



WINTER 2019

Arkansas HIGHWAYS

A PUBLICATION OF THE
ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION | MAGAZINE

ARDOT Hosts Regional Rodeo:

**WINS 1ST PLACE IN EQUIPMENT
OPERATORS COMPETITION**

**A NEW
WELCOME CENTER
for Harrison**

**MEET ARDOT'S
Dive Team**

**CELEBRATING
20 YEARS:
The Bobby Hopper Tunnel**

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



The Year of the Employee

THE SUCCESS OF ANY COMPANY IS DEPENDENT ON ITS EMPLOYEES AND THE HARD WORK PERFORMED TO MEET THE GOALS OF THE ORGANIZATION. Where would a company stand without a dedicated, productive staff?

At ARDOT, we recognize and value our employees and the effort they invest in their jobs on a daily basis.

With this in mind, ARDOT is recognizing 2019 as the "Year of the Employee" and is celebrating with numerous opportunities for employees and their families.

I mention families because I am pleased to announce a new SASHTO Scholarship Program aimed at assisting ARDOT employees with the expenses of sending their children to college.

Beginning this summer, the Department will be awarding 30 ARDOT SASHTO scholarships of \$500 each to children of Department employees. As member states of the Southeastern Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (SASHTO), Departments of Transportation receive funds each year from the organization. The monies are what remain from the annual SASHTO conference and are divided among the 14 member states and Puerto Rico. ARDOT and the other DOTs decided to use those funds for scholarships to benefit employees and their families. Applying for a scholarship is easy, and each will be awarded through a random drawing involving all eligible applicants. The ARDOT SASHTO Scholarship application is available on the Human Resources Division's Intranet page found at ahtdnet/.

To further the educational goals of our employees, ARDOT is partnering with the Arkansas Department of Career Education to help those who do not yet have their high school diploma or GED. Beginning this spring, ARDOT is planning regional classes for employees interested in pursuing their GED. There is no cost to employees other than a small fee to take the final exam. Watch for more details soon on this beneficial opportunity. It is an accomplishment that will last a lifetime.

In the near future, you will also be hearing about a new online ARDOT "Company Store." The store will offer a range of products such as clothing, outerwear, caps and bags. The ARDOT logo can be printed or embroidered on most products available. The store will be a great way to promote our Department and show company pride!

Several months ago, I had the pleasure of presenting a number of ARDOT employees with the "Director's Diamond Award for Outstanding Public Service." The award recognizes employees that have gone above-and-beyond the call of duty and whose actions exemplify one or more of the Department's core values of safety, public service, teamwork, quality, integrity and efficiency. The employees included below made a significant difference among their peers, supervisors and the public, and I was proud to give them the recognition they deserve:

**David Baker | Jonathan Beshears | Jack Bocksnick | Nathan Daniels | Dustin Davis | Sharon Hawkins
Jerry Howe | Steve Muldrew | Jim Nunnery | Joe Plyler | Needra Sisson | Coleen Stevens
Joseph Valliant, Jr. | Jamey Wilhite | Chrissy Williams**

I feel confident the months ahead are going to be filled with success made possible by the hard work and determination of our staff. That is why we will be saluting your efforts and bringing you and yours new opportunities. It is all a part of making the employee experience at ARDOT the best it can be. Thank you all for your hard work!

Scott E. Bennett, P.E., Director



FRONT COVER:
Belt buckles served as awards at the Southeast Regional Roadeo.

BACK COVER:
Competition at the Southeast Regional Roadeo in Rogers.

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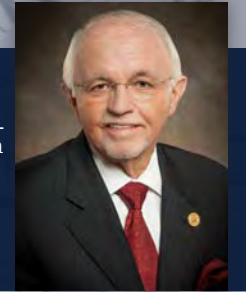
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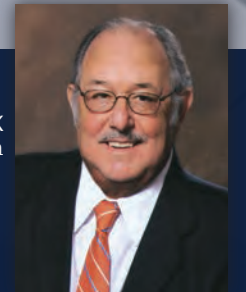


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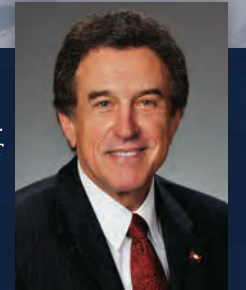
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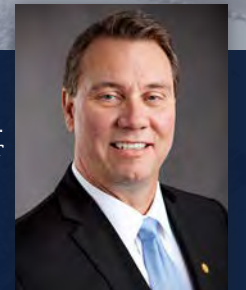
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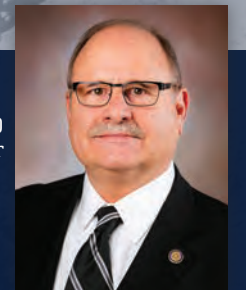
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Member



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ARDOT HOSTS REGIONAL ROADEO:

WINS 1st PLACE IN EQUIPMENT OPERATORS COMPETITION

BY DAVID NILLES

COMPETITORS FROM TEN DEPARTMENTS OF TRANSPORTATION FROM ACROSS THE SOUTHEASTERN REGION OF THE UNITED STATES CONVERGED ON ROGERS, ARKANSAS, IN EARLY SEPTEMBER TO TAKE PART IN THE 16TH ANNUAL SOUTHEASTERN REGIONAL EQUIPMENT OPERATORS ROADEO.

ARDOT played host to guests from nine states including Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. All are members of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). A tenth guest, the remnants of Hurricane Gordon, was expected, but fortunately, the rains did not arrive until the competition had drawn to a close.

"We are thrilled to have all of you here as our guests," ARDOT Director Scott Bennett told the crowd at the opening ceremony.

"This annual event began 16 years ago as a friendly competition between ARDOT and the Mississippi Department of

Transportation. Today we have ten states involved in our Roadeo."

After the introduction of each state's dignitaries, Arkansas Lieutenant Governor Tim Griffin welcomed the crowd of more than 500 and addressed the importance of the job carried out by equipment operators serving on road crews across the country.

"Infrastructure has played a huge role in the growth of this region. If we are going to continue to grow, we will rely on people like you. The work you do on our highways is a big deal and it makes a difference."

SAFETY TRAINING

A key element of the Regional Roadeo includes courses offered in safety training. All operators at the Roadeo participated in the training sessions, which covered the subjects of working safely around moving equipment on a job site and how to minimize injuries in the workplace.

"There is a lot of activity at a construction site, and we want our workers to be well prepared so they can return home safely at the end of each day," stated presenter Ross Maestas, Health & Safety Officer for ARDOT.

(continued on page 6)

In another session, ARDOT's Carroll Lathan shared the importance of stretching to improve range of motion and muscle control.

"Strains and muscle injuries account for 44 percent of occupational injuries. Employees can minimize those types of injuries with proper stretching on the job."

Safety training is a big part of the Regional Roadeo each year and is paying off according to Steve Cole with the West Virginia Department of Transportation.

"We see a benefit from these events. We keep track of all of our accidents and lost workdays. From 2009 to 2016, our accident numbers went from 97 to 72. The year we started participating in Regional Roadeo is when the numbers started improving."

THE MAIN EVENT: EQUIPMENT COMPETITION

The highlight of the Regional Roadeo each year is the equipment competition. The top winners from each DOT's statewide competition gather to lay claim to being the best of the best.

Participants from each state competed in six categories including single axle dump truck, tandem axle dump truck, tractor truck with lowboy, backhoe, tractor/mower and motor grader.

Practice day was a chance to get familiar with equipment and learn new ways of doing things.

"We don't have extended bumpers on our equipment in Louisiana because we don't have much snow," stated Vivian McGough with the Louisiana

Department of Transportation & Development who competed in the tandem dump truck category.

"We are re-learning the equipment here at Roadeo, and this will help us to be better prepared in the future."

Competition day on Thursday brought out the best in everyone, and the sharpest of skills were evident throughout the course.

"The competition is tough, when you get to this level, you can expect that," stated Jason Lacks of the Virginia Department of Transportation.

"The best of the best are here. It's an opportunity to see how others work and run their equipment and a chance to get some pointers from them."

"Events like this help," shared Brandon Varnadore from the South

Carolina Department of Transportation. "Roadeo is a lot of fun, and it keeps you up to date and refreshed."

AWARDING OF THE TROPHY

After a full day on the course, participants came together for a banquet and the announcement of the team champions.

After tallying all scores, ARDOT came out on top as the 2018 Regional Champions. South Carolina finished second and Tennessee came in with the third place finish.

"We are thrilled to not only host this year's Regional Roadeo but to also come away with a first place finish in the competition," stated ARDOT Director Scott Bennett.

"The Roadeo is the one opportunity each year for equipment operators to come together to improve their skills, learn from their peers from other DOTs and sharpen their safety skills. It has been a pleasure to host everyone here in Arkansas. I want to congratulate all of the teams that made this Roadeo a huge success."

Looking to next year's event, the 2019 Regional Roadeo will be hosted by the Mississippi Department of Transportation and will be held in Biloxi.

Sponsors for the 2018 Regional Equipment Operators Roadeo included APAC-Central; Bush-Whacker; Certified Cirrus Control Systems; Diamond Mowers; Ennis-Flint; Ergon; EZ Street Company; Force America; FuelMaster/Syntech Systems; Garver; Grass Roots Equipment and Outdoor/Midwest; Gulf Material Sales; Henderson Products, Inc.; Hutchens Construction Company; L3 Driver Training Solution; M-B Company; Oakley Fertilizer, Inc.; PSS Innovations; Riggs Cat; Sweeping Corporation of America, Inc.; The Godwin Group; The Southern Company; Trinity Highway Products, LLC; Verizon Connect; Viking; Visit Rogers; Whelen Engineering Company, Inc.; and Winter Equipment Company, Inc. ■



Inspecting the tractor truck with lowboy competition.



