Cannon
- 5 David Webb

### AUSTIN

- 5 Loren Bairrington  
Hilina Shibeshi

### AVIATION

- 10 Edward Ricke

### BEAUMONT

- 20 Jamaal Hadnot
- 10 Alan Moffett
- 5 Gary Johnson  
Karen Naismith  
Jesse Spivey

### BRIDGE

- 5 Chun Ho Lee

### BROWNWOOD

- 25 Gregory Cedillo  
Victoria McKee
- 5 Hector Arredondo  
Charles Bailey  
Jose Castillo  
Jonathan Conley  
Ryan Lindhorst

### BRYAN

- 35 Mark Jeffrey
- 5 David Alvarado  
Nathaniel Holiday  
Levi Jones

### CHILDRESS

- 5 Isaac Cantu  
Andrea Crownover

### CIVIL RIGHTS

- 20 Hermelinda Deleon Salinas
- 5 Hasan Yacoub

### COMMUNICATIONS

- 25 Bobby Colwell
- 10 Timothy McAlavy

### CORPUS CHRISTI

- 20 Leonard Gregor  
Elane Livas  
Carol Rivas
- 10 Luann Davila
- 5 Eleuterio Escobar IV  
Isaac Jaramillo

### DALLAS

- 20 Dawit Abraham
- 10 Richard Dowdy  
Emigdia Silva
- 5 Randy Castaneda  
Cori Palmer

### EL PASO

- 10 Israel Borrego  
Rafael Gonzalez
- 5 Christine Guerra

### ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

- 10 Leslie Mirise

### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

- 30 Christina Cabello
- 10 Morgan Davis
- 5 Irfan Halimi  
Angelica Zulueta

### FLEET OPERATIONS

- 20 Joe McKee Jr.
- 10 Michael Moore  
Runi Rodriguez  
Justin Smith  
Richard Tucker
- 5 Gregory Duke  
Candace Jones  
Deric Patton

### FORT WORTH

- 25 Bao-Phuc Tran
- 10 Todd Bridegam  
Roshan Shrestha
- 5 Yusef Marwan  
Jenny Potter

### HOUSTON

- 35 Stephen Waller III
- 30 Phillip Sasser
- 20 Robert Etheredge  
Chin Tsen  
Andres Varilla  
Sarah Wyckoff
- 15 PaTrinia Marsh  
Sharmeen Rahman
- 10 Jesus Cervantes  
Clifford Davis  
Joe Frazier  
Tunisia Smith

### 5 Yvar Carcaces

- Linh Chung  
Javier Jimenez  
Sjolanda Rhenee Lawhorn  
Chris Parks  
Emmitt Williams

### HUMAN RESOURCES

- 10 Sajimon Luckose  
Roger Winn
- 5 Karri Schoeneberg

### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- 5 Brianna De La Cerda

### LAREDO

- 30 Victor Montiel
- 5 Alfredo Trevino

### LUBBOCK

- 25 John Ryan
- 20 Ruben Renteria
- 10 Juan Cortez Jr.  
5 Roxana Mendoza

### LUFKIN

- 10 William Conway

### MAINTENANCE

- 25 Salomon Flores  
Justin Obinna
- 5 Samuel Glinsky  
Bradly Navarro

### MATERIALS AND TESTS

- 20 Daniel Balboa

### ODESSA

- 20 Jaime Gonzalez
- 5 Isneyda Galvez

### PARIS

- 20 Kenneth Riddle
- 5 Kenny Thomas

### PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING PROCUREMENT SERVICES

- 25 Julie Rook
- 10 David McLachlen  
Vanessa Williams
- 5 Cassandra Johnson  
Arlene Sanchez

