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TO DATE WITH ALL  
OF PENNDOT'S  
PROJECTS AND  
INNOVATIONS  
THROUGHOUT  
THE YEAR.



SUMMER 2019 EDITION



# PENNDOT HONORS ITS 2019 STARS OF EXCELLENCE



 **pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



# PENNDOT HONORS ITS 2019 STARS OF EXCELLENCE

Every year, PennDOT recognizes some of its most innovative employees who exemplify our mission to provide the very best transportation services to Pennsylvanians every day. Recently, 30 employees from around the state were given a Star of Excellence Award, the agency's highest recognition.

"Every day, I am reminded of our employees' dedication, their excellent customer service, and in many cases, their sacrifices," said PennDOT Secretary Leslie S. Richards. "The accomplishments of our Stars of Excellence exemplify PennDOT's mission to provide the very best transportation services to Pennsylvanians every day."

From the descriptions of our Stars' achievements, you will see how the day-to-day work of exceptional individuals spells great success for PennDOT: significant savings for taxpayers, improved service delivery, and advancements in safety and productivity.

Winners of the 2019 Star of Excellence Awards are listed below. For more information on why each winner was selected, View the June 11 blog post or view the program at [www.penndot.gov/PennDOTWay/Documents/STAR\\_Booklet\\_2019.pdf](http://www.penndot.gov/PennDOTWay/Documents/STAR_Booklet_2019.pdf)



## Central Office

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Jessica L. Clark, Transportation Planning Manager, Center for Program Development & Management, Planning

Keith Doersom, Chief Pilot, Bureau of Aviation, Multimodal Transportation

Erica B. Dutton, Administrative Officer, Office of Deputy Secretary for Administration

Jillian L. Harry, District Press Officer, District 1, Press Office

Richard E. Heineman, Roadway Program Manager, Bureau of Maintenance and Operations, Highway Administration

Rayna Lemelle, Administrative Officer, Bureau of Support Services, Driver & Vehicle Services

Stephanie J. Shoemaker, Accountant, Bureau of Fiscal Management, Administration

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David M. Demyanovich, Transportation Equipment Operator Supervisor

Jennifer L. Nulph, Construction Finals Unit Supervisor

## District 2 — Clearfield

David R. Karp, Transportation Construction Manager

Victoria E. Rusnak, E.I.T., Transportation Planning Manager

## District 3 — Montoursville/Williamsport

Crista L. Dailey, Human Resources Officer

Jennifer A. Reed, Roadway Programs Coordinator

## District 4 — Dunmore/Scranton/Wilkes-Barre

Charles J. DeFebo, Assistant Highway Maintenance Manager

Michael J. Nescoda Jr., Building Services Supervisor

## District 5 — Allentown/Lehigh Valley

Todd F. Stehle, Highway Foreman

David G. Viola Jr., Senior Civil Engineer Supervisor

## District 6 — King of Prussia/Philadelphia

Vincent J. Cerbone, Traffic Control Specialist Manager

Marilyn R. Musiowski, Clerk Typist

## District 8 — Harrisburg

Douglas E. Knoll, P.E., District Bridge Engineer

Mazhar A. Malik, District Permit Manager

## District 9 — Hollidaysburg/Altoona

Zachary R. Ickes, Highway Foreman

Kelli H. Scalia, Roadway Programs Coordinator

## District 10 — Indiana

Kevin D. Pollino, Right-of-way Administrator

Layne K. Norris, Stock Clerk

## District 11 — Bridgeville/Pittsburgh

Joseph W. Kurnot, P.E., Senior Civil Engineer Supervisor

John B. Myler, Transportation Construction Manager

## District 12 — Uniontown

Gary V. Ferrari, Senior Civil Engineer Supervisor

John "Jay" M. Ofsanik, Safety Press Officer

## WELCOME TO THE DOTcom!

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This quarterly newsletter highlights our latest efforts to improve mobility and quality of life in Pennsylvania.

This issue features PennDOT's 2019 Star Of Excellence awards, PennDOT (STEP) program, PennDOT interns honored as Workplace Heroes, PennDOT awards, project updates and more!

As always, feel free to send story ideas or requests for information you want to see. If you're involved in an interesting or innovative project or initiative, have ever wondered about other parts of PennDOT's operations or have other suggestions, email the Press Office at [ra-penndotpress@pa.gov](mailto:ra-penndotpress@pa.gov).

