



Arkansas HIGHWAYS

2025 ISSUE 2

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ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION | MAGAZINE

Jared D. Wiley Takes the Helm

**TALDO BEGINS
Tenure as
AHC Chairman**

**HALSEY 'ECSTATIC' TO
be Named Newest
Highway Commissioner**

**ARDOT HELPS
Neighbors in
Louisiana**

Hello ARDOT Team, industry partners, elected officials and traveling public.

IT HAS BEEN A FAST-PACED FIRST FEW MONTHS FOR ME AS DIRECTOR. In January, we said goodbye to Director Tudor on the frontside of a snowstorm that blanketed much of the state on her last day in the chair. I was immediately impressed and inspired by how well our dedicated Operations employees tackled the storm head-on. We were successful because we planned well and flawlessly executed that plan. When our neighbors to the south were hit by a record-breaking snowfall later in January, 75 members of our ARDOT family drove south to combat Winter Storm Enzo. Those volunteers were supported by many other ARDOT staff members who ensured that our frontline workers had what they needed to keep people moving in southern Louisiana.

In mid-January, the 95th General Assembly convened for the Legislative Session. I am proud to report that the Session was a success for ARDOT. We were able to enact legislation that will improve worker safety through the permanent use of green lights on highway construction and maintenance vehicles, double fines for traffic violations in mobile work zones, and incorporate work zone information into the driver's license test for new drivers. In addition to this, we were able to work with legislators to include ARDOT workers on the list of first responders whose beneficiary will receive a \$250,000 payment should they fall in the line of duty. This solidifies the importance of the work we do and underscores that it is oftentimes hazardous.

To that end, construction of the Fallen Worker Memorial began in March right here on the grounds of the Central Office Complex. The construction of the Memorial would not have been possible without the outpouring of support from our ARDOT family. Over \$80,000 was raised through cookouts, bake-sales, raffles, and auctions by our team. All that was done on staff's personal time because of their belief in and realization of the importance of the job we do and the sacrifice that so many have made to deliver on our commitment to a safe and efficient transportation system. Our industry partners stepped up in a big way also, bringing the total donations to over \$200,000 in cash, materials, labor, and professional services combined. Director Tudor will be back to dedicate the Memorial with us this fall. I hope to see you there too.

Until then, keep up the good work, stay safe, and build each other up as we all work together with one goal in mind – serving the traveling public full STEAM ahead.

Jared D. Wiley, P.E., Director



FRONT COVER:
ARDOT Director Jared D. Wiley, P.E.

BACK COVER:
Scenic view of Highway 8 in Pike County

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KEITH GIBSON
Vice Chairman



MARIE HOLDER
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DAVID HAAK
Member



JERRY L. HALSEY, JR.
Member



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Jared D. Wiley TAKES THE HELM

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL

OUR INTERVIEW WITH NEW ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (ARDOT) DIRECTOR JARED D. WILEY STARTED OFF DIFFERENTLY THAN YOU MIGHT IMAGINE. He began by talking to us about his plants, the framed photographs his family took, and the comfy chairs he and his wife, Jessica, purchased for his office. Speaking with him, you get the sense of a man who loves his family and time spent outdoors, but who also has a passion for ARDOT.

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Wiley was named Director by the Arkansas State Highway Commission in December 2024 and officially assumed the role on January 11, 2025. He succeeds Lorie Tudor, who retired in January 2025.

EARLY CAREER ASPIRATIONS

Wiley hadn't ever intended to be Director, or for that matter, an engineer. He wanted to play professional baseball.

"That's all I really enjoyed and cared about. Frankly, I loved it," Wiley said. "My last game was at Baum Stadium in Fayetteville. We won the State Championship in 2001 for Malvern High School. That was a really good ending to my sports career."

High school is also where Wiley became interested in math and science, which eventually led to his interest in engineering. As he describes it, a classmate who was extremely gifted got the attention of some professors at Arkansas State University (ASU). The Dean of Engineering at ASU visited his class and arranged for them to tour the campus.

"And I saw what they had, what they offered, what they were studying there. And, I said, wow, I really want to try this," Wiley said.

Wiley was offered an academic scholarship and began engineering school.

"I had to change my study habits. I remember staying up late nights. I'd come home on the weekend sometimes and I'd work all weekend on schoolwork," Wiley said.

Wiley knew at that point that he wanted to be a civil engineer, but thought he wanted to work with buildings. He enjoyed troubleshooting problems of structures and working with steel and concrete design.

"I never saw myself in a transportation arena," Wiley said.

Yet he interned with ARDOT during the summer after his sophomore year and discovered that he was interested in transportation.

"I said, well, that's interesting. I never thought about this aspect of what I'm learning. And I came back a second summer and a third summer, and I thought well, I think I might want to make a career out of this," Wiley said.

Jokingly, he added "I'm still trying to figure out what I want to do when I grow up."

HISTORY AT ARDOT

After interning with ARDOT, Wiley started in December 2005 as a Civil Engineer in the Planning and Research Division. He advanced through several positions in the Planning Branch where he oversaw the Department's traffic count and roadway inventory programs before becoming Consultant Coordinator in the Deputy Director and Chief Engineer's office in July 2013.



“It really is something I draw on because I have been blessed with the ability to experience office life and field life at the Department; I think it brings a good perspective for me to understand a little more about where our staff is coming from. I use that experience quite often here.”

- Director Jared D. Wiley, P.E.

He was promoted to Assistant Division Head of Transportation Planning and Policy in January 2014, then promoted to the position of Division Head of Program Management in May 2015. In April 2020, he was promoted to Assistant Chief Engineer for Planning, and from there he became Chief Engineer for Preconstruction in April 2023.

When Wiley started working at ARDOT, he was in a position that allowed him to work in the field about 25 percent of the time. In addition to time spent in the office, he was able to travel. He spent seven years in that position and said he feels that it gave him a better perspective when relating to other ARDOT employees.

"It really is something I draw on because I have been blessed with the ability to experience office life and field life at the Department," Wiley said. "I think it brings a good perspective for me to understand a little more about where our staff is coming from. I use that experience quite often here."