### PHARR

- 25 Irma Villarreal
- 10 Nayely Parra
- 5 Luis Lujan  
Erik Ramirez

### PROCUREMENT

- 10 Linda Mena  
Sheila Nichols
- 5 Joann Cox

### PROJECT FINANCE, DEBT AND STRATEGIC SERVICES

- 5 Amy Krutis

### RIGHT OF WAY

- 50 Nancy Johnson
- 10 Michelle Maxon

### SAN ANGELO

- 10 Michael Watkins

### SAN ANTONIO

- 25 Benigno Lopez III
- 20 Ruben Ortiz
- 10 Pedro Carrillo  
Gerald Rodriguez
- 5 Ruben Ponce  
Rudy Vasquez

### SUPPORT SERVICES

- 10 Ciro Lucero  
Camille Stanfield  
Lyle Williams

### TRAFFIC SAFETY

- 30 Karen Peoples
- 20 John Hajek
- 10 Juan Morales
- 5 Deandra Atkinson

### TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

- 10 Eric Clennon

### TYLER

- 30 Larkin Shaw
- 10 Kenneth House

### WACO

- 10 Anel Rivera Rosado
- 5 Noel Espinoza  
Dominguez  
Desiree Flynn

### WICHITA FALLS

- 20 Brian Beaty
- 10 Janice Nolte  
Caitlin Roe

### YOKUM

- 25 Freddie Ramirez
- 10 Carl Klimitchek
- 5 Bryan Kirts  
Mitchell Naico

## JUNE SERVICE AWARDS

### ABILENE

20 Ernest Piske Jr.  
5 Joshua Caffey  
Katherine Stone

### ADMINISTRATION

10 Darran Anderson  
Richard McMonagle

### ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY

5 Mark Weaver

### AMARILLO

35 Bradley Buchanan  
20 Russell Washer  
5 Mario Banos  
Guss Jameson  
Jamie Leavitt  
Samuel Torres

### ATLANTA

30 Donna Barnes  
5 John Robicheaux

### AUSTIN

30 David Goldstein  
25 Diana Schulze  
20 John Robinson  
10 Samuel Himawan  
5 Tewodros Berhe  
Scott Dean

### BEAUMONT

10 Chad Roach  
5 James Fife  
Jennifer Hungerford

### BRIDGE

5 Prameela Rao

### BROWNWOOD

5 Ben Rowell

### BRYAN

20 Hoyt Wichman  
20 Carlton Williams  
5 Joshua Duncan  
Karen Kroll  
Darrell Winkelmann

### CHILDRESS

20 Crawford Mason  
Brian Miller  
5 Zachary Loudermilk

### CONSTRUCTION

15 Sonny Nugent

### CONTRACT SERVICES

20 Hettie Thompson

### CORPUS CHRISTI

30 Orlando Carrillo  
20 Jason McKelvey  
5 Sara Gonzalez  
Taylor Jones-Williams  
Juan Marin  
Randy McPherson

### DALLAS

25 Michael Anthony  
James Morren  
20 Mary Morrel  
Christopher Rocha  
10 Habtamu Gebreselassie  
Robert Neathery  
Patrick Rivera  
5 Blake Collins  
Cole Ramsey

### EL PASO

25 Jorge Laboy  
Edgar Marin  
Monica Ruiz  
5 Cynthia Balderrama

### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

25 Lillie Salas  
5 Marisa Cienfuegos  
Yuly Davila Mesa  
Roxann Martinez-  
Montemayor

### FLEET OPERATIONS

35 Lauren Fortier  
25 Joseph Lamb  
20 Omar Jimenez  
Rodney Rodrigues  
10 Shane Dornak  
Michael Erb  
5 Sarah Farish

### FORT WORTH

55 Raymond Buzalsky  
25 Mark Burwell  
10 Mohammed Quadeer  
5 Juan Diaz  
Alvaro Garcia  
Clinton Lee  
Forrest Moss  
Trevor Rabke  
Charles Wier

### HOUSTON

45 Russell Johns  
35 Daniel Ammons  
David Crain  
30 Joseph Tijerina  
25 Mary Hernandez  
20 David Jamandre  
Tan Luong  
Kurtis Tielke  
10 James Mergist  
Jeremy Pavlock  
5 Angela Coakley  
Ashley Franklin  
Angela Gerber  
Nathanael Grudier  
Westin Seets