**We hope you enjoy this latest issue!**



## FROM THE secretary

Dear Colleagues,

In many board rooms and organizations across the professional spectrum, people are discussing their workforce. Who is on the team, how do they impact our organization, and how do we prepare for the future? In any such discussions – to be truly successful – there needs to be honest assessment of how much needs to change and how an organization can bring about that change.

Transportation and other traditionally STEM-related fields can have some of the biggest impacts on our way of life and therefore benefit from diverse, new perspectives. In other words, they are just like any other professional tracks – but they also have the challenge of lower representation among women and minorities. As the first female Secretary of Transportation in Pennsylvania, I have seen and worked hard to expand who is gathered under our internal and business-relationship tent.

In this issue of the DOTcom, I'm so happy to highlight the great work of our employees. Our Stars of Excellence exemplify PennDOT's mission to provide the very best transportation services to Pennsylvanians every day. Our School to Employment at PennDOT (STEP) program offers high school students valuable job shadowing experience and the opportunity to "step" from the classroom to the workforce.

At PennDOT, we are proud to offer a wide range of employment opportunities, and we celebrate the diversity of our workforce.

Sincerely,

Secretary of Transportation

For more information please visit our website: [www.PennDOT.gov](http://www.PennDOT.gov)

Or find us on social media at:



[www.facebook.com/PennsylvaniaDepartmentofTransportation](http://www.facebook.com/PennsylvaniaDepartmentofTransportation)



[www.twitter.com/PennDOTnews](http://www.twitter.com/PennDOTnews)



[www.instagram.com/pennsylvaniadot](http://www.instagram.com/pennsylvaniadot)

# PROGRAM OFFERS WIN-WIN OPPORTUNITY FOR COUNTY MAINTENANCE AND VOCATIONAL STUDENTS

By: Joshua Kaufer, Safety Press Officer, District 1

PennDOT's Crawford County office's participation in a statewide program gives students a chance to dip their toes into a career before stepping fully into the workforce.

The county is one of two in District 1 that participates in the School To Employment at PennDOT (STEP) program — joining Venango County. In Crawford County's maintenance office, four students from Crawford County Career and Technical Center are finishing their senior year working alongside state employees in a cooperative educational experience.

Three of the students assist with work in the garage and in the field. They are Nate Sorger, a welding student of Maplewood High School; Garrett Boylan, a diesel student of Cambridge Springs High School; and Chad Jones, a carpentry student of Conneaut Area High School. Grace Csiky of Conneaut Area High School works as an administrative assistant in the county office.



According to Bonnie Stein, cooperative education coordinator for Crawford County Career and Technical Center, the STEP Program provides five key advantages for the teens:

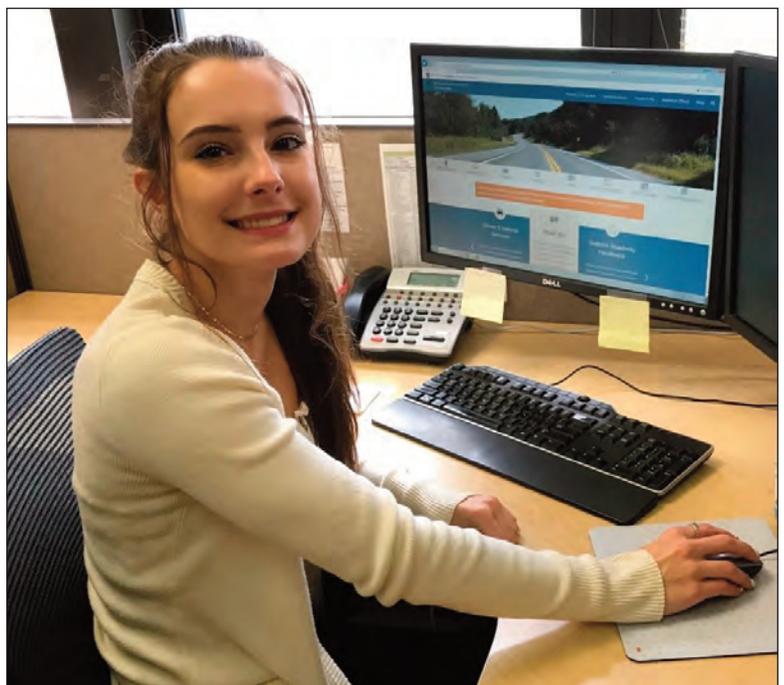
Earn while they learn; receive school credits for working; develop good work habits; learn life skills, and obtain employment in the local community.

The yearlong program lasts from July 1, 2019, until June 30, 2020, with students working part-time hours. The students still attend classes while working and are expected to maintain a high-grade point average while finishing their final year of high school. The classroom work is designed to reinforce the skills learned on the job, giving the students an all-around learning experience.