Knocking tennis balls off of posts is the goal of the motor grader competition.



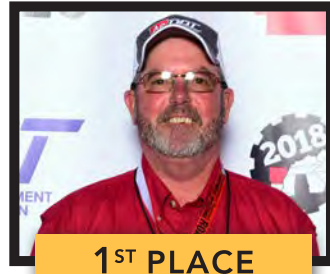
The tractor/mower competition.



ARDOT'S WINNING REGIONAL ROADEO TEAM

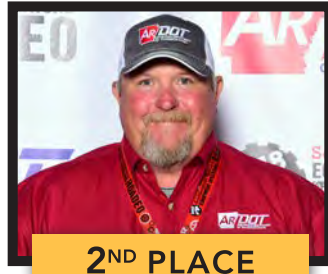
Individual members of Arkansas' Regional Rodeo team finished first, second or third in every event the day of competition. Here is a look at members of Arkansas' championship team and their standings.

SINGLE AXLE DUMP TRUCK



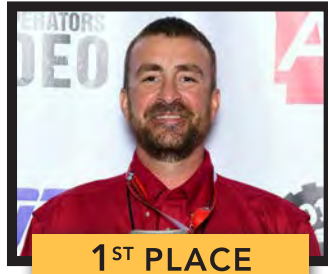
1ST PLACE

Brian Johnson
Maintenance Aide II
District 5



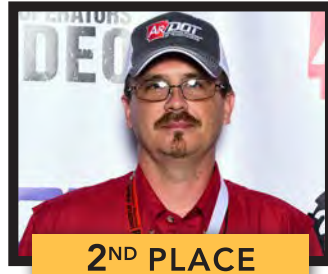
2ND PLACE

David Pruitt
Tractor Trailer Driver
District 8



1ST PLACE

Derek Stroot
Maintenance Specialist
District 9

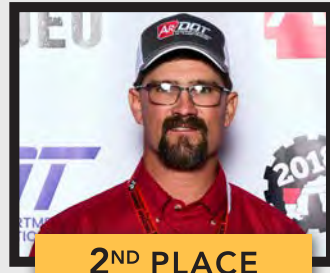


2ND PLACE

Jeremy Evans
Crew Leader
District 7

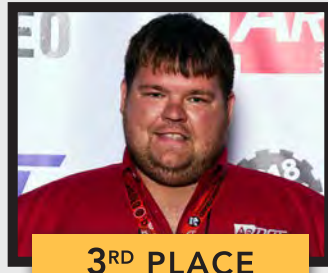
MOTOR GRADER

TANDEM AXLE DUMP TRUCK



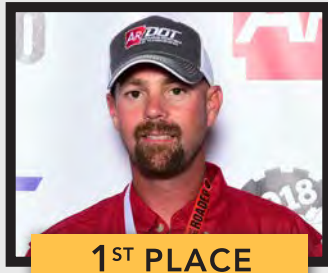
2ND PLACE

Keith Carpenter
Bridge Job
Superintendent
District 9



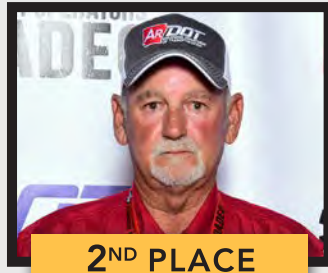
3RD PLACE

T.J. Pulley
Maintenance Aide II
District 1



1ST PLACE

Blake Angel
Maintenance Specialist
District 6

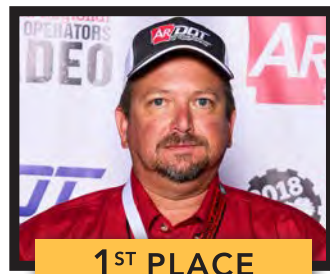


2ND PLACE

Eugene Farrell
Heavy Bridge
Maintenance Supervisor
Central Office

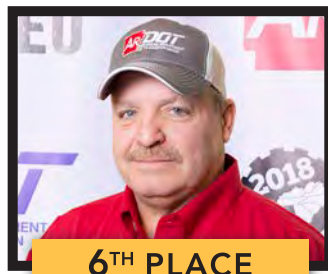
TRACTOR MOWER

LOWBOY



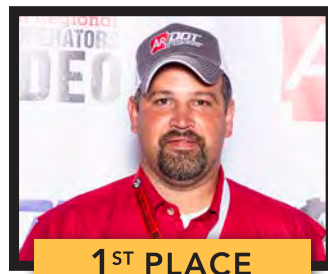
1ST PLACE

Johnny Jason
Maintenance Aide II
District 5



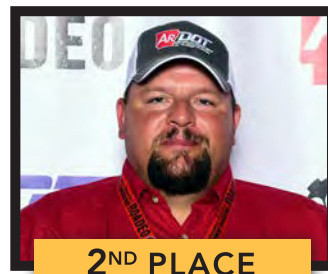
6TH PLACE

Jeff Upton
Maintenance Specialist
District 9



1ST PLACE

Chad Foster
Maintenance Specialist
District 9



2ND PLACE

Stephen Norris
Maintenance Aide II
District 5

BACKHOE



RIBBON CUTTING

ARDOT Director Scott Bennett and Cabot Mayor Bill Cypert (center) cut a ribbon along with local dignitaries.

CABOT NORTHERN INTERCHANGE

BY DAVID NILLES

ARDOT staff members, local dignitaries and Lieutenant Governor Tim Griffin gathered in Cabot on October 26 to cut a ribbon on the new U.S. Highway 67 interchange located on the north side of town.

"Cabot has an interchange on the south end of the city," ARDOT Director Scott Bennett told the crowd. "There is also one located midway through town. What was lacking was an interchange on the northern side of town. Not only did this community have a vision of how a new interchange could be beneficial to the area, they also came to ARDOT with a commitment. They became partners in order to make this northern interchange a reality."

The City of Cabot partnered with ARDOT by providing close to \$11 million towards construction of the interchange. ARDOT provided an additional \$21 million for the project. As a result, Manhattan Road & Bridge Company began work in early 2017.

Lieutenant Governor Griffin pointed out the significance of the new improvements.

"Road improvements like this are important. They contribute jobs and bring economic development. When they are in high growth areas like this, they are even more important. If you do not stay ahead of the curve on highways and infrastructure, you will stifle that future growth. I applaud the people of this community for having the long-term vision for this project."

Cabot Mayor Bill Cypert agreed and said the biggest thanks went to the voters of Cabot.

"They supported this project by approximately three to one at the voting booth, and we commend them for their vision." ■



An aerial view of the new interchange along U.S. Highway 67.





MORE THAN PINK

BY BRITNI PADILLA-DUMAS

"AND THOUGH SHE BE BUT LITTLE, SHE IS FIERCE." EVEN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE KNEW THAT A WOMAN'S SIZE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HER TENACITY.

October is officially Breast Cancer Awareness Month. For the second year, ARDOT partnered with Susan G. Komen to remind Arkansans of the fierce women who have fought for their lives. Many gathered on the Broadway Bridge in North Little Rock on October 5th, declared "Go Pink Day" by Governor Asa Hutchison, with the Arkansas Affiliate of Susan G. Komen to unveil and dedicate more than 60 "More Than Pink" banners. The banners hung on light poles on the bridge during the month of October and through the Race for the Cure on Saturday,

November 3, 2018. ARDOT dedicated a banner to honor employee Teri Cantrell.

Teri has worked with ARDOT for 25 years and has been described as "a pistol." True to her character, she is a fighter. Teri received her diagnosis of triple negative breast cancer in August 2015 at the age of 36 and, three years later, can also call herself a survivor.

"I underwent surgery to remove the tumor and lymph nodes, five months of intense chemotherapy and 33 rounds of radiation," Teri explained.

Triple negative breast cancer is usually more aggressive than some other types of cancers. Since the tumor tests negative for all three receptors, hormone and targeted therapies don't work.

"I could have never made it without all my family, friends and Dr. Rhonda Gentry helping me lead the charge. I'm proud to call myself a survivor and proud to have the honor of working with ARDOT for 25 years and have their support through this whole journey," Teri said.



Danny Keene, Head of ARDOT's Equipment and Procurement Division, described his experience knowing Teri through her battle:

"Teri has said that her fight made her stronger. I can attest to that, being around her and interacting with her every day. I think her story, along with so many others, serves as an inspiration to us all."

Arkansas is the third worst state in the country for late stage diagnosis and mortality of breast cancer.

"Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women in the United States," explained Kenny Clark, Executive Director of the Arkansas affiliate of Komen, "and it is the second most common cause of cancer deaths among women. In 2018, there will be more than 2,000 women diagnosed with cancer in the state of Arkansas. There will be more than 400 deaths. We have to stop this."