INSPIRATION AND LEGACY

Wiley kept the original advertisement poster from his first job at ARDOT and has carried it around in his briefcase ever since. In big letters across the top, it says "WANTED." He says that he hung on to it because he wanted to remember



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I want to make sure our staff understands that we're here to support and see everybody excel, take care of everybody, whether an engineer, an accountant, a maintenance aide, a programmer, whatever degree they have or don't have, we want everybody to be successful and valued."

- Director Jared D. Wiley, P.E.



the time when he encountered it and the feeling of satisfaction when he got the job offer letter from ARDOT.

"It was a big deal. Big deal. And so, I look back at that sometimes and remember where I started and how the journey began," Wiley said. "I'll carry it [the poster] now until I leave this place."

When he was named Director, Wiley said that he was committed to building on his predecessor Director Tudor's legacy of cooperation and collaboration. He admires her for how hardworking she is, her integrity, and selflessness.

"Lorie was good at bringing folks along, having you in the room, having you maybe not be a part of the conversation, but at least hearing the conversation so you could gain understanding about what was going on, why decisions were made," Wiley said. "That pays dividends still to this day. And I do my best to try to bring people along as well, bring them in a room."

FAVORITE PROJECT AT ARDOT

As a career ARDOT employee, Wiley has had the opportunity to work on numerous projects. He says his favorite project goes back to his early days when he was a new engineer. He worked on rewriting ARDOT's traffic count processing program and was allowed to implement changes.

The previous program was a mainframe with very limited capabilities to run trend analysis and data validation checks. Wiley worked on the project with another employee, David Li, who is still with ARDOT.

"Anything that I dreamed programmatically, he made happen," Wiley said. "We tackled that together and we built a software that we were proud of . . . I remember hearing from the federal level, somebody bragging on Arkansas' data and the improvements we had made and the improved data integrity and quality. And to me, it just validated all the work we had done on that system."

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE OF TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

When talking about the future of ARDOT, it is hard to not look at what is to come for highway funding, knowing that historically it comes from gasoline tax revenues.

"Vehicles are becoming more efficient. Electric vehicles aren't paying the gas tax at a federal level. There's really no way to recoup that lost revenue," Wiley said.

He talks of the importance of working with our legislators to make sure we have secure funding for the future and for keeping costs down.

This is especially important because of the amount of

capital needed to finance highway projects. He says that in the past, \$20 million projects were seen as huge projects. Now, \$20 million projects are not that uncommon.

"The landscape is changing with electric vehicles coming on board," Wiley said. "We're not sure where that takes us in the future, but we need to make sure that electric vehicle drivers pay their fair share to ensure we have revenue in place to deliver what the public needs from us."

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF EMPLOYEES

As the largest engineering firm in the state, ARDOT has long been known to those interested in a career in engineering. But Wiley wants people interested in other fields to look to ARDOT for career choices and development.

"I want to make sure our staff understands that we're here to support and see everybody excel, take care of everybody, whether an engineer, an accountant, a maintenance aide, a programmer, whatever degree they have or don't have, we want everybody to be successful and valued," Wiley said. "So, I'm going to be working to solidify that, to find ways to show our staff that, because that's who we are."

He wants to dispel past assumptions that ARDOT is only a place for engineers to excel.

"There's maybe a feeling in the past . . . that we're only watching out for engineers. I know that to not be true, but I want to make sure that we're being mindful of what we're doing and making sure everybody gets a chance to excel and achieve," Wiley said.

He talks about his ideas to recruit and retain employees. He wants to be involved with schools and with students at a younger age, so they know about the transportation industry and look to ARDOT as a career choice. He sees this as way to let them know that there are a variety of opportunities, whether that means becoming an equipment operator, a data technician, or an engineer drawing plans for roadways. He wants to build out a team to accomplish this, adding more staff if needed.

"I'm kicking around a lot of ideas," Wiley said.

He envisions finding ways to offer scholarship opportunities for current staff and for college students interested in engineering or other professions. He'd like to bring back a past ARDOT program that helped pay for employees to get a master's degree in exchange for a promise to work at ARDOT a certain number of years as repayment, much like some hospitals do for medical staff.

Wiley is also interested in recognizing achievements that staff have earned in their respective fields. This would involve celebrating when someone becomes a Certified Public Accountant, attains a Professional Engineer license, becomes a certified auditor, or similar professional

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certificate in their field. This could include correspondence, a recognition luncheon, or something else.

He said he wants to recognize people throughout the year for acts of kindness or heroic acts on the roadway that help save lives or prevent an accident.

"I'm going to be working on some program to help recognize folks who do great things. I just got a letter in the mail a couple of weeks ago about a couple of good Samaritans who stopped and helped a lady who was stranded on the side of the road," Wiley said. "I wrote those employees a note, told them thank you, we appreciate them, but I want to give them some small token of appreciation from the Director . . . something to keep with them to know we acknowledge what they did."

PLANS FOR ARDOT'S FUTURE

Since becoming Director, many people have asked Wiley what his priorities for ARDOT are.

"The simple answer is, I want us to continue to be the best state agency we can be. I want us to be the state agency of choice for state employees. I want us to continue to excel, deliver top quality products, whether it's the written

word, magazines, road projects, maintenance projects, litter pickup, all that," Wiley said. "I want us to strive for excellence in all that we do. That's why we included that in our strategic plan."

When speaking of long-term priorities, Wiley says that he wants to "see this thing through to retirement." And he says, if that works out, "I'll have over a decade to serve, and I can see some long-range plans implemented as my goal. But I'm not going to get to that goal if I'm not tackling each day with purpose."

When he was interviewing for the Director's position, Wiley talked with the Commission about his tenure, how long he has left, and how that would allow him to implement some long-range plans.

"They remind me, and I remind myself this every day, it's a marathon and not a sprint. Because I tend to sprint," Wiley said. "I can wear myself out, and others, sometimes if I don't watch myself. So, my short-term goals are to pace myself."

Since becoming Director, Wiley created a video for ARDOT staff where he talks about the type of atmosphere he wants to ensure employees have at ARDOT.