"I have really enjoyed my work experience here," Csiky said. "The ladies in the office with me have supported me and helped prepare me for my future career."

Aaron Fox, Crawford County maintenance manager, sees the benefits of the STEP program for both the students and the department. He says the garage and office staff really value the assistance the students give.

"This program is a perfect 'step' from the classroom to the workforce," he said. In the past five years, the Crawford County Maintenance Office has hired three STEP graduates into full-time positions.



# THIS IS PENNDOT: A VIDEO TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO 'THINK PENNDOT' FOR THEIR CAREER

By: Jan Huzvar, Deputy Communications Director, Central Office

Employees who are in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields are in high demand. The situation is no different here at PennDOT.

While some PennDOT careers are obvious — highway pavers, bridge inspectors, driver's license examiners, and snow plow drivers — many careers vital to the smooth operation of Pennsylvania's transportation system are not. Those careers include app developers, internet technology managers, photogrammetry technicians, civil engineers and more.

In addition to STEM careers, the department needs those interested in in skilled trades, professional, technical, business, and administrative and clerical work.

PennDOT's School to Employment at PennDOT (STEP) program introduces eligible high school students who have completed their junior year to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's operations and provides them with meaningful work assignments with the hope that they will consider PennDOT as their career employer after their education. The students are hired to support a variety of PennDOT functions, including skilled trades, professional/technical/business, and administrative/clerical work.

PennDOT worked with Commonwealth Media Services (CMS), a full-service multimedia and marketing provider for commonwealth agencies, and produced a video highlighting STEP participants and PennDOT employees in STEM-related positions. The goal of the video is to encourage students and those with an interest in these fields to consider PennDOT for their careers.

The video was debuted to high school students who entered and were chosen as finalists in PennDOT's Innovations Challenge — a competition to encourage innovative solutions to real-world transportation challenges.



## To gauge the effectiveness of the video, we prepared a two-question survey to give to the students after they viewed the video:

Before watching the "This is PennDOT" video, did you consider a career at PennDOT? Yes/No

After watching the video, will you consider a career at PennDOT? Yes/No

### The results:

Before watching the video, of the 29 students who watched the video and took the survey:

**19** did **NOT** consider a career with PennDOT prior to watching the video

**10** **DID** consider a career with PennDOT prior to watching the video

After watching the video, of the 29 students who watched the video and took the survey:

**28** **WILL** consider a career after watching the video

**1** will **NOT** consider a career with PennDOT after watching the video

It appears that the video met our goal of getting high school students to "**Think PennDOT**" for their career!

PennDOT is a great place to work, and we have a great story to tell.

The creation of "This is PennDOT" gave us just one more opportunity to do so.



District 1 Executive Jim Foringer, far left, presented Workplace Hero certificates to interns Jacob Southwick, second from left, and Nick Swatzler, second from right, for their role in helping James Garfield, center, when he was stuck under his tractor by the side of the road. Also pictured is Transportation Construction Manager 2, Chad Tarr, who supervises the interns.

## PENNDOT INTERNS HONORED AS WORKPLACE HEROES

By: Jill Harry, Community Relations Coordinator, District 1

Two PennDOT interns were honored as Workplace Heroes for taking the right action when they found themselves at the right place to help a stranger in need earlier this summer.

On July 16, construction interns Jacob Southwick of Titusville and Nick Swatzler of Galloway assisted in lifting a tractor that had fallen onto its driver.

The two happened upon the scene while traveling to inspect a detour sign that had been posted in connection with the "Big I" Roundabout project in Crawford County.

What first caught their attention was another driver who had already pulled over to the side of the road.

"We thought he was acting strange, but as we got closer we saw the tractor," Southwick said. "The windows were down, and we could hear the guy yelling for help."

They safely parked their vehicle and went to see what was happening. What they discovered was 76-year-old James Garfield of Crawford County had accidentally rolled his small tractor into a ditch, and he was pinned beneath the machinery.

Once trapped, Garfield struggled to get the attention of those driving past.

"I could hardly see anyone because I was upside down and backwards," Garfield said. "I was covered by the tractor."

Those who did stop, including Southwick and Swatzler, quickly sprang into action.

The other good Samaritan on scene, a former EMT, assessed the situation as the PennDOT employees tried to talk with Garfield. With the ambulance on the way, they decided to take additional action as Garfield was having trouble breathing.

"We decided to lift the tractor and pull (him) out," Southwick said.