Approximately 22,000 motorists crossed the Broadway Bridge every day and were reminded of the battle so many women have fought against breast cancer. "Go Pink Day" and the "More Than Pink" theme are a call to action for citizens to think beyond the iconic pink ribbon and focus on how they can help win this war. A woman with a diagnosis is more than the disease. She is Fierce. She is a Survivor. She is More Than Pink. ■

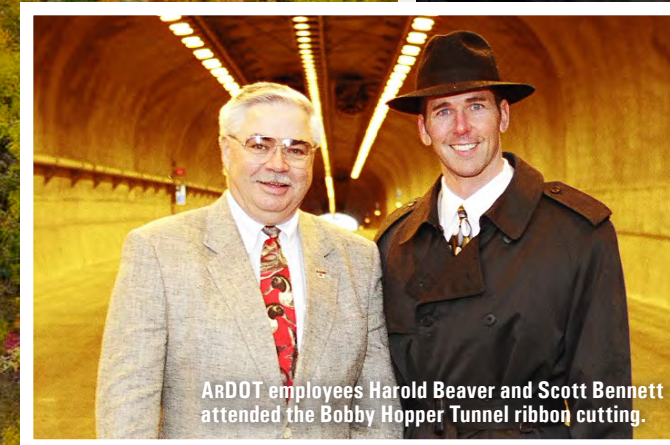
The best chance of **SURVIVAL** is **EARLY DETECTION.**

The Arkansas Affiliate of Susan G. Komen is committed to the **FIGHT AGAINST BREAST CANCER** in your community. There are available services to provide education, mammograms and treatment and other survivor support services such as financial aid for those in need. For more information, please call the Komen office at **501-202-4393.**

Susan G. Komen is the only organization that addresses breast cancer on multiple fronts such as research, community health, global outreach and public policy initiatives in order to make the biggest impact against this disease. To find dates for Race for the Cure in the future, visit ww5.komen.org/raceforthecure.

PHOTO ON PAGE 10: Teri Cantrell hangs her More Than Pink dedication banner on the Broadway Bridge.

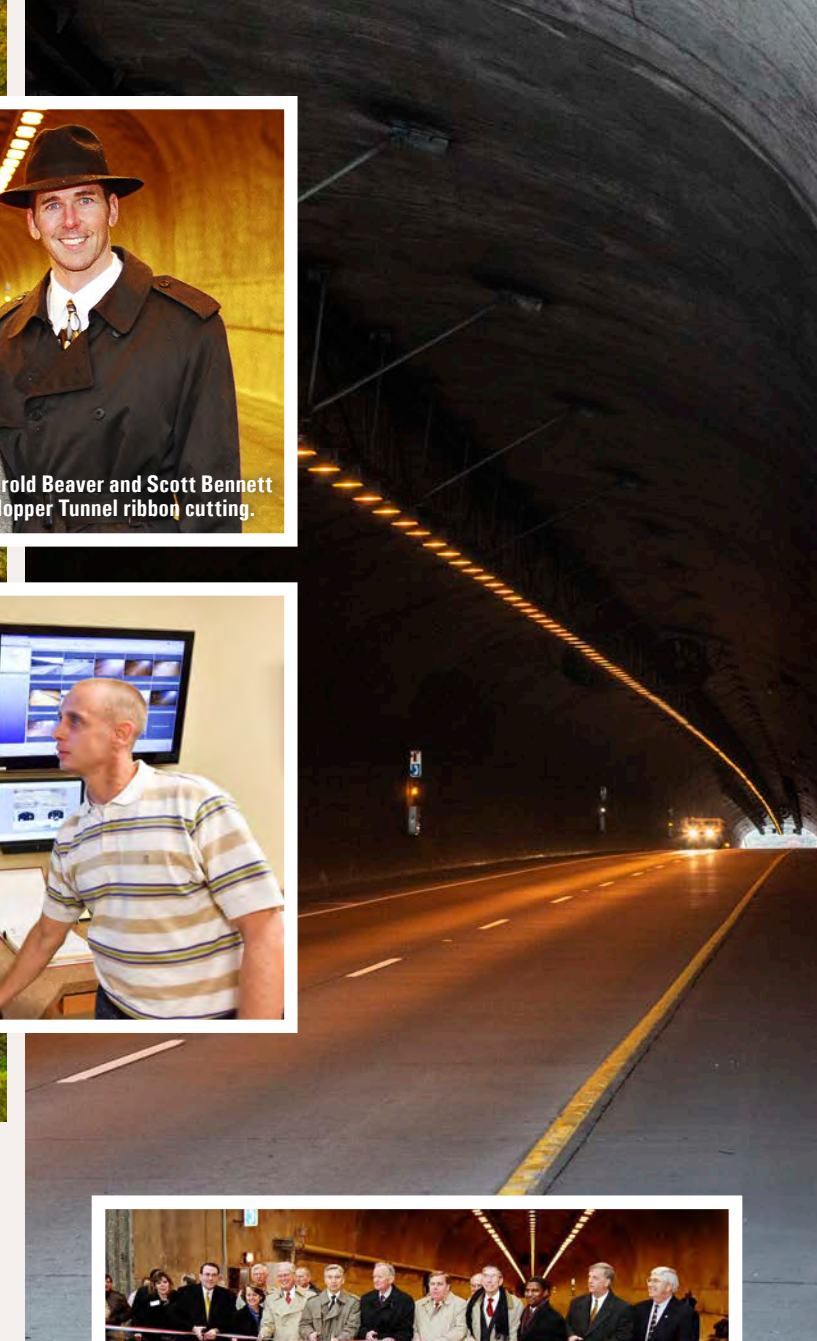
TOP PHOTO: Danny Keene (L) spoke at the More Than Pink event honoring Teri Cantrell (R).



ArDOT employees Harold Beaver and Scott Bennett attended the Bobby Hopper Tunnel ribbon cutting.



District Engineer Chad Adams monitors the tunnel from Fort Smith.



Officials cut a ribbon on January 8, 1999.

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS: *The Bobby Hopper Tunnel*

BY DAVID NILLES

THE BOBBY HOPPER TUNNEL ON INTERSTATE 49 IN NORTHWEST ARKANSAS HAS THE DISTINCTION OF BEING THE ONLY TUNNEL ON ARKANSAS' HIGHWAY SYSTEM. IT ALSO CELEBRATED ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF SERVICE IN JANUARY.

CELEBRATING THE "NEW HIGHWAY 71" TWENTY YEARS AGO

A crowd of approximately 500 gathered in the rain on January 8, 1999, at the Bobby Hopper Tunnel to cut a ribbon on "new Highway 71" between Alma and Fayetteville. Officially known as Interstate 540 at the time, the new route traverses a total of 42 miles over

the Boston Mountains. The highlight of the new roadway was Arkansas' first highway tunnel, the Bobby Hopper Tunnel, just southwest of Winslow.

Dignitaries including U.S. Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater and Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee joined all five highway commissioners for the event.

Commissioner Bobby Hopper, whose term on the Commission expired the week following the dedication, spoke about the safety the highway would provide for travelers.

"That one factor alone makes this highway special," Hopper commented.

"This is a wonderful and historic day for transportation in Arkansas, with its high bridges and tunnel, this is a unique highway that will save many lives," Hopper added.

He also thanked his fellow Commissioners "who listened to me for 16 years about this highway. And I especially want to thank the Commission

for naming the tunnel after me. This is the high point of my life, and I am humbled by your honor."

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE TUNNEL

The twin-bore, four-lane tunnel carries 23,000 vehicles per day through 1,600 feet of the Boston Mountains in Washington County. The bores measure 38 feet in width and are 25 feet tall.

Inside the tunnel are five cross-passages allowing access between the two tubes, directional signals, 1,400 light fixtures, carbon monoxide monitors, jet fans, fire protection, motorist assistance call boxes and closed-circuit television cameras to monitor traffic.

OVERSEEING ACTIVITIES UNDERGROUND

Supervising the tunnel and keeping it in top condition is the job of ArDOT personnel at the District Four Headquarters in Fort Smith.

"We monitor the tunnel from here using dual, independent computer systems and a wall of monitors on our own independent fiber network," stated District Four Engineer Chad Adams.

As needed, District Four dispatches "tunnel expert" Gary

Dewitt or personnel from the Area Maintenance Crew in Mountainburg when something needs attention on site.

"While some components of the tunnel operations such as the lighting, cameras and computer software are aging and require continual monitoring, maintenance and updating after 20 years, the structure itself is sound and should continue to serve the state and it's visitors for decades to come," Adams observed.

"This entire section of Interstate 49 has served the state well for the past 20 years. The tunnel is obviously an important and vital part of this corridor. Not only has it become a symbolic cornerstone of the route, it adds to the beauty and charm of the scenic drive between Interstate 40 and northwest Arkansas." ■



ARDOT Director Scott Bennett joins dignitaries to cut a ribbon in Harrison.

HARRISON

WELCOME CENTER

BY DAVID NILLES

A FEW LIGHT SPRINKLES COULD NOT DAMPEN THE EXCITEMENT AMONG THE CROWD GATHERED ON NOVEMBER 2 AT THE NEW ARKANSAS WELCOME CENTER AT HARRISON. GUESTS WERE THERE TO CUT A RIBBON ON THE NEW \$2.3 MILLION FACILITY CONSTRUCTED BY DAYCO CONSTRUCTION.

Among those present were Arkansas Highway Commissioners Dick Trammel and Philip Taldo, Harrison Mayor Dan Sherrell and legislators Ron McNair, Jack Fortner and Donald Ragland.

ARDOT Director Scott Bennett welcomed everyone to Arkansas' newest welcome center.

"The traffic count on U.S. Highway 65 in front of this building averages 20,000 vehicles per day," he noted. "Many of those will likely stop at this new facility to take a break from the road and to pick up useful traveler information. They are going to meet some of the friendliest, most helpful staff you'll find anywhere from the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism."

Inside the new building, visitors will also find a much larger center that features a coffee bar, a sitting area, a computer information desk and information on hundreds of places to travel in Arkansas.

"These welcome centers are the front porches for Arkansas as travelers come and go," Arkansas Parks and Tourism Director Kane Webb observed. "There isn't a week that goes by that I don't get a postcard, a note, an email or phone call from someone who has had a great experience at our welcome centers. I give a big hand to the staffs at all of our centers for what they do each day."

Highway Commission Chairman Dick Trammel shared the history of the Highway 65 site.