L.-R., Seated: Jared D. Wiley, ARDOT Director. Middle Row: Jessie X. Jones, Chief Engineer for Preconstruction; Rex Vines, Chief Engineer for Operations; Kevin Thornton, Chief of Administration. Back Row: Erica Adams, Assistant Chief Engineer for Planning; Chad Adams, Assistant Chief Engineer for Construction; Steve Frisbee, Assistant Chief Engineer for Maintenance; Mike Fugett, Assistant Chief Engineer for Design; Keli Wylie, Assistant Chief Engineer for Program Delivery; and Crystal Woods, Assistant Chief of Administration.



I just hope people realize that I'm just a guy like the rest of us, trying to do the best he can . . . **be the best father and husband and public servant that I can be.**" - Director Jared D. Wiley, P.E.

"I want to elevate our communication. I want to reach everyone in the agency who wants to be reached," Wiley said. "I want them to tell us how we can make this place better for everyone. I don't want to forget my time when I wasn't in management or leadership. When a manager or leader forgets where they came from or how they started out, they tend to lose touch and credibility."

"I want to stay plugged in. I want to stay accessible. I want to hear what people have to say."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Wiley feels a strong commitment to ARDOT and its future. But he also recognizes the importance of work-life balance. He is married and has four children.

"I think as important as this job is, if I was to leave tomorrow, I'd be replaced the next day. But with my family, you know, it's not the same."

He has a wall in his office with framed photographs, all of which are from family trips, and each taken by someone in his family.

"What I'm trying to do is be deliberate with the time I have with my family. My kids are 15, 13, 11, and 8," Wiley said. "I want to be around when they want me. So, my goal is to be there with them in the mornings to get them on the bus, which I do. And then leave here at a reasonable time to spend time with them. We always try to eat supper together around the table, visit a little bit and hang out until bedtime."

A REGULAR GUY

When asked what he'd like people to know about him, Wiley said "I just hope people realize that I'm just a guy like the rest of us, trying to do the best he can . . . be the best father and husband and public servant that I can be. That I do this without ego or a goal of personal gain – that's not what I'm about. I want to serve the agency because I believe in what we do." ■

Top Photos, L-R: Jared Wiley with his kids on a bridge at Crowley's Ridge State Park and hiking with his wife at Queen Wilhelmina State Park.



TALDO BEGINS TENURE

as AHC Chairman

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL

AFTER EIGHT YEARS SERVING ON THE ARKANSAS STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSION (AHC), IT'S NOW TIME FOR PHILIP TALDO TO LEAD THE GROUP AS ITS NEW CHAIRMAN.

Taldo is eager to do his part.

Taldo was first appointed to the Commission in 2017 by Governor Asa Hutchinson. He replaces outgoing Chairman Alec Farmer, who completed his ten years of service in early January.

The AHC is made up of five members who serve ten-year, staggered terms. Every two years, a Commissioner's term ends and a new Commissioner is appointed by the Governor. Appointments are based on Arkansas' four Congressional Districts, with one member serving at large.

The Commission makes the policy and funding decisions necessary for the administration of the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) and they hire the ARDOT Director to oversee the day-to-day operations of the Department.

"Every Commissioner has their turn and I am eager to do my part as the Chairmen have done in the past," Taldo said.

Taldo starts his new role with a strong foundation. As Vice Chairman, he worked closely with then-Chairman Farmer. It is no surprise to hear that he is eager to begin.

"Serving as Vice Chairman behind Chairman Farmer was invaluable. He was a great mentor for the chairmanship and if I can fill his shoes, I will be happy," Taldo said.

Taldo talks about observing Farmer in the role and learning from his style of leadership.



"There is a saying 'measure twice, cut once' that truly describes how Chairman Farmer operated. As issues arose, he would gather opinions from fellow Commissioners and ARDOT staff before he would settle on a path forward. Then, he moved with a swift hand. I learned a lot by observing his methods of operation."

57th State Highway Commission & ARDOT Director:

Seated, L.-R.: Marie Holder, Member; Philip Taldo, Chairman; Keith Gibson, Vice Chairman.
Standing, L.-R.: Jerry L. Halsey, Jr., Member; Jared D. Wiley, Director; and David Haak, Member.



The responsibility of serving as Chairman is not lost on Taldo, who recognizes that it places him in the public eye. He says that he feels a different responsibility as Chairman and that he must maintain a clean line of communication between the Legislature, the staff, and the Commission.

As he sees it, there are different expectations of the Chairman. The Chairman "must ensure everyone is on the same page" with integrity and honesty, while being transparent and ethical in his actions. He feels there is an expectation that the Chairman will make tough decisions and lead with authority.

"As a member of the Commission, you speak for one. As the Chairman, you speak for the group. The Chairman must be a consensus builder and be willing to give and take," Taldo said.

Before his term ends in two years, Taldo wants to see the western half of the Springdale Bypass completed and the eastern half funded with construction progressing, in addition to the completion of the XNA Connector Road. He'd also like to see half of the Highway 112 widening project completed or at least under construction.

Looking to the future and challenges that ARDOT faces, Taldo feels that one of the greatest challenges on the

horizon is continuing to maintain and increase quality staff on all levels.

"ARDOT has a reputation of being a great career agency, but it is getting more competitive with the private sector," Taldo said.

He wants to strengthen ARDOT's recruiting tools to fill vacancies on staff. One of the tools that he sees having a positive impact on recruiting is expanding ARDOT's satellite office in Northwest Arkansas and establishing a satellite office in Jonesboro.

Taldo would also like to continue building good relationships with contractors and legislators, something he credits former Director Tudor with having established.

"I feel Director Tudor did a great job building these relationships the past five years," Taldo said.

Taldo lives and works in Springdale where he is a real estate broker, investor, and developer. He has been married to Mary Ann for 52 years and has three daughters and nine grandchildren.

Taldo's advice for future Commissioners is to ask questions: "Ask questions, not just of staff but of the Commissioners too. I have learned more from discussions than any other thing." ■



HALSEY

‘Ecstatic’ to be Named Newest Highway Commissioner

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL



IT DOESN'T TAKE LONG TO FIGURE OUT HOW JERRY L. HALSEY, JR. FEELS ABOUT BEING APPOINTED TO THE ARKANSAS STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSION.