"I was glad we got there when we did because it took all three of us to lift the tractor."

They remained on the scene until the ambulance and Vernon Township Police arrived.

"We wanted to make sure that he was OK," Swatzler said.

Once Garfield was loaded into the ambulance, Swatzler and Southwick returned to their route and inspected the detour sign as assigned.

Three weeks later, Southwick and Swatzler were able to visit with Garfield, when he attended the Workplace Hero ceremony at the construction field office on August 7, 2019.

Workplace Hero is an award open to PennDOT employees who, during work hours, take actions that prevent the death or serious injury of a co-worker or member of public.

"I appreciate the help that was given and I'm so glad for their intervention," Garfield said.

Transportation Construction Manager 2, Chad Tarr, who supervises the interns, said it was a series of little decisions that led to the first-year employees being at the scene of the accident on Middle Road, like sending both of them to handle the possible sign relocation and taking a different route than normal.

"Nick and Jacob are a shining example of the high level of public service PennDOT employees provide every day," District 1 Executive Jim Foringer said. "These two gentlemen were not only at the right place at the right time but were willing to take the right action."

"You have to be ready for anything," Southwick said of his time working for PennDOT. "You have to be able to help people when they need it. I like that this job enables us to do that."

# PENNSYLVANIA STIC'S COMMUNICATION SUCCESSSES HIGHLIGHTED AT NATIONAL FHWA MEETING

By: Richard Kirkpatrick, Bureau of Innovations

Lessons from Pennsylvania's award-winning State Transportation Innovation Council (STIC) reached a nationwide audience of state-level transportation officials on April 11.

PennDOT's Bureau of Innovations highlighted the Pennsylvania STIC's successes and enviable track record of widespread collaboration at the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) National STIC Meeting from Washington, D.C.

Broadcasting from the Commonwealth Media Services studio in Harrisburg, bureau staffers Danielle Klinger-Grumbine and Anja Walker outlined the accomplishments of the Pennsylvania STIC in an "Innovation Through Collaboration and Communication" presentation that was seen by state DOT officials across the nation. They stressed the STIC's breadth – representing 26 organizations from government, industry, planning agencies, and academia and how active engagement of all parties spells the difference between success and failure.

Highlighting a record of success since its inception in 2012, STIC has reviewed more than 80 innovations. Besides supporting and promoting deployment of FHWA's Every Day Counts innovations, the Pennsylvania STIC looks at other grassroots innovations that can be advanced.

The presentation highlighted that communication is key to advancing innovations.

"We need to ensure we are communicating about the right innovation at the right time to the right people," Klinger-Grumbine said. "Since the STIC's inception, tailored communications and collaboration with our partner organizations have played a critical role in effectively promoting STIC innovations to a variety of target audiences."

The Pennsylvania STIC's communications goals, she added, are to: 1) increase knowledge, 2) gain acceptance and 3) dispel myths about innovations among our target audiences. Buy-in and support are critical to ensure successful deployment.

The communications tools used by the Pennsylvania STIC include news releases, webinars, articles, conferences and outreach events, educational videos, social media posts, and infographics. The PennDOT Press Office assists the Bureau of Innovations with many of these tasks.

Among the STIC successes is High Friction Surface Treatment, which was embraced across the state thanks to the targeted communications efforts.

With 67 counties and more than 2,500 municipalities, Pennsylvania poses a significant challenge when it comes to educating local officials about transportation innovations. To overcome potential obstacles, the Pennsylvania STIC conducted an outreach survey and then used the results to host a Local



Government Innovations Day and then a Local Government Safety Seminar.

Using PennDOT's Local Technical Assistance Program and STIC Incentive Program funding, a hands-on Salt and Snow Management Course to help spread improved winter maintenance techniques across the state was developed. So far, more than 70 on-site classes were held for nearly 1,600 participants.