### HUMAN RESOURCES

25 Dianna Arredondo  
20 Mariah Jolley

### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

5 Steven Pryor

### LAREDO

10 Oscar H. Almaraz  
Antonio Reyna Jr.

### LUBBOCK

10 Martin Aguilar  
5 Kazandra Cavazos  
Russell Ortega  
Reynaldo Saldana

### LUFKIN

30 Eleazar Carranza  
25 Jesse Sisco  
20 Joe Byley  
10 Rodney Jolley  
5 Adam Driskell

### MAINTENANCE

35 Khoa Nguyen

### MARITIME

25 Heather Scott

### MATERIALS AND TESTS

30 Marissa Trujillo  
25 Jason Tucker  
10 Rodrigo Vivar

### OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY

10 Tina Dukes

### ODESSA

25 Joe Macias

### PARIS

5 Arnold Fullerton

### PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING PROCURMENT SERVICES

10 Alan Gonzalez  
Ana Rivera

### PHARR

30 Benita Mendoza  
20 Manuel Estrada III  
Jesus Noriega  
10 Daniel Flores  
5 Roberto Reyna

### PROCUREMENT

35 Charla Saegert  
25 Kirby Bailey  
5 Amy Bell  
Juanity Wilson

### PROJECT FINANCE, DEBT AND STRATEGIC SERVICES

15 Elaxis Benavides

### PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

30 Donna Roberts  
15 Gonzalo Ponce

### RIGHT OF WAY

35 Michael Lightfoot  
20 Christina Lambert  
10 Robert Mosley  
5 Joshua Muir

### SAN ANGELO

25 Walter Crews  
5 Adam Hicks

### SAN ANTONIO

25 Armando Rodriguez  
Gil Romo Jr.  
10 Gustavo Jimenez  
Mario Lopez III  
5 Alejandra Bravo  
Jesus Garza  
Carlos Sosa  
Carlos Trevino  
Kevin Williams

### STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND INNOVATION

15 Sondra Johnson  
10 Marcia Gibbs

### SUPPORT SERVICES

20 Michael Schintgen

### TRAFFIC SAFETY

15 Tamara Gart

### TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

30 Sara Garza  
5 Robert Brown Jr.

### TRAVEL

10 Brandon Jakobeit  
5 Michael Hoinski

### TYLER

30 Victor Martinez  
20 Brian Rivers  
10 Dianna Blauert  
5 John Bodiford  
Tanya Uribe  
Randel Womack Jr.

### WACO

30 Michael Bolin  
20 Dennis Cheyne  
5 Matthew Musick

### WICHITA FALLS

25 Matthew Poirot

### YOAKUM

25 Brian Jasek  
20 Lester Clark Jr.  
10 Troy Blankenburg  
David De La Rosa

# MILESTONES

## MARCH RETIREE AWARDS

### ABILENE

23 Jerry F. Houghton

### ATLANTA

17 James P. Ennis

### BEAUMONT

18 Debbie L. Hallam

### BRIDGE

26 John D. Beer

### CHILDRESS

26 Roy D. Bertrand

12 Randy C. Shaw

### CORPUS CHRISTI

19 Vicente Romero Jr.

### DALLAS

26 Joel Garcis

24 Michael D. Hudek

11 Mark K. Karlin

### EL PASO

9 Jorge Eduardo Acuna

### FORT WORTH

10 Juan C. San Martin

### HOUSTON

25 Farshad Shafipour

24 William M. Hausman

23 David J. Weisz

10 Alfred M. Doherty

### LUFKIN

19 Terry P. King

16 Roy N. McClendon

### ODESSA

17 George R. Salcido

### PHARR

30 Juan Moreno Jr.

### PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING PROCUREMENT SERVICES

32 Dione N. Albert

### RIGHT OF WAY

10 Patti J. Dathe

### WICHITA FALLS

11 Michael Ray Alexander

## APRIL RETIREE AWARDS

### AMARILLO

28 David L. Britten

### AUSTIN

29 Mark F. Herber

### BRYAN

25 Wesley B. Reeder

18 Rodney E. Ewing

### EL PASO

30 John K. Connors

### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

17 Ghada Karam

### FORT WORTH

26 Domingo V. Rivas

24 Rakhshanda Mahar

18 Cleo Cortez

### HOUSTON

39 Tommy L. Spain

37 William P. Mallin

26 Nghia H. Doa

20 Tar-Hsi Huan

18 Hungchieh Chou

### HUMAN RESOURCES

11 Carol G. Cunard

### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

2 Mark Prindle

### LUBBOCK

25 Brad R. Grisham

### PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

22 Richard Darryl Neill

### SAN ANTONIO

25 Bracy M. Keeney

### TRAFFIC SAFETY

17 Kimberly Renee Justice

### TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS

2 Valerie Iannuccilli

## IN MEMORIAM

### ATLANTA DISTRICT

**Jerry Yates**

Design Project Coordinator

Date of Death: 6/1/2024

Years of Service: 29

Retired: 2007

### BRIDGE DIVISION

**John Jesse Panak**

Date of Death: 4/21/2024

Years of Service: 25

Retired: 1993

**David William McDonnold**

Date of Death: 4/25/2024

Years of Service: 30

Retired: 2002

### CORPUS CHRISTI DISTRICT

**Michael Gross**

Ferryboat Captain

Date of Death: 4/22/2024

Years of Service: 18

### ODESSA DISTRICT

**Benjamin Hinojos Jr.**

General Transportation Technician

Date of Death: 4/28/2024

Years of Service: 10

### PROCUREMENT DIVISION

**Herbert Finney II**

Purchaser

Date of Death: 5/13/2024

Years of Service: 23

# CONNECTING TxDOT WOMEN HONORS LUX WITH MOXIE AWARD

The Connecting TxDOT Women Employee Resource Group recently honored Ginger Lux, assistant maintenance section supervisor with the Houston District, with its second annual Moxie Award. The award recognizes women at TxDOT who work in a maintenance, traffic, construction, fleet, inspector, or other similar field position historically filled by men.

Lux received the award at the TxDOT Construction, Materials and Alternate Delivery Conference in March.

Lux’s career journey began in the hospitality industry before joining the military. During her service, she was part of operation Enduring Freedom and remains an active reservist.

In 2019, Lux joined the Houston District as a contract inspector. In early 2022, she assumed the crew chief duties for the Galveston Maintenance Office, then later became the maintenance supervisor for the Montgomery Maintenance Office.



Ginger Lux (center) received the second annual Moxie Award from the Connecting TxDOT Women Employee Resource Group in March. Amanda Allen (left) and Liz Bullock presented the award. Photo by Fred Whitaker

In her role, Lux has trained and guided the office’s contract inspectors to be among the best in the district.

Her knowledge of computers and heavy equipment is an unusual but great combination in the maintenance field. She has innovated trainings and implemented new ideas to make the team more efficient and thorough. Lux also plays a critical role in the hiring process and ensures the office gets the right people in the right spot. Lux is praised as always willing and ready for new challenges.

Outside of TxDOT, she is dedicated to her three children and works with animal rescue organizations. Lux’s selflessness and work ethic embodies the Moxie Award.

Congratulations, Ginger! ▼

## YOUR TURN



# WHAT WAS YOUR DREAM JOB AS A KID?

### BRYAN DISTRICT



**Lindsey Schroeder**  
District Public Engagement Specialist

“I always dreamed of becoming a nurse. When I was a kid, my grandparents would watch me. They cared for me, and I cared for them. It gave me a sense of purpose.”

### DALLAS DISTRICT



**Daniel Villalobos**  
Construction Records Auditor

“I enjoyed documentaries on marine life and I loved the movie, *Free Willy*. So, I wanted to be a marine biologist and work at Sea World with the killer whales.”

### EL PASO DISTRICT



**Karla Y. Rios**  
Transportation Engineer

“As a child, I aspired to be a backup dancer for a famous singer, allowing me the opportunity to travel the world and perform on global stages.”



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