Describing it in one word, Halsey says he's "ecstatic."

"To be part of that process - I did not know if it was achievable," Halsey said. "I mean, if you think about it, the Commissioners serve ten-year terms, and there's just not that many Commissioners. And to be part of that process, quite frankly, is just humbling. I am happy to be here."

Halsey was appointed to the Commission by Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders. He replaces Alec Farmer whose term ended in January. Halsey will serve on the Commission until 2035.

"Jerry is an incredibly gifted businessman, a leader in Jonesboro, and most importantly, a great friend. I know his experience in community development in Northeast Arkansas will lend itself to his new role on the Highway Commission and I look forward to working with him to keep Arkansas the center of America's road, river, and rail

systems," Governor Sanders said.

Halsey is the founder, CEO, and President of Halsey Thrasher Harpole Real Estate Group, with offices in Jonesboro and Benton. He is a graduate of Arkansas State University.

"I thank Governor Sanders for this opportunity to serve, and for her trust and confidence in me. I am excited and ready to go to work," Halsey said.

We recently had a chance to sit down with the new Commissioner to get to know him and his thoughts on the new role.

Q: Why were you ecstatic at being asked to serve on the Commission?

A: It goes back to my junior year in high school. I grew up on a cotton farm in Northeast Arkansas and I remember Dalton Farmer getting appointed to the Commission. He had roots in the area.

I was fortunate enough to have a really good social studies teacher, civics teacher, and government teacher, one of which was my aunt. So, at a very young age, I realized what

the Highway Commission did for the state of Arkansas.

Q: What do you find appealing about serving on the Commission?

A: It's the infrastructure. You know, I am a firm believer that good roads bring good industry.

There's always more to do than there is money. And I think as part of this process, from what I know about other Commissioners, they are dedicated to the same thing that we are, that I am. It's all about making Arkansas more connected, handling the traffic, moving people, and moving them safely.

Q: Have people in your part of the state started to contact you about highway issues?

A: The answer is yes. But the answer has also been, it's all been good-hearted.

I've had them call and say, 'Would you come look at this road? These are the needs we have.' And I intend on doing that.

I don't know what the answers are, but I can certainly report them back and be part of a conduit to pass information and try to be helpful.

Q: What are some priorities that you see for our highway system as you look to the future?

A: I am a big I-57 proponent. I know it's probably ambitious, but I would really like to see I-57 completed in my 10-year term.

And I want to be able to make sure we use our resources and our time efficiently to make sure that we get the most for what we're investing, whether it is time or money.

Q: You mentioned earlier that your family had a cotton farm. What was it like growing up on the farm?

A: My father and I farmed together for about eight years. I've got the same opportunity to work with my daughter. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

We raised cotton and watermelons. I spent my Julys getting up at . . . 4 or 5 in the morning, and we would take watermelons to Memphis. And then in the fall, the rest of the family would go to pick cotton. My grandfather would continue to take the watermelons to the Memphis market, and he would leave the house between 1 and 1:30 in the morning. He always wanted me to take a load of melons with him, so we'd take two trucks. And I had to be back for class, but what I really had to be back for was to eat breakfast at my grandmother's before I went to class. My grandfather



You know, I am a firm believer that **good roads bring good industry.**

- Commissioner Jerry L. Halsey, Jr.

always had me out of Memphis usually by 4 or 4:30 so I could get back to town.

Q: How do you think that working in real estate or farming has helped prepare you for a seat on the Commission?

A: I've had the opportunity, and I do believe it to be an opportunity, to work with folks who didn't always think the way I thought, who had a different philosophy. What I have found, and it's not always the case . . . some of the very best decisions that we've made as either a family or a company or partnerships or whatever that looks like, have come when you sit down with polar opposite views. And it forces everybody to kind of lay it on the table. What you do is . . . you learn the reason they think the way they think. They learn the reason I think the way I think. But you get some really good decisions.

Q: How do you feel going into your first Commission meeting? Do you have any concerns?

A: A little bit anxious.

I don't think I've had this much reading to do since college. And they keep saying 'We'll send that to you, or we'll get that to you.' And I'm thinking, I'm still reading on what you've given me.

So, there is a lot to absorb.

As far as one of the first things he may be doing as Commissioner, Halsey smiles big and laughs before he says, "The main role of a Commissioner is to fix potholes." ■

With a Little Help From Our Friends: ARDOT Helps Neighbors in Louisiana

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL



75 ARDOT EMPLOYEES

focused on pre-treating and plowing sections of the heaviest traveled corridors in Louisiana.

WINTER STORM ENZO CAME ROARING INTO LOUISIANA ON JANUARY 21, BRINGING WITH IT SNOW, SLEET, AND FREEZING RAIN, FOLLOWED BY A BLIZZARD WARNING – THE FIRST TIME THAT ONE WAS EVER ISSUED IN LOUISIANA. With snow accumulations ranging from six to ten inches, cities like New Orleans and Baton Rouge broke modern records for the most snowfall in one day, while cities all over the state saw record-breaking low temperatures.

Winter storms can be a challenge for any department of transportation, but this storm was unlike anything Louisiana

had ever seen. Because our neighbors in the Pelican State rarely experience this type of weather, they were not equipped to battle a record-breaking statewide winter storm.