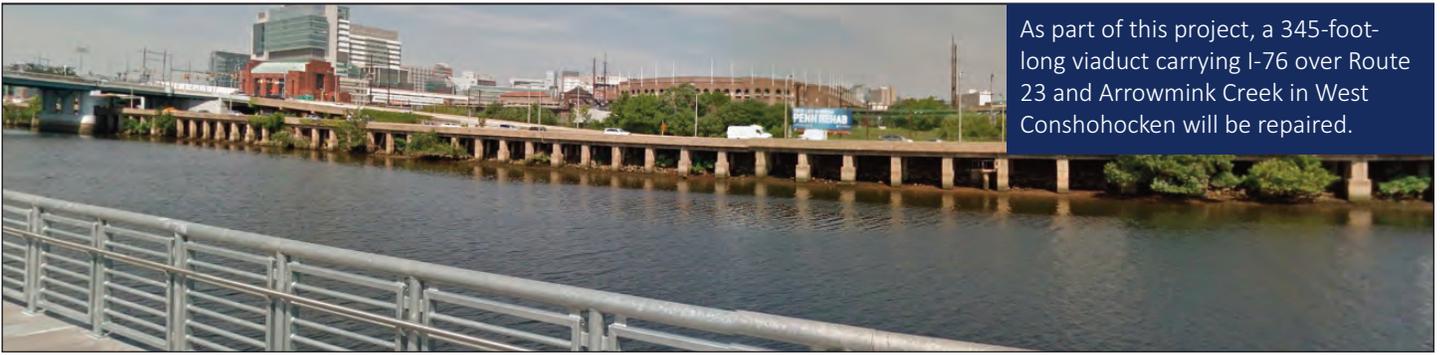
Assuming oversight of STIC in 2016, the Bureau of Innovations has been working to set a vision for STIC "Moving Forward." A strategic plan was unveiled in 2018, and it provides "the framework to reorganize, reenergize, and right size the STIC to increase participation opportunities to develop and deploy proven innovations across Pennsylvania," Walker said.

Walker added that the STIC Moving Forward plan established a process-driven management structure to ensure consistent innovation development practices.

Since the plan's launch, six new innovations have been submitted and are being developed for deployment.

In conjunction with the strategic plan, the STIC Management Team is also working on a comprehensive marketing strategy and communications plan. It calls for developing a STIC catalogue of innovations, a STIC media center with ready-to-use communications materials for use by partners and stakeholders and added in-person awareness briefings and webinars to bring the innovations message home.

A recording on the National STIC Meeting is available on FHWA's website. To learn more about the Pennsylvania STIC, visit the STIC's website, which features the 2018 STIC Year-End Report.



As part of this project, a 345-foot-long viaduct carrying I-76 over Route 23 and Arrowmink Creek in West Conshohocken will be repaired.

## BRACING FOR SCHUYLKILL EXPRESSWAY CLOSURES

By: Brad Rudolph, Community Relations Coordinator, District 6

**H**ow do you spread the word to travelers about traffic impacts when you have to close the Schuylkill Expressway for at least 20 weekends before the end of 2020? PennDOT thinks early and often.

Earlier this year, the department's Philadelphia-area district welcomed the media for a briefing to outline a \$39.8 million project to rehabilitate two Interstate 76 (Schuylkill Expressway) viaducts, which include the 6,120-foot-long structure between the Interstate 676 and University Avenue interchanges in Center City Philadelphia.

District Executive Kenneth M. McClain, along with Assistant District Executive for Design Chuck Davies, and Acting Assistant District Executive for Construction Harold Windisch, highlighted the purpose of the rehabilitations, the specific repairs needed for each structure, and most importantly, the impacts motorists can expect during all this work.

Through the end of 2020, the rehabilitation of the 289-span Center City structure will require numerous overnight lane closures, full directional closures, as well as a limited number of weekend daytime single-lane closures over the next 21

months. And don't forget all the ramps! They'll be closed, too, as needed, across the project limits. Altogether, there will be more than 15 detour routes implemented at some point during construction.

"We are working very closely with our partners and stakeholders including SEPTA, DRPA, nearby universities, sports teams, event centers, hospitals and others to best coordinate and limit construction impacts," McClain said.

To stay in the know about this project, PennDOT has launched a website — [www.i76viaduct.com](http://www.i76viaduct.com) — to keep motorists up-to-date on each week's planned lane restrictions and/or closings.

As part of this project, a second, 345-foot-long viaduct carrying I-76 over Route 23 and Arrowmink Creek in West Conshohocken Borough, Montgomery County, will be repaired. Work on the structure is expected to begin in June and be completed this November. The repairs will be done using single-lane closures seven nights a week. No full closure of the expressway is planned for this rehabilitation. Some good news there.

## MARGIOTTI BRIDGE PROJECT WINS AWARD

By: Jamie Arehart, Community Relations Coordinator, District 10

**J**ason Layman, a civil engineer supervisor for PennDOT's Indiana-based District 10, recently received an award for Outstanding New Major Bridge from the Susquehanna Chapter of the Association for Bridge Construction and Design (ABCD).

Jason Layman, a civil engineer supervisor for PennDOT, won an award for his work on the Margiotti Bridge.