"In 1975, we bought five acres of land right here from Regina

McFarland. A welcome center followed in 1987. When they tore that old center down to make way for this beautiful facility, they placed a temporary mobile home and bathrooms in its place. That is how important ARDOT and the Arkansas Parks and Tourism Department feel it is to welcome motorists to our state and spread the good word about what we have to offer."

Commissioner Philip Taldo reminded the crowd that Arkansas Welcome Centers are strategically located across the State.

"First impressions are so important," Taldo stated. "When motorists cross into Arkansas and stop here, this center is going to set the tone for the rest of their visit to our great State. We have twelve more welcome centers in Arkansas that are making similar impressions. In fact, each year, close to one million visitors are helped in our centers."

Kaylene Griffith, Vice-chair of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, told the crowd that Arkansas has one of the best welcome center networks in the United States. She shared a quote from a visitor's comment card that summed up the centers well: "Southern charm and lots of smiles." ■



1 2 3 ONCE, TWICE, THREE TIMES A WINNER

BY BRITNI PADILLA-DUMAS



ARDOT Photographer Rusty Hubbard's photo of the Peel Ferry wins the People's Choice Award for the 2018 AASHTO "Sailing Away by Christopher Cross" category.

EACH YEAR, THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE HIGHWAY AND TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS (AASHTO) HOLDS THE "FACES OF TRANSPORTATION" PHOTO AND VIDEO CONTEST, AND EACH YEAR, FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS IN A ROW, ARDOT PHOTOGRAPHER RUSTY HUBBARD HAS WON.

"Transportation is about people," said Lloyd Brown, AASHTO Communications Director. "This competition's goal is to focus on the people who build, maintain and use the transportation system that serves as the backbone of our strong economy and high quality of life."

Song titles defined the theme for 2018's contest. Hubbard's award-winning photo of the Peel Ferry fell under the "Sailing Away by Christopher Cross" category, with ARDOT employees Rob Mersman and Randall Williams operating the ferry as it moved through the fog on Bull Shoals Lake.

"I try to find things that are interesting to photograph," Hubbard said. "Boring images don't tell a story."

Hubbard holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in studio art with an emphasis in photography from the University of Arkansas Little Rock.

"It is both challenging and rewarding to capture ARDOT's role through the lens of a camera," he noted.

In 2015, he photographed Natural Resource Specialist Kayti Ewing as she prepared to plant a flat of milkweed, an intended habitat for Monarch butterflies as they migrate through Arkansas. His photo was one of 103 submitted and won the People's Choice Award after more than 4,500 online votes.

The next competition was held in 2017, and Hubbard's photo of Chris Doggett and Kevin Milligan inspecting the Interstate 55 Bridge between Arkansas and Tennessee won the grand prize.

This year, after scoring the majority of more than 6,000 online votes, Hubbard placed for the third time in a row and brought home the People's Choice Award for his photo of the Peel Ferry. It is the last operational ferry in Arkansas and provides a connection to the north-central portion of the state to Missouri.

"We're very proud of Rusty and his talent of representing ARDOT so well," said ARDOT Director Scott Bennett. "He does a great job of telling our story. His photos give Arkansans the opportunity to see multiple aspects of ARDOT as each person in the Department plays a role in helping us fulfill our mission." ■

ARKANSAS' SCENIC BYWAYS:

Taking the Scenic Route

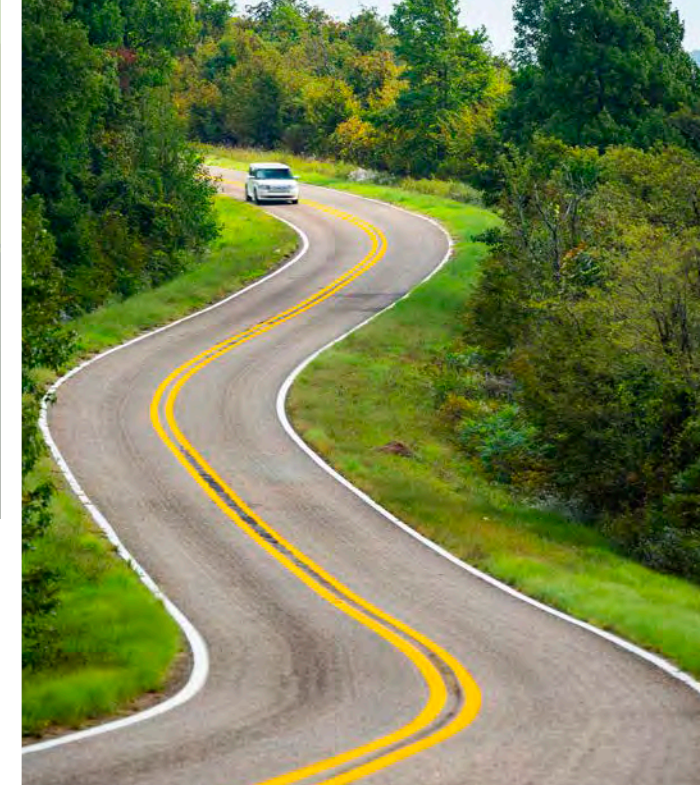
BY DAVID NILLES

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.

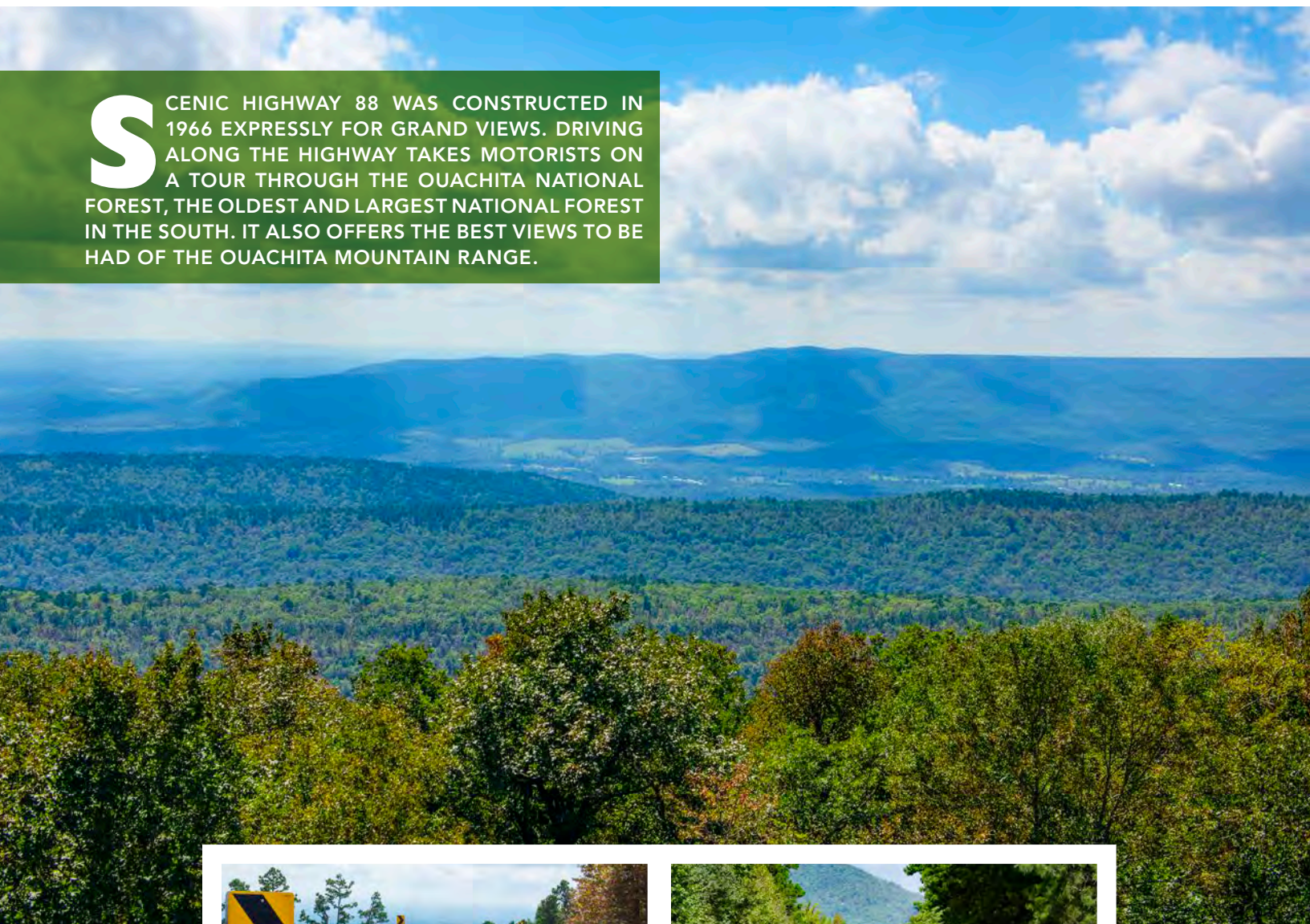
ROUTE: State Highway 88

POINTS: Mena to the Oklahoma State Line

LENGTH: 18 miles



Scenic Highway 88 was constructed in 1966 expressly for grand views. Driving along the highway takes motorists on a tour through the Ouachita National Forest, the oldest and largest national forest in the south. It also offers the best views to be had of the Ouachita Mountain Range.