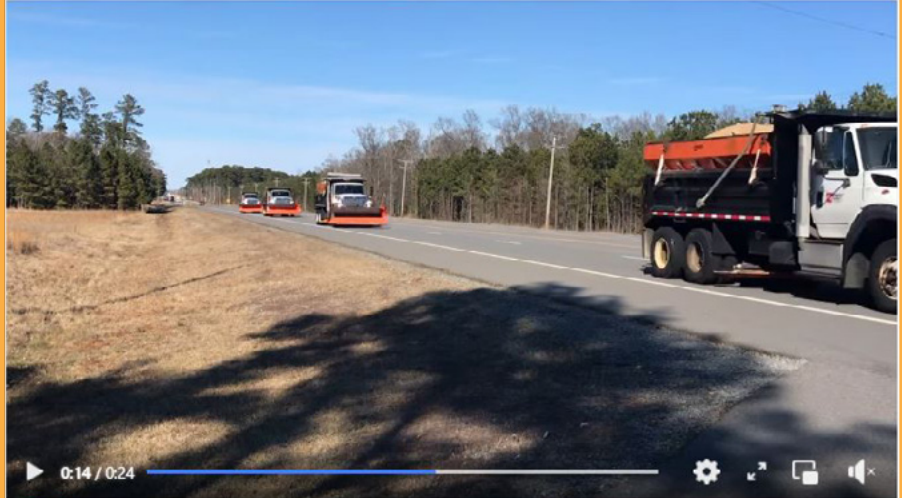
The Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) and Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LADOTD) began monitoring winter weather forecasts the week prior to Winter Storm Enzo. As the storm approached, Louisiana realized that they would need some help getting through this unprecedented event.

“We always try to be good neighbors and are glad to help out our friends to the south,” Deric Wyatt, ARDOT State Maintenance Engineer, said.

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Arkansas Department of Transportation
January 20 · 🌐

ARDOT Strike Team snow plow drivers and workers from District 2 heading through Calhoun County on their way to Louisiana. Their goal is to help keep vital roads open th... [See more](#)



0:14 / 0:24

3.8K 405 comments 574 shares

Like Comment Send Share

View more comments

Christine Rogers
Thank you all for helping our state out in this time of need
9w Like Reply 23

View 1 reply


Victoria Freeman
Lord protect them going, working and coming back.
9w Like Reply 22

View 1 reply

Arkansas Department of Transportation
January 23 · 🌐

Overnight, ARDOT and LADOTD crews were able to remove significant amounts of snow from closed sections of I-10 in Louisiana and began working on other routes. Mother Nature will continue to be a big help, with lots of sunshine and temperatures projected to be in the upper 40's this afternoon.

The teamwork with our [Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development \(DOTD\)](#) counterparts has been amazing.



424 31 comments 18 shares

Like Comment Send Share

ARDOT's Winter Weather Strike Team from central Arkansas, as well as other snowplow and salt brine tanker drivers from three of its southern districts, arrived in Louisiana on January 20 to help LADOTD. ARDOT's Winter Weather Strike Teams are made up of personnel from ARDOT maintenance crews that travel across the state during winter weather events to assist the areas with the most need. Seventy-five ARDOT employees focused on pre-treating and plowing sections of Interstate 10, Interstate 12, Interstate 49, and U.S. Highway 190, the heaviest traveled corridors in the area.

ARDOT was able to assist Louisiana using a Congressional Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). An EMAC enables states to share resources during times of emergency or declarations of disasters. The EMAC was coordinated with the help of the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management and their counterparts in Louisiana.

"The EMAC ensures that Arkansas will be reimbursed for all expenses during the mission, including salaries, equipment usage, supplies, travel, and lodging," Jared D. Wiley, ARDOT Director, said. "I am proud of the dedicated ARDOT men and women who volunteered to assist with this mission."

Teamwork prevailed and ARDOT and LADOTD's personnel worked together to clear roadways as quickly as possible.

"Some of us got co-riders from their [LADOTD's] bridge crew, and seeing their reaction to the snowstorm was interesting as they had never seen anything of that magnitude down there. Most of them had never seen

a snowplow," Tyler Wood, ARDOT Maintenance Striping Crew Leader, said.

ARDOT teams stayed in Louisiana most of the week, plowing snow and salting roads until the major corridors were clear. After working together so closely, ARDOT and LADOTD crews talked about the sense of camaraderie they felt working together.

"During Winter Storm Enzo the amount of team effort that came from ARDOT and LADOTD was amazing," Tim Coyde, ARDOT Striping Machine Driver, said. "Complete strangers came together as if we worked with each other for years. They would assist in any way they could, while being friendly and helpful the whole way."

After five days of non-stop work, ARDOT crews returned to Arkansas on January 24 having accomplished what they came to do.


"I have a wife and three small kids at home. Traveling a long way away in a weather event that may leave you stuck for an extended amount of time is tough. There's no real time frame of when you might return home," Wood said. "With that being entered into the equation, I would consider going to help again if needed."

To commemorate the overall feeling of teamwork by the two agencies during the winter storm and to recognize the efforts of staff, ARDOT created a sew-on patch featuring Louisiana's state bird, the pelican, wearing a winter hat. The patch was distributed to ARDOT staff who worked during the event.

"It's hard to describe how it feels when different agencies can come together in a moment's notice and be successful," Coyde said. "The event almost seemed magical in its own way." 🟩

Arkansas Department of Transportation
January 23 · 🌐

I-55 between Hammond and New Orleans, Louisiana



0:04 / 0:20

Stacy Elms Fields and 43K others 1.7K comments · 3.9M views · 5.6K shares

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Stacy Elms Fields
Austin Fields
12w Like Reply

Keith Sharp
Was that an ARDOT truck?
12w Like Reply 77

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Paige Holiday
My first thought was "LA HAS SNOW PLOWS?!" Then I saw it was Arkansas. 😊
12w Like Reply 61

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Patty Strom Pyle
FOX Weather reported that ARDOT trucks were in Louisiana helping clear the roads, you're getting national recognition 🙌 Great Job! Thank you for helping our neighbors to the south ❤️
12w Like Reply Edited 423

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RAISING ATTENTION to Keep Drivers in Their Lane

BY EMMA GOAD

CRASHES CAUSED BY MOTORISTS LEAVING THEIR TRAVEL LANE ACCOUNT FOR OVER 70 PERCENT OF ALL TRAFFIC FATALITIES IN ARKANSAS. The Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) is continuing its efforts to reduce the number of lane-departure crashes by using Raised Pavement Markers (RPMs). These reflective markers help drivers navigate in low-light and adverse weather conditions, which is critical to achieving the state's goal of reducing roadway fatalities.