The Margiotti Bridge won the 2018 ABCD Award for Outstanding New Major Bridge due to its structure design complexity including haunched girders, architectural facing, and large piers with deep foundations. PennDOT also earned the award due to District 10's critical coordination with Punxsutawney Borough, Buffalo and Pittsburgh Railroad, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

"This was my first complex project as project manager, and I am very excited to have received this award,"

Layman said. "This project was full of complexities, including coordination with B&P Railroad regarding vertical and horizontal clearances for the railroad. This was also the first Chapter 408 Permit District 10 was fully engaged with, and the correspondence and coordination with USACE allowed us to be successful in obtaining the 408 Permit in nine months. This project was very challenging and was exciting to work on and be a part of."



The Margiotti Bridge is an overview deck truss bridge located on State Route 436 in Punxsutawney.

# PENNDOT PROVIDES MID-YEAR UPDATE ON STATEWIDE PROJECTS

"What is PennDOT doing for me and the roads I travel every day?"

That's the question we hear the most from Pennsylvanians — and it's something we don't take lightly. PennDOT understands that our state's transportation network is critical to our quality of life and our economy.

Through June 30 this year, PennDOT crews have improved more than 800 miles of roadway and rehabilitated or replaced 27 bridges statewide. In the same timeframe, 372 construction contracts for highway, bridge, and other improvement projects were issued statewide to PennDOT's private-sector partners.

Progress also continues on the department's public-private partnership for bridges, the Rapid Bridge Replacement Project. All of the initiative's 558 bridges have started construction, are under construction, or have finished, with 548 replaced so far over roughly six years. Located largely in rural areas, the bridges would have taken eight to 12 years to address through the department's overall program.

PennDOT anticipates putting out for bid \$2.2 billion total in projects in 2019. For more information on projects occurring or being bid this year visit [www.projects.penndot.gov](http://www.projects.penndot.gov).



The public is also encouraged to view [www.penndot.gov/results](http://www.penndot.gov/results), a page dedicated to reporting PennDOT's progress in delivering for the state. Customers can also view the department's 2018 Annual Report, which for the first time is viewable as a document and also a responsive website.

# PENNDOT DISTRICT 4 HONORS EMPLOYEE FOR GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

By: Michael Taluto, Safety Press Officer, District 4

Robert A. Kretschmer, P.E., traffic engineer for PennDOT's northeastern District 4, was recently awarded the 2019 Charles M. Mattei Award by the district. The award honors an employee with at least 10 years of service with PennDOT, who participates in PennDOT as a whole, is involved in the community, and goes above and beyond the normal job description.

Before he was promoted to Permit Engineer, Kretschmer worked in a position that aided ongoing projects. He was part of the implementation for the new Electronic Permitting System (EPS) for occupancy permits, where he set up training sessions for utility companies and engineering firms to create an easier transition to the new system.

In his current role, Kretschmer has been challenged with many tasks related to customer care, seasoned engineers, and property owners who were unaware of the requirement for a Highway Occupancy Permit. He continues to educate engineers on how to perform their tasks and provides regulations to property owners when issues arise.

When not at work, Kretschmer participates in many activities.



He was the president of the Honesdale Area Jaycee's Club, a member of his local Lions Club, and coach for the Honesdale Soccer Club. He recently had the opportunity to coach his son's basketball team. Kretschmer also participated in the pack committee for the Cub Scouts and took part in coffee break events at PennDOT rest areas.

His colleagues describe Kretschmer as a hard worker. He continues to shine through his outstanding work and educate himself on positions he is given so he can excel in his work performance.

Pictured above: District 4 Executive Rich Roman, left, stands with Robert Kretschmer, who was given the district's 2019 Charles M. Mattei Award.



## SAVING THE BEES, BUTTERFLIES WITH A POLLINATOR GARDEN

By: Tara Callahan-Henry Community Relations Coordinator, District 9

**Y**ou may ask yourself, "Why would highway engineers concern themselves with butterfly gardens and honey bees?"

The answer – a mutually vested interest in pollen.

It's a simple, yet delicate, relationship between humans, insects, and plants. It's also the very fine line between life and death for us all.

PennDOT staff at a Huntingdon County stock pile facility are working to establish a pollinator garden as part of a larger plan to create corridors for migrating species of insects, like the Monarch butterfly, that have been threatened and endangered.

Bees, butterflies, and other pollinators are almost exclusively responsible for the pollination of crops, which makes their survival critical for ours. These insects travel from flower to flower, gathering pollen from the blooms. As they do, they transfer it to other plants – providing a sort of "service in kind" to help them reproduce.