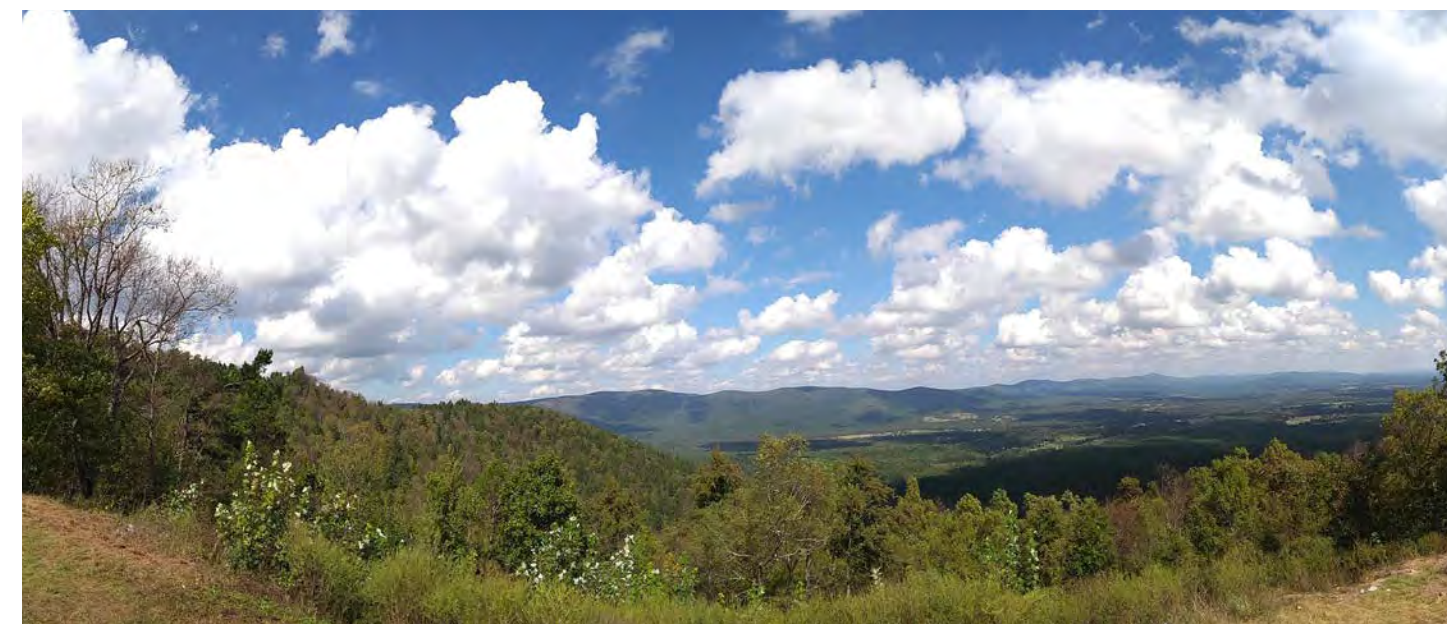
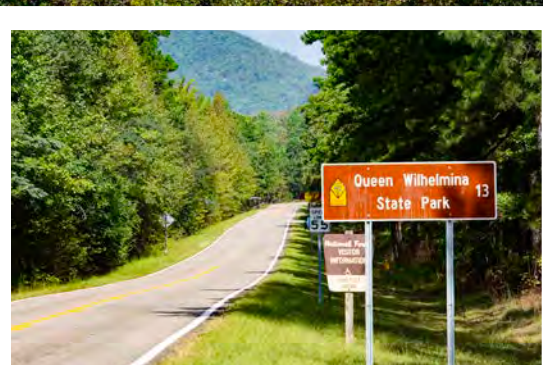


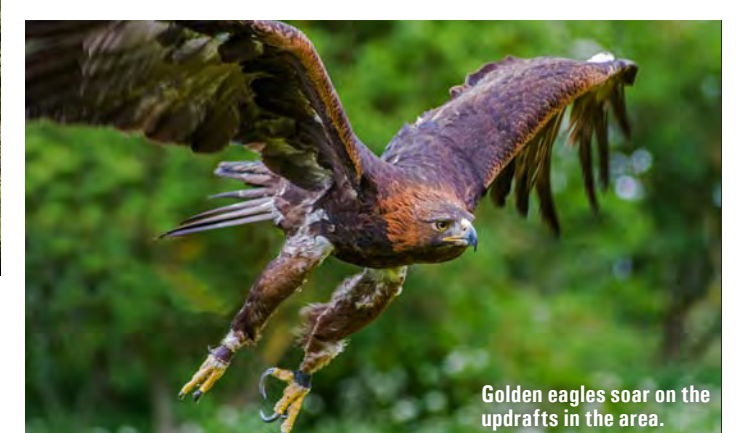
Though just 18 miles in length in Arkansas, the views continue westward into Oklahoma on Highway 1. Together, the highways form the 54-mile **TALIMENA NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY**. The byway can take anywhere from an hour to all day to drive, depending on how long you stop at each of the vistas. The route offers mountain vistas unsurpassed in mid-America of forested peaks and valleys, lakes and streams.

The two-lane byway follows one of the highest mountain ranges between the Appalachians and the Rockies, and the views are spectacular. Along the way, there is lodging, picnicking, camping and hiking trails.

The roadway is located along the crest of Rich Mountain and Winding Stair Mountain in Arkansas' Ouachita National Forest. There are 17 vistas strategically located among the shortleaf pines, scrub oaks and evergreens to provide travelers with a place to pull over and enjoy the many panoramic views of the Ouachitas. Keep your eyes open for the Grand View Vista, a favorite pullover for travelers. Be sure to watch the skies for golden eagles, vultures and hawks that soar on the updrafts in the area. The forest is also home to white-tailed deer, bobcats and foxes.

(continued on page 18)





Golden eagles soar on the updrafts in the area.



All aboard at Mountain Glory Station.

Sitting atop Rich Mountain, Arkansas' second highest peak at 2,681 feet, is Queen Wilhelmina State Park. The park is a great place to spend some time taking in the spectacular views. In the late 1800s, a resort hotel, named Queen Wilhelmina Inn in honor of the Queen of Holland, was built on Rich Mountain by the Kansas City, Pittsburg and Gulf Railroad. It has since been replaced by the must-see Queen Wilhelmina Lodge. This welcoming spot offers 40 guest rooms for travelers as well as meals in the Queen's Restaurant. The park offers picnic tables, hiking trails and overlooks, all just a short walk from the lodge. Next to the lodge is Mountain Glory Station. The kids will want to hop aboard the seasonal mini-train for a trip around the park and then play some mini-golf.

A few miles beyond the State Park, the Scenic Byway crosses into Oklahoma and continues as Highway 1. The Talimena National Scenic Byway comes to its western end at Talihina, just north of Talimena State Park.

For trivia buffs, the Talimena National Scenic Byway's name derives from a combination of the towns that form its end points—Talihina and Mena. ■



MONTICELLO BYPASS

BY BRITNI PADILLA-DUMAS

A crisp fall morning was the perfect setting to celebrate the opening of the Future Interstate 69 Monticello Bypass. Elected officials, citizens, chamber members and local officials gathered to ceremoniously open the new highway on October 11.

The U.S. Highway 278 Bypass will eventually be part of Interstate 69, one of six corridors selected by the United States Department of Transportation as a corridor of the future. Once completed, Interstate 69 will stretch more than 2,600 miles from Canada to Mexico.

"This is a great example of many different layers of government coming together, working cooperatively on something that will benefit us all," commented Lieutenant Governor Tim Griffin. "We will not be able to grow and have the prosperity we want for Arkansans unless our highways and infrastructure keep up with that."

Interstate 69 begins in Port Huron, Michigan, and will cut through eight states on its path to Mexico. Once completed, approximately 184 miles of corridor will be in Arkansas.

The Monticello Bypass was constructed in two phases. Phase one was awarded to Southern Industrial Contracts of Rayville, Louisiana, for \$13.1 million, and phase two was awarded to Pine Bluff Sand and Gravel for \$16.2 million. The project spans 8.6 miles and needed more than 100,000 tons of asphalt to complete.

Corridors like Interstate 69 are important because they bring freight and passenger movement to new parts of the country. One main concern for economic development is access to quality roads.

Arkansas Highway Commissioner Robert S. Moore, Jr. of Arkansas City brought the project into perspective:

"We're here celebrating the first lane miles of Interstate 69 in Arkansas. This is a footprint, but the reality is, if we don't find the impetus in Congress to fund big infrastructure projects like this, Interstate 69 will not happen. Elected officials respond to the voice of the people," Moore said. "If the voice is loud enough, they will listen. Let's keep our tax dollars here where it's benefiting our local families, economic growth, jobs and wages." ■





MEET ARDOT'S DIVE TEAM:

Tending Endangered Mussels Below the Surface

BY DAVID NILLES

JOSH SEAGRAVES, MICKEY MATTHEWS AND BEN THESING WORK IN THE NATURAL RESOURCES SECTION OF ARDOT'S ENVIRONMENTAL DIVISION. COMBINED, THEY HAVE OVER 40 YEARS OF DIVING EXPERIENCE. THOSE YEARS UNDER THE WATER'S SURFACE HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED WHILE FOCUSING ON MEETING ARDOT'S REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CLEAN WATER ACT AND THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT.

A HISTORY OF DIVING

ARDOT's dive team dates back to 1983. Dr. John Harris was the first diver on the staff. His initial project involved working with the Jackson, Mississippi, field office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to relocate mussels found in the Spring River near Ravenden. Seagraves joined the team just prior to Harris being promoted to Assistant Division Head. Thesing and

Matthews followed in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

Today, Section 404 of the Clean Water Act as well as the Endangered Species Act are the predominate focuses within ARDOT's Natural Resources Section.