IMPROVING VISIBILITY IN NIGHTTIME AND ADVERSE WEATHER

An analysis of fatal and serious injury crashes on Arkansas highways found that 32 percent occur at night, 15 percent happen on wet pavement, and 5 percent take place at night on wet pavement. Low visibility increases the risk of crashes, making countermeasures like RPMs essential. While ARDOT has been using RPMs on select highways for decades, in 2018 the agency began installing them across the entire Arkansas Primary Highway Network, the key highways throughout the state that provide interstate and regional movement, using Federal-aid Safety funding. By 2021, the program was expanded to cover the 16,400-mile state highway system.

RPMs provide enhanced reflectivity, helping drivers maintain lane position at night and in inclement weather. They are installed on the centerlines of two-lane highways and both centerlines and lane lines of multi-lane highways. Additionally, they may be placed on edge lines, traffic

islands, pavement arrows, exit ramps, construction zones, curves, and intersections when additional visibility and guidance are needed for drivers. This is especially common in areas with low-light conditions, high-traffic volumes, and sharp curves and intersections.

THE TWO TYPES OF PAVEMENT MARKERS: PLOWABLE VS. TRADITIONAL RPMs

When it comes to pavement markers, states generally decide between two types: plowable markers and traditional RPMs.

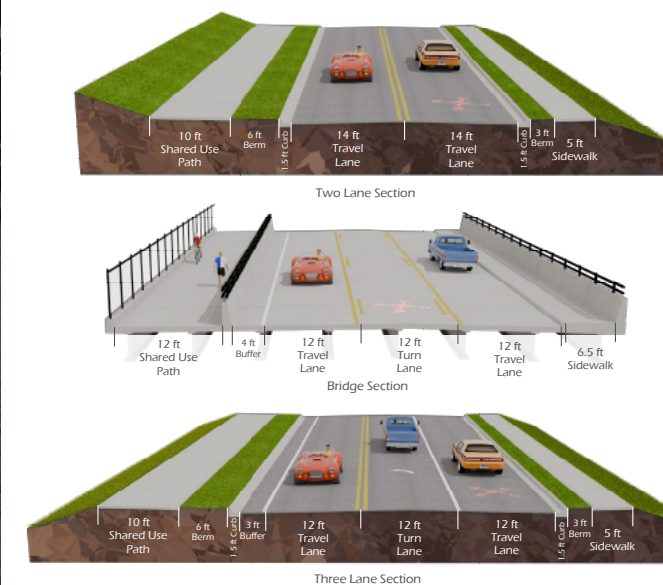
Plowable markers are embedded into a groove in the pavement to withstand snowplows and other wear. Plowable pavement markers cost around \$40 each for material and installation due to the need for pavement grinding before placement. Additionally, plowable markers require costly maintenance, as their lenses tend to get dirty and lose reflectivity within one to two years.

Traditional RPMs, on the other hand, are more affordable and cost-effective despite being more susceptible to damage from snowplows and regular traffic. Each installed RPM costs about \$3.50. Given the expected wear and tear, RPMs typically last less than two years. This can happen due to a variety of reasons, from the damage caused by snowplows to a rock wedged in the tire tread of a vehicle. However, maintaining RPMs (which involves replacing missing or damaged markers) requires less labor and shorter lane closures than maintaining plowable markers (which involves replacing the lenses).

"Plowable pavement markers definitely have the benefit of remaining in place better during winter months," Steve Frisbee, Assistant Chief Engineer for Maintenance for ARDOT, said. "However, when looking at the overall life cycle costs of installation and replacement, the value of the traditional RPM outweighs the plowable markers for Arkansas."

"Because our snowplows apply a significant amount of pressure to the roadway to remove snow and ice, we are not aware of any flexible markers that would remain in place following plowing unless a groove or divot is ground into the pavement," Frisbee said. "ARDOT continues to review new products as they come onto the market to identify those best suited for Arkansas' roadways."

ARDOT anticipates damage during winter weather events and has contracts in place to replace them annually, with work set to begin after March 15, weather permitting. For more information on RPMs, please visit ardot.gov/safety-countermeasures. ■



3D Visualization Team Roadway Design Division

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL

THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (ARDOT) IS ALWAYS STRIVING TO BETTER COMMUNICATE WITH ARKANSANS ABOUT UPCOMING PROJECTS. WITH THAT GOAL IN MIND, ARDOT USES VARIOUS TOOLS TO HELP PEOPLE VISUALIZE ROADWAY DESIGNS INCLUDING MINI MODELS, FLYOVER VIDEOS, VIRTUAL MEETING OPTIONS, AND NOW 3D VISUALIZATIONS.

"Some members of the public struggle to visualize the project from 2D lines on aerial photos," Matt Strawn, Public Involvement Section Head, said. "This is where 3D models shine – they make the project easier to understand by offering realistic, relatable views of the proposed changes. Flythroughs, interactive models, and traffic flow simulations give the public a clearer picture of how the project will look and function, often sparking more productive feedback."

(continued on page 22)



L.-R. Tanesa Kassa, Designer & Jason Bohannon, Advanced Designer

3D visualizations help people better understand complex engineering models, like those used at ARDOT. In the past, these visualizations were created by consultants for use at public involvement meetings, including a meeting about the future Interstate 49 (I-49) section between Barling and Alma, from Highway 22 to I-40. That visualization included 3D goggles to explore the project from any angle, which created an interactive, immersive experience where individuals could “fly around” the design and view any part of the job. You can view the flythrough video online at <https://vimeo.com/754411670>.

In addition to consultant created visualizations, ARDOT’s Environmental Division’s Geographic Information System (GIS) team creates 3D renderings for public involvement meetings to help people grasp design details that might otherwise be hard to interpret. These renderings, now a standard for every public involvement meeting, show cross sections of roadways and intersections.

Taking things a step further, in 2024 ARDOT created its own 3D Visualization Team within the Roadway Design Division. Although the 3D Visualization Team is new to ARDOT, Roadway Design’s process has long involved the development and use of 3D engineered computer models which are now used by the visualization team.

“Roadway Design has been making three dimensional engineered models since at least the mid-1990s,” David Baker, ARDOT Assistant Division Head of Roadway Design, said. “But those models are really for engineering consumption – they’re not necessarily for public consumption. The models convey the design intent, but it’s not a visualization.”

Roadway Design’s 3D Visualization Team converts the 3D engineered computer models into realistic animations using the same rendering technology used by video game designers and animators.