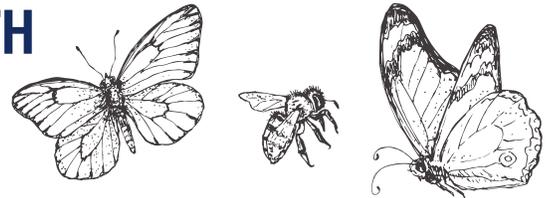
Environmental Manager Tom Yocum is working with the new PennDOT Pollinator Work Group to find ways for the department to support pollinator conservation.

He enlisted the expertise of our Huntingdon County maintenance manager, Mike Peachey.

"As we thought about how to execute this project, Mike immediately came to mind," Yocum said. "Asking him to take the lead on this was a no-brainer, knowing about his personal interest in saving pollinator species."

Peachey keeps bee hives at his home and gladly offered his knowledge and skill to help with the garden.

"We have two colonies of bees at my father-in-law's house and working with him got me interested in honey bees and what they



do for us," Peachey said. "So, when Tom came to me with the idea of a garden at the district, I immediately said I'd help, because I understand the environmental impact of bees and their disappearance."

Peachey and his team took a ¾-acre section of land at the stock pile and planted a temporary assortment of wildflowers this spring to allow proper turnover of the soil from grass to garden. The permanent mix of perennials will be planted this fall.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission played a large part in the garden's creation, as well, lending a crew and equipment to clear and dig the plot.

Yocum sees multiple benefits for the addition of the garden and the possibility of planting them across the state.

"While the primary purpose of the gardens is to help save pollinators, we can take advantage of an opportunity to receive pre-listing conservation credits for insect species that may be listed as threatened or endangered," he explained.

Monarch butterflies are at risk of being listed as endangered, so the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working to help prevent their extinction and offers environmental credits as incentives for landowners, government agencies, and others to engage in efforts that benefit declining species before their formal addition to any endangered species list.

"These credits can help PennDOT on future highway improvement projects that have impacts to similar habitats," Yocum added. "Further, the gardens can eliminate lawn care frequency and maintenance expense for the districts, build goodwill with the public, and help educate Pennsylvanians on the importance of protecting pollinator species."

After assessing the feasibility of this one test site, other garden plots may be planted next season and beyond.

# PUBLIC ENCOURAGED TO VOTE FOR PENNDOT PROJECT IN NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION AWARDS, REGIONAL AWARDS RECEIVED



Accepting the regional America's Transportation Awards awards are, from left to right, PennDOT Legislative Affairs Director, Sarah L. Clark, Esq., Executive Deputy Secretary, Yassmin Gramian, P.E., Director for the Center for Program Development and Management, Brian Hare, P.E., Secretary Leslie S. Richards, Maryland Transportation Authority Chairman, Pete K. Rahn, and Executive Policy Specialist, Emily Watts

**P**ennDOT was named as one of the Top 12 projects nationwide in the America's Transportation Awards competition for its "PennDOT Connects" transportation planning initiative. PennDOT Connects engages community stakeholders, planning organizations, and local governments to help ensure that community needs are understood at each phase of a transportation project's planning process.

The initiative was nominated in the Quality of Life/Community Development category, and is competing for the national Grand Prize and the People's Choice Award.

Sponsored by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, (AASHTO), AAA, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the competition evaluates projects in three categories: Quality of Life/Community Development; Best Use of Technology & Innovation; and Operations Excellence.

One example of PennDOT Connects collaboration in action is the nearly \$1 million I-676 Bridges Replacement Project in Philadelphia. Completed in 2018, this project replaced seven bridges in poor condition while boosting pedestrian and driver safety. Working closely with the metropolitan planning organization in center city Philadelphia, PennDOT replaced the bridges – including two pedestrian bridges – and added "green space" to two of the city's parks.

An independent panel of transportation industry experts will select the Grand Prize winner, while the public will decide the People's Choice Award winner through online voting that has begun and ends at 11:59 p.m. eastern time on Sunday, Oct. 6.

Additionally, PennDOT recently received two regional awards in the regional America's Transportation Awards competition for PennDOT Connects, and replacement project in Philadelphia and bridge rehabilitation project in Pittsburgh.

The "PennDOT Connects" won in the in the Quality of Life/Community Development Small Project category.

"The Liberty Bridge Rehabilitation" project won in the Operations Excellence, Medium Project category. The project consisted of a complete rehabilitation of the 91-year-old Liberty bridge including steel repairs, concrete repairs, full paint of the superstructure, new exodermic deck, and new lane control system.