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) establishes a program to regulate the discharge of dredged and fill material into waters of the United States including rivers, lakes, streams and most wetlands. Regulated activities include those dealing with infrastructure development such as highways. The Endangered Species Act calls for the conservation of threatened and endangered plants and animals and the habitats on which they depend.

THE NATURAL RESOURCES SECTION

"Diving is just one part of our responsibilities," Seagraves shared. "New bridge crossings and similar construction projects require permits through the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. They may also require permits through the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality for short-term

activity authorization or individual water quality certifications. There are also National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits to consider for general construction and storm water management. These are all done through our Natural Resources Section.

"Then we also have to consider the endangered species components. We do quite a few terrestrial and aquatic surveys for impacts of highway projects on wildlife or fisheries, in particular, threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. That particular component is what triggers the need for diving surveys."

WORKING WITH ENDANGERED MUSSEL SPECIES

The majority of the ARDOT team's dive work focuses on freshwater mussels. They are one of the most endangered groups of organisms. Most of Arkansas' watersheds contain at least one species of threatened or endangered freshwater mussel.

"Arkansas has 13 threatened or endangered mussels including one that may possibly be extinct," Thesing shared.

GOING UNDER

When an upcoming highway construction project has the potential to affect a body of water associated with that job, the dive crew springs into action. Endangered mussels living in those waters must be relocated to a safer area. That is where the dive crew fits in. Their job is to relocate the mussels to a new location.

"When we dive, we are swimming around on the river bottom," Thesing explained. "Usually the water is dark and so you have to feel for the mussels. We carry bags we put them in. Then they are pulled up near the surface for identification. Next we move them to their new location and place them back in the proper orientation."

Determining a new location for the mussels is done in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They keep a database of known mussel beds in the State.

"They may ask us to relocate them to a known mussel bed," Seagraves explained. "If it is in an area where little survey work has been done, it may take some leg work on our part to find another bed."

A bed is defined as an ideal habitat where there is a congregation of mussels.

"You'll find lots of them in that area," Thesing added.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is the point of contact for consultation for endangered species. In fact, ARDOT funds a position at the agency to provide expedited project reviews.



Josh Seagraves, Natural Resources Section Head

Lindsey Lewis at the Service works specifically on ARDOT construction projects.

"There is rarely a day goes by that we don't coordinate with him on at least one project," Seagraves stated. "It's been a good working relationship."

The number of dives the team makes varies from year to year but falls between 10 and 20.

"It varies based on the jobs that are active at the time," Seagraves stated. "It can be year round."

The team tries to time it so they have good weather and water conditions. Ideally, the team tries to find those low water times of the year.

"On our major rivers where most of our endangered mussels are, that's usually around the fall," Matthews explained. "The summer would be ideal for your smaller streams."

It also has something to do with the amount of rainfall in an area.

"If you have too much rain, the rivers are too high for us to get in," Seagraves added.

(continued on page 22)



Ben Thesing, Mickey Matthews and Josh Seagraves comprise the ARDOT Dive Team.



Relocating endangered freshwater mussels.

"TRADITIONALLY, THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE WOULD REQUIRE US TO SURVEY 100 FEET UPSTREAM AND 300 FEET DOWNSTREAM, IF WE FOUND MUSSELS IN THAT AREA, WE WOULD HAVE TO RELOCATE THAT ENTIRE LENGTH. THAT CAN BE HUNDREDS OR THOUSANDS OF MUSSELS IN A 400-FOOT LENGTH OF RIVER."



Josh Seagraves, Natural Resources Section Head

There are times the dive team is required to work with groups that do propagation efforts for the freshwater mussels. For some species, the team can only collect the females for use in propagation in the winter months.

"We are outfitted and have the equipment to do surveys year round," Thesing added. "Our dry suits enable us to do winter sampling if necessary."

MAKING THEIR WAY THROUGH MURKY WATERS

Ideally, ARDOT's dive crew would be jumping into crystal clear water as they tend to Arkansas' endangered mussels. However, such is usually not the case according to Matthews.

"There is rarely clear water. You never know what you are getting into. People like to throw trash off bridges. You have to get down there and slowly find your way around. You may stumble across an old car body or something. We found an old die cast metal cap gun once. When we first found it, we thought it was a murder weapon that had been thrown off the bridge."

"I found a real gun in the Ouachita River," Seagraves recalled. "It's the only one I've ever found, a 38 Special. We called the local law enforcement agency to come out. You find all kinds of things."

"We have found some interesting things," Thesing agreed. "I found an outboard motor at the bottom of the Little River. I imagine

someone tried to start their boat and probably got very upset when the motor fell into the water."

The list of items found while diving goes on and includes toys, old appliances, downed trees, animal carcasses, general trash and broken glass.

Thesing also recalled close-ups with some fish in the area.

"Sometimes large fish will come into your field of view quickly because you are stirring things up and they are eating that. When a large catfish or something like that is right in your face, it can startle you."

Despite the obstacles, the team's focus is on the mussels.

"We don't particularly do dives for other reasons," Seagraves commented. "Ben has done some snorkel samples for endangered species of fish like the leopard darter. The Materials Division asked me to dive once when they dropped a piece of boring equipment to the bottom. Fortunately, I was able to find it and bring it up. ARDOT usually contracts out the diving work for other purposes such as bridge inspections."

Once a dive is completed, the team goes to work completing the required paper work that goes with the dive.

"If we find something of interest we will initiate consultations with the Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure we get everything in compliance with the Endangered Species Act," Seagraves added.

RECALLING SOME MEMORABLE DIVES

Having done so many dives, there are going to be some that stand out for one reason or another. For Thesing, one of the more memorable dives contained a fear factor.

"I was in one of those St. Francis systems in murky water so I couldn't see. I came across a boot, I grabbed it, and it was attached to something... So, I sat there a good minute with this boot in my hand knowing I had to reach down and see what was attached. Fortunately, it was just a pair of waders. No Leg! But that was quite interesting."

Matthews recalls working in some of the ditches on State Highway 18 in northeast Arkansas.

"Flying carp have been introduced in some of those ditches in that area. It has been interesting in terms of dealing with that species and seeing the changes that have resulted in the system."

Matthews also recalled a Saline River project on U.S. Highway 167 near Sheridan. "There was a research component in addition to a construction component so those were interesting days."

"Traditionally, the Fish and Wildlife Service would require us to survey 100 feet upstream and 300 feet downstream," Seagraves recalled. "If we found mussels in that area, we would have to relocate that entire length. That can be hundreds or thousands of mussels in a 400-foot length of river."

"We received a commitment from the Fish and Wildlife Service to attempt to only relocate mussels in the direct footprint of a project area and combine that with long-term monitoring during the project to see what the construction effects were on the mussels. We did some chemical evaluations focusing on the general health of the mussels and did sediment measures as well during the construction period.

"As a result of that project, we have been able to significantly reduce the area that we have to relocate. The research showed that the mussels were not being significantly affected outside of that construction area. So today, we just relocate in the direct footprint plus a small buffer depending on the project. So that was a revealing project."

DIVING FOR THE FUN OF IT

You may wonder how much diving the crew does when the weekend rolls around or during free time in the warm summer months. The answer may surprise you. For Thesing, it has only been one dive.

"I tried some spear fishing on Lake Ouachita."

Seagraves has only been once or twice as well. For Thesing, it will be more than that soon.

"I will be going to Costa Rica in a couple of weeks, and that will be my first dive in the ocean. Some clear water ocean diving will be nice for a change!" ■



ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

PAYING IT FORWARD WITH

RONNIE STOUT

BY BRITNI PADILLA-DUMAS

IT'S EARLY. THE SKY STILL LOOKS BLUEISH GRAY AS IT PEEKS THROUGH THE WINDOW. THE BIRDS HAVEN'T EVEN BEGUN THEIR MORNING SERENADE. SWIRLS OF STEAM SLOWLY RISE FROM THE COFFEE CUP CLUTCHED IN HIS CALLOUSED HANDS, SLIPPING INTO THE ROOM AS SUBTLETY AS THE SUNLIGHT. THESE STILL, QUIET MOMENTS ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN FOR HIM, BUT HE WOULDN'T PREFER IT ANY OTHER WAY.

Thirty-two year ARDOT employee Ronnie Stout enjoys having a busy, full schedule. His day begins at the Alma Headquarters in Crawford County where he's been a Maintenance Specialist for more than 30 years, and they often end late after an evening full of meetings or training.

Apart from his day job, Ronnie has dedicated his life to public service. He retired from the District Three Volunteer Fire Department with 30 years of service, is a current member and past president of the Crawford County Search and Rescue Team, is currently the Assistant Deputy Director for the Crawford County Department of Emergency Management, and participates in both the Highway 71 Water Association and the River Valley Water Association. The amount of volunteer activities he juggles, along with work, begs the question: how does he manage to find time for everything?

"Helping people motivates me to be so involved in the community," Ronnie said. "Volunteering means a lot to me, and I'm very passionate about it."

Ronnie is very humble when reflecting on his acts of service. He filled the old dusty shop with warmth and radiated kindness as he spoke with tender tenacity.

"What I've done is no big deal. People should just help people...do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Pay it forward."

He began his journey of volunteer service more than 35 years ago when he'd arrived on the scene of an accident and didn't have the training to help those involved. He decided to become a volunteer fireman, who are often first responders. As his experience progressed, he was able to pass his knowledge to others as an instructor at the fire academy.

"I've had the privilege of teaching for the fire department," Ronnie beamed. "When I see my students understand something, their eyes light up. I love that."

His ability to see the good in people appears effortless. A bashful grin flashes across his face as my wonder-filled questions try to capture his selflessness.

"Most of my days used to consist of work, followed by meetings. I'd get home around 9:30 every night, and it was seven days a week. To me, it's natural; I'd feel lost if I wasn't doing something."