“I’m excited to see how Roadway’s visualization team continues to improve the way we engage the public,” Strawn said.

The team currently consists of two 3D technicians, Jason Bohannon and Tanesa Kassa.

“It is exciting to help ARDOT be at the forefront of this new technology,” Bohannon said. “I never anticipated working for ARDOT or in transportation. Part of that is because this is a new career path at ARDOT, so we are just now creating these opportunities. Thankfully, David Baker created the first position and trusted me to fill that role.”

Baker explained that the 3D visualizations really bring the engineered models to life.

“The technicians hang the sun in the sky, implement shadows, add cars and people, paint different patterns, whether it’s concrete, asphalt, grass or a pavement marking,” Baker said. “So, they do all of those things to our engineered models to make it look visually more like what it actually is in the real world.”

Bohannon emphasized how important it is that the visualizations are as accurate as possible.

“The public is familiar with the roads they take and if we can’t accurately show what is familiar, then it lowers the trust they have in us,” Bohannon said. “Getting the most up to date information is critical.”

According to Baker, ARDOT hopes to grow the 3D Visualization Team in the future because the visualizations



have been very successful at conveying the intent of ARDOT’s highway projects in a way that non-engineers can understand.

“We can develop a rendering that shows the project in a three-dimensional view so that a property owner who is having trouble envisioning the project can understand the impacts and say ‘Oh, okay, I think I understand a little bit better now,’” Baker said.

The 3D visualizations are already helping Arkansas residents to understand ARDOT’s projects a little better. Recently, ARDOT used 3D visualizations to address a concern brought by citizens in Cave Springs about the safety of a project that would bring traffic close to their neighborhood. The team created a visualization to show the citizens what the job would look like once completed.

“Every example where we’ve shown the 3D visualizations, it has been very beneficial to have. We’re going to try to start showing these as much as possible – we’ve already got plans to start making them for every project that has a public involvement meeting,” Baker said.

As demand for 3D visualizations has grown, those interested in a career in the transportation sector have been able to apply skills learned from many different degree and technical programs of study. Bohannon has a bachelor’s degree in interactive media and game design from Arkansas Tech University (ATU). Kassa has an associate’s degree in computer-aided drafting and design technology from ITT Technical Institute–Little Rock and a bachelor’s degree in computer visualization technology from ITT Technical Institute–Tampa, Florida.

“I do believe it is important to note that a degree is not necessary – as long as someone has the skills, they would be eligible to work in 3D visualization,” Bohannon said.

According to Bohannon and Kassa, there are a lot of different options to prepare someone for a career in 3D visualization.

“There are lots of degrees for 3D artists at universities across the country. They can be directly for visualization, such as the Bachelor of Fine Arts in 3D Digital Visualization at Berkeley College,” Bohannon said. “However, I believe that any 3D degree will be a good pathway to take. Some examples of potential degrees for someone looking into a job like mine are 3D animation, 3D modelling, interactive media design, etc.”

To help others with these skill sets realize the potential in careers in transportation, Bohannon is returning to his alma mater to speak to interactive media and game design classes. He plans to talk about ARDOT’s new team and its use of 3D Visualization.

“I’m wanting to show them that there are alternatives that they may not expect and that the skills they learn, such as 3D animation and modelling, can be applied to the visualizations we create at ARDOT,” Bohannon said.

ARDOT isn’t the only department of transportation using 3D visualization technology. States like Oregon, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin, to name a few, have similar programs. Although new to the transportation sector, there are several opportunities to use these technologies and skills to break into the 3D visualization field.

“3D is a new language for departments of transportation, especially ARDOT,” Kassa said.

For those interested in learning this “new language,” Bohannon offered his advice.

“Find some courses to take to learn how to navigate the 3D world,” Bohannon said. “There are also many YouTube videos and tutorial courses that navigate our primary program, Unreal Engine.”

3D Visualization may be a new language for ARDOT and other departments of transportation, but we are quickly learning to speak it. ■



DECLINING CRASH NUMBERS SIGNAL PROGRESS BUT THERE'S STILL MORE TO DO

BY EMMA GOAD

ROAD CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE CREWS RELY ON DRIVERS TO STAY ALERT AND FOLLOW THE RULES. Just one brief moment of distraction could mean disaster.

For nearly four years, Arkansas' highway safety partners have collaborated on the Slow Down, Phone Down work zone safety campaign to minimize those tragedies. And while meaningful progress has been made, the work is far from over.

The Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) and Arkansas Highway Police partnered with the Arkansas State Police in 2022 to launch the campaign, which strives to remind drivers of two simple, but crucial, rules: slow down, and put the phone away.

The Slow Down, Phone Down campaign is made possible with help from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) grant funding which helped launch a widespread public awareness campaign. From TV and radio ads to digital outreach, the campaign has ensured that drivers are constantly reminded of the life-or-death choices they make behind the wheel.

The impact is clear, but so is the need for continued vigilance. In 2021 (before Slow Down, Phone Down), there were 2,594 work zone crashes, resulting in 84 fatalities or suspected serious injuries. By 2023 (the most recent official crash data), Arkansas recorded 1,776 work zone crashes, resulting in 50 fatalities or suspected serious injuries (representing a roughly 30 percent decline in work zone crashes and 40 percent decline in fatalities and serious injuries occurring in work zones). Recognizing its effectiveness, the campaign has continued receiving NHTSA funding, allowing work zone safety messaging to remain front and center.

Despite the marked improvement from previous years, the numbers show there is still work to be done. Each crash represents a life affected, and every injury is a reminder of the potential dangers on our roads.

A key focus of the campaign in its fourth year is reaching younger drivers. Teens and new drivers often lack experience navigating work zones and may be prone to distractions. To address this, campaign exposure has been increased on social media and streaming channels like

Snapchat and Twitch. By targeting these younger drivers, the campaign aims to instill lifelong habits that promote safer roads for everyone.