Votes can be cast online at <http://tinyurl.com/y6mn23yc>.

Individuals can cast no more than one vote per day.

To learn more about PennDOT Connects, visit [www.penndot.gov/connects](http://www.penndot.gov/connects)

# COLLABORATION BETWEEN PENNDOT'S CENTRAL REGION TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT CENTER AND LOCAL 911 CENTERS SAVES TIME AND LIVES

Jennifer Kuntch, Deputy Communications Director, Central Office

When PennDOT is notified of a crash or unplanned interruption on our roadways, it sets off a chain of activity designed to alert motorists, increase the safety of first responders, and decrease the possibility of secondary crashes. Prior to a pilot project between PennDOT and the Clearfield and Centre County 911 centers, that notification could take 30 minutes or more, delaying alerts to motorists and creating back logs that could have been avoided.

In 2016, seeing a need to decrease the reaction time and make the process more efficient, Clearfield County 911 Coordinator Jeremy Ruffner discussed an idea with PennDOT Central Region TMC Manager Dennis "Denny" Prestash and his team. The thought was that if they could somehow establish a direct connection between the two locations, PennDOT could access the 911 Center's Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) WebView program, allowing traffic control specialists to see 911 incidents as they are being created.

"The hardest part of this idea was seeking and receiving the approval to install a microwave antenna on the roof of the Central Region Traffic Management Center (CRTMC)," Prestash said. The antenna was needed to establish the direct connection with the 911 center's computer system. "Once I described the idea, and the potential for increasing safety on our roadways, the installation was approved within three hours! Jeremy installed the antenna the next day with the help of District 2's IT unit and three days later the connection was made. In less than a week we started to receive data in real time."

Before the direct connection, staff at the CRTMC were listening to scanners and calling the 911 center for more details, creating a barrier for 911 operators as they worked to address the emergency. Both agencies quickly recognized the value to receive information from dispatch faster, and the need for an instant feed. Today, PennDOT's CRTMC staff can see incidents affecting our roadways as they are being created and 911 operators can see live feeds for traffic cameras in their county without any phone call being exchanged. Both agencies are getting the same information, at the same time, which allows PennDOT to immediately implement their Intelligence Transportation System (ITS) sending out alerts through dynamic message signs, highway radio advisories, traffic cameras, and more. Simultaneously, staff are entering incident information into PennDOT's Road Condition Reporting System (RCRS), which automatically feeds popular traffic apps such as 511PA, Google Maps, and Waze, reducing the occurrence of secondary crashes and roadway congestion. Today's process takes just 10 minutes or less from the time of the incident until the notifications are complete.



Jeremy Ruffner, left, and Denny Prestash in the Clearfield County 911 Center.

"It wasn't until the project was fully implemented that I noticed how well the relationship between 911 and the CRTMC was working," said Ruffner, who is also a volunteer with his local fire station. "While responding to an incident on Interstate 80, we passed the dynamic message sign which was a mile or two before the incident. To my surprise and amazement, the sign was already updated and alerting traffic to the incident ahead. Motorists were moved into the left lane, passing the emergency, and there was no traffic backlog. The system was working how it should!"

Additionally, PennDOT was able to do a before-and-after analysis on the average "incident influence times" for I-80 in Clearfield County. An incident influence time is calculated from the time the incident occurs on the roadway until the traffic flow goes back to normal conditions. When looking at the same six-month period, the time motorists had to sit in congestion was reduced by 93 minutes with the implementation of the direct CAD feed. This information further highlights the importance of timely ITS responses to aid first responder arrival on scene, and ultimately, improving the overall safety for motorists on our roads.

After the success of the piloted partnership, the program was expanded in November 2018 to include Centre, Elk, McKean, Cameron, and Huntingdon counties. In 2019, Clinton County has been added and there are plans to add Mifflin, Blair, Cambria, Snyder, Union, and Northumberland counties to the project. Access is based solely on the available technology in each county 911 center. Several counties do not have the available upgrades, but they have expressed interest in partnering once their systems are updated.

In addition to the direct-data connection, an incident email notification system was also implemented with Clinton, Mifflin, Centre, Potter, Lycoming, Sullivan, Somerset, Tioga, Montour, and Columbia counties. When a 911 dispatcher categorizes an incident as anything that would impact a roadway, this additional tool sends an email directly to operations staff within the CRTMC, also significantly reducing the awareness time of incidents. With the success the central region has seen with this project, there are plans to eventually expand statewide.