Ronnie's work with the Crawford County Search and Rescue were probably the most fascinating to me. Countless hours of training are needed to develop sharp skills used to save people. Classes in weather, tracking and clue-finding are a few he listed.

"When you go on a search, you don't look for the person, you look for clues. Off-hand, I can remember at least a few hundred rescues we've done. We've found the missing person all but one time."

Ronnie said the most rewarding part of that job is the look on the family's face when they're reunited with their loved one.

"They come up and thank you, but it's just part of what we do." Humility shields the magnitude of his selflessness from him, but I'm spellbound.

His concern for his community continues with his involvement on two boards that are working to bring water to residents. The River Valley Water Association is trying to build Crawford County its own water supply, while the Highway 71 Association is working to ensure that everyone in rural communities has access to public water utilities.

Given all his endeavors, Ronnie has one accomplishment of which he is the most proud.

"I have a daughter. I've raised her by myself since she was five years old. She just graduated college—she's a nurse. She wants to continue with school, and I'll do everything I can to support her."

I sat across a table from the proudest father on the planet. His face filled with joy as he bragged about her success. Like her father, she's chosen a field that is dedicated to helping others. Lucky for us, that apple hasn't fallen far from the tree. ■

Helping people motivates me to be so involved in the community; volunteering means a lot to me, and I'm very passionate about it.



COOKIN' THE 'QUE WITH THE AAPA

BY DAVID NILLES

OCTOBER 12 FINALLY BROUGHT A HINT OF FALL AND COOL WEATHER TO THE AIR. ALSO IN THE AIR THAT DAY? THE SMELL OF BARBEQUE AS THE ARKANSAS ASPHALT PAVEMENT ASSOCIATION (AAPA) YOUNG LEADERS PRESENTED THEIR ANNUAL FALL COOK-OFF IN LITTLE ROCK.

The third year for the cook-off included 19 teams, all arriving well before sunrise to fire up elaborate smokers and grills. Their hard work over the coals resulted in quite a feast by lunchtime. Guests at the cook-off were treated to barbecue ribs, chicken, pork, sausage, grilled bacon

and smoked jalapenos. Broccoli salad, potato salad, beans and peach cobbler rounded out a great meal.

"The event was a great success and the cook-off scores were very close with one tie that was settled in a run-off," stated Park Estes, Executive Director

of the AAPA. "All first place teams were first time winners at the cook-off. They knocked off some heavy favorites!"

Trophies for first, second and third place were awarded in several categories though everything cooked up was a winner. First Place for "Ribs" went to Larco Trucking. Winner in the "Pork" category was Time Striping. Taking first place in "Chicken" was Crow Paving. The overall winner of this year's cook-off was Crow Paving.

"What makes the event special and fun is the opportunity to bring industry together in an informal setting for fellowship," Estes added.

"It is really gratifying to look out and see all the different folks from ARDOT, our legislators, contractors, suppliers and family enjoying the event and eating as good of barbeque you will find anywhere!"

AAPA was able to raise \$1,000 that was donated to the Arkansas Ovarian Cancer Coalition. The donation was made in honor of Taryn Classen who passed away from ovarian cancer at age 24 in the fall of 2017. She is the daughter of AAPA members Brad and Sherri Fryar of Contractors Specialty Service Company.

The 2018 cook-off was sponsored by Contractor's Specialty Service Company, Lion Oil, Kiewit, J & L Asphalt Paving, Red Stone Construction Group, Forsgren, Inc., APAC Central, Delta Companies, Inc., Rogers Group Inc., Crow Construction, Time Striping, Inc., Ingevity, Crane Automotive Team of Conway, Heartland Asphalt Materials, Cranford Construction, Largo, Inc., Arkansas Aggregates, The Cashion Company, DKL Transportation, LLC. and Riggs CAT. The reception sponsor was Hugg & Hall Equipment Company.

The Arkansas Asphalt Pavement Association was founded in 2000 so that Arkansas contractors could have a collaborative voice to promote quality asphalt in Arkansas. The Association represents over 50 asphalt plants and over 97 percent of the hot mix suppliers and laydown contractors in Arkansas.

The AAPA created the Young Leaders Committee in an effort to strengthen the industry, its member organizations and their association by developing an organized path consisting of identifying, educating, developing and providing individuals opportunities to prepare themselves for future leadership within their careers. ■





Corporal Robert Sellers, Arkansas Highway Police

Above & Beyond

BY BRITNI PADILLA-DUMAS

ARKANSAS ATTORNEY GENERAL LESLIE RUTLEDGE RECOGNIZED LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS FROM ALL 75 COUNTIES DURING THE RECENT 2018 LAW ENFORCEMENT SUMMIT. BRADLEY COUNTY'S OFFICER OF THE YEAR IS NONE OTHER THAN ARKANSAS HIGHWAY POLICE OFFICER ROBERT SELLERS.

The annual Law Enforcement Summit is a free training and educational opportunity for the law enforcement community. Each year, the Attorney General selects an outstanding law enforcement official from each county that has performed admirably within the last year.

"Our men and women in blue risk their lives on a daily basis to protect and serve our communities," Attorney General Rutledge said. "It is my duty as the State's chief law enforcement officer to not only provide leadership, but to honor and acknowledge those in the line of duty for their education and service."

Corporal Robert Sellers began his law

enforcement career in Bradley County in 1988 with the sheriff's office.

"I'd always wanted to go to work for the Highway Police when I was a youngster," Sellers reflected. "I was working construction, and I always looked up to my dad's friend who worked for the Highway Police."

Sellers fulfilled that dream in August of 1999.

"I get up every morning and look forward to going to work—I can't wait to get there," he said.

Bradley County Sheriff Herschel Tillman recommended Sellers for the Outstanding Law Enforcement

award. He has a reputation for helping other agencies in need, no matter the situation. An average day for Sellers involves weighing trucks and getting unsafe vehicles off of the roads. One routine stop turned into a more serious situation:

"I stopped a truck for speeding and we talked for a few minutes. He said he wasn't feeling well, and he sat in the front seat of my patrol car. He had a heart attack. I called an ambulance, performed CPR, and he made it. I still have contact with his family today."

Sellers works closely with the sheriff's office on crashes and assists on county roads if there's a truck displaying dangerous driving.

"If they need me for something or if one of the deputies needs backup, I go help them in any way that I can." ▣

Dear ARDOT

I saw on your main site a link to your Citizens Opinion Survey that asked pertinent questions about road conditions and funding mechanisms, and really wanted to answer the first question "Are you satisfied with the condition of the existing state highway system?" but, since I'm not an Arkansas resident, the survey obviously isn't for out-of-state folks. However, my reason for reaching out to you is to compliment your highway system. My daughter, grandson, and I spent a week in Northeast Arkansas and we drove from Paragould and Mammoth Spring to west of Conway (Petit Jean State Park) and all points in between, and I don't remember ever driving roads that were as well maintained and marked as yours. That would include Montana and West Virginia.

We've vacationed in Arkansas for the last 3 years, enjoy coming back each time, and look forward to visiting again.

Sincerely,
Randy Young
Battle Ground, IN

NICE, CLEAN FACILITIES

Stopped in to your rest area across from Dujacks Liquor this morning. I have to give a shout out to you and the crew that works here as it is one of the nicest, cleanest facilities I have been to in a long time. The area is always clean and tidy and the bathrooms are virtually spotless. The landscaping is beautiful. Just wanted to give a thumbs up and say keep up the great professional work. My wife and I always stop here. Thanks for keeping it nice.

Kent Gentry

DETERIORATING CULVERT

I wanted to write you a letter to express my appreciation to your department for their attention and professionalism during the project at [my home] in Russellville.

I purchased my house almost a year ago and did not notice the deteriorating culvert under the driveway. The tile was completely deteriorated and the driveway was falling in and was unsafe. After contacting Scott Mullis, he immediately got in contact with Thale Keisling, who put the crew together to replace and rework my driveway. I am very impressed at their response time!

Andy Edwards brought a crew to my house in a timely manner. They repaired the driveway after multiple trips to my residence. Andy and his crew were very professional and informative during the entire process. Andy's crew even cleaned out the ditch line for better drainage.

This letter is just a "thank you" to these men who complete a thankless job on a day to day basis. I emailed Mr. Mullis and he said that a thank you was not necessary because "that was his job." Part of the job is completing the task at hand, but doing it in a timely, courteous and professional manner speaks volumes to the mission and vision of the Arkansas Department of Transportation, as well as your leadership.

Danny Ketcherside, Ed. S
Russellville, AR

SAFE & BEAUTIFUL REST AREAS

I would like to take the time to commend Arkansas on its safe and beautiful rest areas. After traveling to and from Texas, I needed a place for my girls and me to rest from travel. Of all the rest areas, Arkansas provided cleanliness, security, and just enough lighting for a nap. Thank you for a job well done Arkansas!

Kim Williams

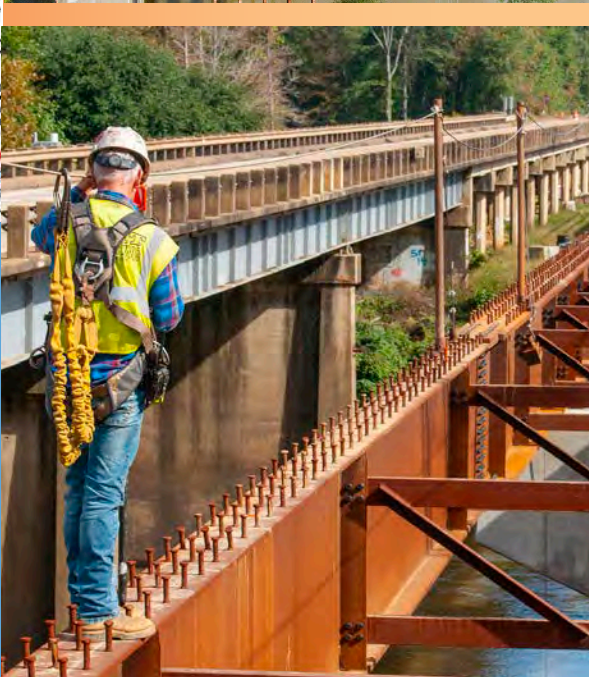
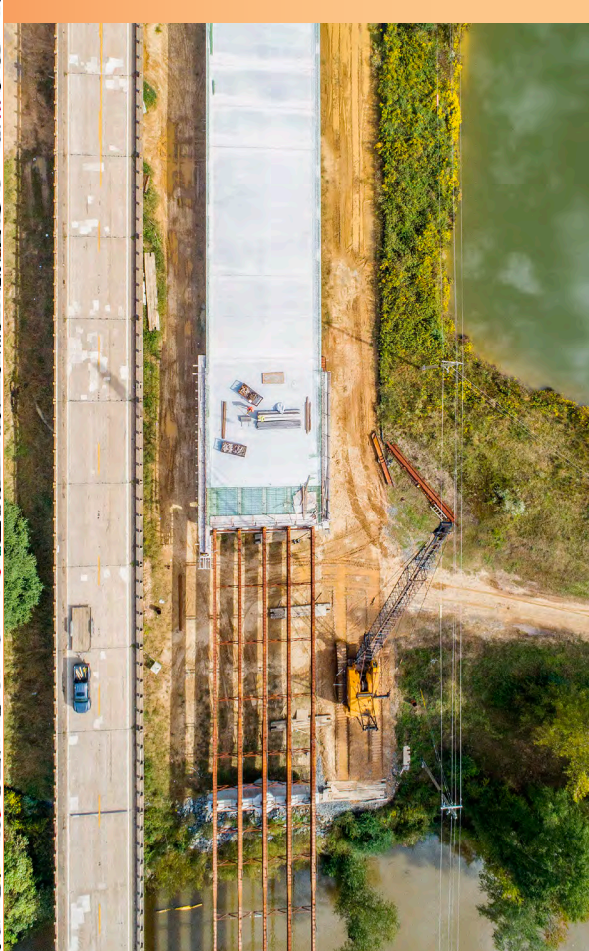
ON THE MAP

SPENDING TIME WITH AN ARKANSAS HIGHWAY MAP CAN BE INTERESTING. HAVE YOU EVER VISITED HERE?

DISTRICT 3

CONSTRUCTION

CORNER



TOAD SUCK IS AN UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITY NEAR CONWAY, ARKANSAS. The Arkansas River Trail, also known as State Highway 60, leads to Toad Suck Park. The origin of its interesting name is undetermined. Soon after the Louisiana Purchase, a ferry was established at this location to cross the Arkansas River. One common story is that the ferry was named for tavern patrons who “sucked on a bottle until they swelled like a toad,” but other researchers note that a “suck” is a river whirlpool that needs to be marked and avoided by travelers.

The Toad Suck Ferry operated from the early 1820s until 1970. The Toad Suck Lock and Dam were completed in 1969, and a bridge was built on Highway 60, connecting Perry and Faulkner counties and eliminating the need for the ferry. Days before the ferry was decommissioned, scenes for the 1971 film *Two Lane Blacktop* were filmed on the Toad Suck Ferry. Singer James Taylor and Beach Boys drummer Dennis Wilson race a 1955 Chevy across the United States in the film, and several Arkansas highways were featured.

Since the early 1990s, the City of Conway has hosted the Toad Suck Daze festival. Each year, families attend the free event for entertainment, food, music and the tradition of the Toad Races. Proceeds from the festival support education incentives and scholarships. ■

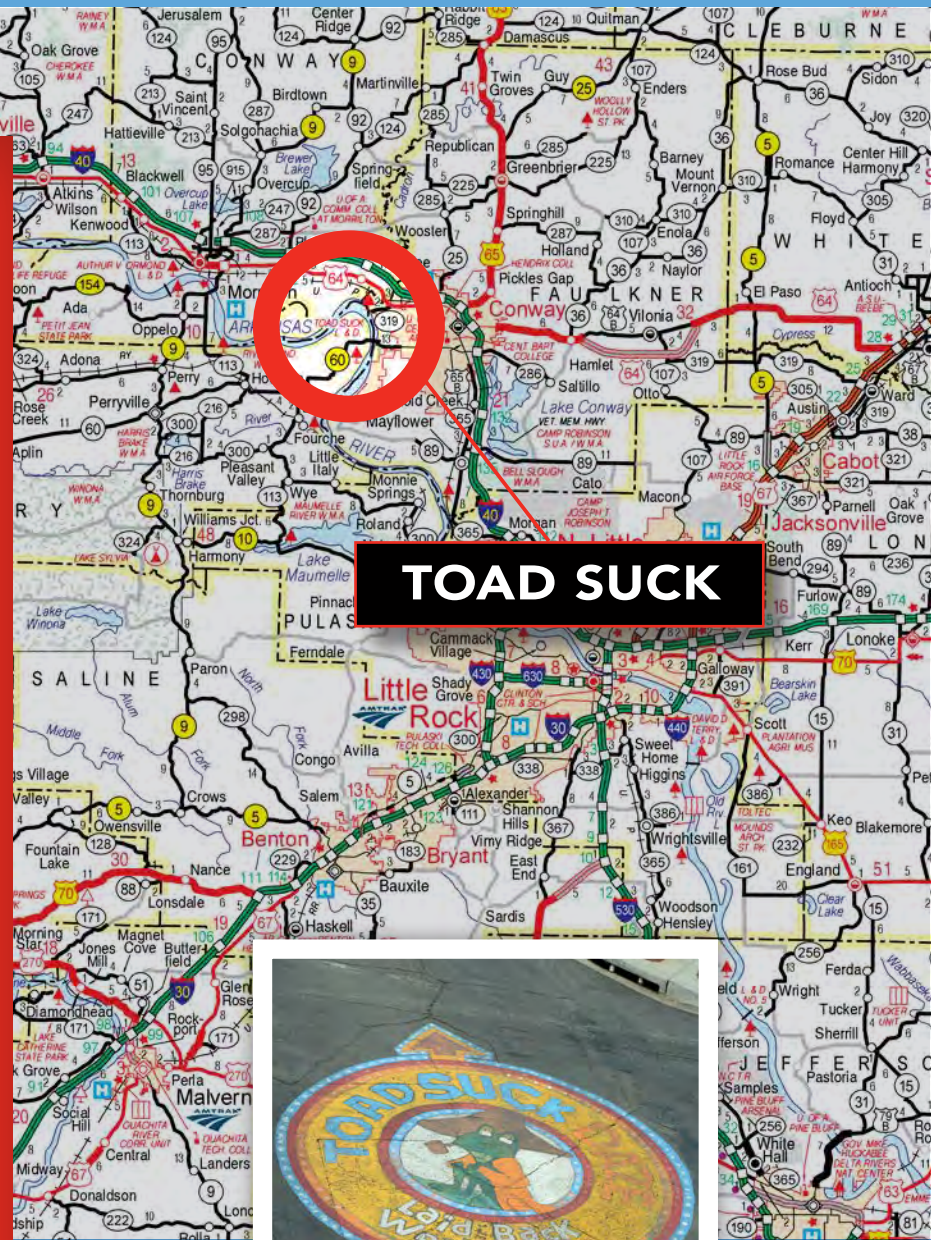


Photo courtesy of Arkansas Parks & Tourism

Information for this story was found at www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net

A project is well underway in southwest Arkansas that is replacing a bridge on State Highway 41 over the Little River. The job is located southwest of Horatio at the Little River-Sevier county line.

The project to construct a 1,993-foot bridge and approximately one-half mile of approaching roadways was awarded in March of 2016 to the Jensen Construction Company of Des Moines, Iowa, for \$13.9 million.

The new bridge features many different elements including both steel piling and concrete piling. There are three 10-foot diameter drilled shafts approximately 100-feet deep at the river channel. Each contains about 329 cubic yards of concrete. The bridge has conventional pier caps and large hammerhead pier caps, and both concrete and steel girders.

This bridge project is located over an ecologically sensitive waterbody and is surrounded by ponds and sloughs, so environmental protection has been both a goal and a challenge. The Resident Engineer’s office for the project received an email from the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) Water Division manager commending all involved for their good work in achieving the desired goal.

The project also has had some interesting wildlife challenges. There were over a thousand Ouachita Rock Pocketbook Mussels and Rabbits Foot Mussels bedded near one of the river piers. The mussels had to be relocated to a safe location upstream. It took ARDOT divers from the Environmental Division numerous hours to collect and relocate the mussels. Divers had to work in murky water to collect the mussels, which brings up the next interesting challenge. The construction area features a good population of American Alligator in the Little River. Though the divers never encountered an alligator, a few large fish surprised them. There were, however, many alligator encounters from the ponds and sloughs that surround the project. Workers have had to watch their step in the tall grass!

The bridge project was delayed a couple of months due to flooding this past spring as the river rose out of its banks. The Contractor was able to secure his barges and equipment in the river, but the column reinforcing steel on the center pier was damaged by the high water.

Currently, 19 of the 23 spans have been constructed and the substructure on the remaining spans is complete.

Crews expect to have traffic on the new bridge soon, with an estimated completion date for the entire project of May 2019. ■



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