But awareness alone isn't enough, and Slow Down, Phone Down is just one of several steps that are being taken to improve work zone safety. As an example, in February 2022, the Arkansas State Police and Arkansas Highway Police took action to increase patrols in work zones across the state, deploying both marked and low-profile vehicles. In 2023, the Arkansas State Legislature introduced a game-changing tool: speed enforcement cameras in Interstate work zones. With a law enforcement officer stationed at the end of a work zone, the cameras allow officers to monitor violations remotely and safely pull over drivers as they exit the work zone. This approach not only enhances safety, but also frees up law enforcement resources, making it easier to crack down on reckless drivers. ARDOT's message is clear: Our goal is safer work zones.

Jared D. Wiley, ARDOT Director, continues to lead the charge in keeping safety a top priority for both workers and motorists.

"We're seeing progress, but one crash, one injury, is still too many. The message remains the same – pay attention, put down the phone, and respect the work zones," Wiley said. "Your choices behind the wheel can impact more than your drive home."

The approach is simple. Fewer crashes mean more lives saved, but the goal is always zero. The next time you approach a work zone, just remember, your speed and attention to the road could mean the difference between life and death.

Slow down. Phone down. Because the fight for safer roads isn't over yet. ■



LEARN MORE ABOUT SLOW DOWN, PHONE DOWN AT WWW.ARDOT.GOV/SLOWDOWNPHONEDOWN



ARKANSAS HIGHWAY POLICE REBOOT K-9 UNIT

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL

IT STARTED OUT LIKE A REGULAR MONDAY FOR ARKANSAS HIGHWAY POLICE (AHP) SERGEANT ZACHARY "ZAC" EMRICK AND HIS K-9, MACK.

Mack and Emrick were conducting a commercial motor vehicle safety inspection along Interstate 40 in Crawford County on this cold February 10 day. Little did they know, they were about to make one of the biggest drug seizures in AHP's recorded history.

While conducting the inspection, Mack alerted Emrick that illegal drugs were present. Once the inspection was completed, law enforcement discovered seven pallets of illegal marijuana, totaling 4,900 pounds, with a street value of over \$16 million.

AHP drug seizures have been known to reach between 2,000 to 3,000 pounds and this case ranks among the top five on record.

The Arkansas Highway Police, a division of the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT), has recently reinstated the AHP's K-9 unit with Belgian Malinois dogs Mack and Jackie, who are each assigned to a handler. Mack's handler is Sergeant Emrick and Jackie's handler is Patrolman First Class Nicholas Murphy.

Emrick has been with AHP for almost ten years and Murphy almost three years.

"We wanted to try something new and challenging in our careers," Emrick said. "I'm interested in trying to find large amounts of illegal drug trafficking through Arkansas and being able to assist other agencies not lucky enough to have K-9s under them."

Murphy added "I'm a big dog guy, an animal lover."

Captain Ross H. Batson, Commander-Special Operations, AHP supervises the K-9 program.

"It's a different experience. It's a lot of knowledge. Highway Police Officers have to learn so much, and now they've just added this part to their training," Batson said. "It is a big commitment – a five-year commitment, and they've got to work with the dog every day. They also have to give it a bath, feed it. It's part of their family now."

TRAINING

Although we often think of our four-legged friends as pets or family members, Mack and Jackie are serious working dogs who live for the job. For Mack and Jackie, work is play and they enjoy playing.

In January, the AHP handlers and dogs attended a three-week, 120-hour class through BlueStreak K-9 of Jonesboro. The handlers and dogs stay together for the duration of the class so that they can start the bonding process.

Prior to the class, the dogs had been trained by BlueStreak K-9 for sniffing drugs, tracking, obedience, when to bite, and scenarios they might encounter on the job.

"I pretty well train them from scratch," Blake Bristow, BlueStreak K9 founder, said. "From puppies, they're raised knowing how to search for a ball. But we have to finish out teaching them when to bite and all the scenarios we put them in, and then, of course, the obedience that they have to have, and drugs, and tracking."

The class the handlers and dogs attend together is more

(continued on page 26)

Top Photo, L.-R.: Sergeant Zac Emrick, K-9 Mack, Patrolman First Class Nicholas Murphy, and K-9 Jackie.

Handlers and their dogs must continue to train together a **minimum of sixteen hours per month** and keep a log of their training time.



K-9 Mack

about learning to work as a team and teaching the handler how to read the dog and what the dog is doing.

"Most of this other stuff, you just hook a leash to the dog and he does it, but the tracking, you've got to really be paying attention to the dog," Bristow said.

During the class, the AHP teams trained alongside other handlers and K-9s from all over the U.S. to prepare for their national certification test through DrugBeat, a K-9 certification program. At the end of the class, the K-9 and the handler must pass the assessment and are then certified as a team.

"Tracking is a team sport – it seems to be the toughest skill for people to learn. A lot of the patrol work, the dog's like, 'I know what I'm fixing to do.' With tracking, you've got to read the dog and what he's doing," Bristow said. "It's a lot to learn in a few weeks."

Once certified, the handler and K-9 are immediately ready to go to work.

"They could stop on the way home today and sniff a car if need be. They leave here ready to go," Bristow said.

Handlers and their dogs must continue to train together a minimum of sixteen hours per month and keep a log of their training time. BlueStreak hosts trainings a few times a month for K-9 units to refresh their skills. The team must be recertified every year.

"Next year is the real test. Did you keep up your training? Did you do what you were supposed to do?" Bristow said. "Some guys come back and they're even better. Others come back and it's like, you ain't really done much, have you? And, we have to fail them."

The K-9s are on duty with their handlers for however long their shift is, which could be eight to twelve hours. At the end of the shift, they go home with the handler. The dogs have kennels outside to house them (except in extreme hot or cold temperatures where they stay inside in a crate).

"They are not the new family pet," Bristow said.

DRUG DETECTION

Due to their keen sense of smell, dogs have long been used by law enforcement for tracking and detection. The first official use of dogs for drug detection was recorded in the 1900s in Belgium where they were used to identify contraband, including drugs.¹

Dogs have an exceptional sense of smell that is powered by 200 million sensitive cells in their noses, compared to about five million in a human nose. This makes a dog's nose about forty times more sensitive than a human's.²

During drug detection training, this sense of smell is utilized to identify target scents, recognize them and indicate their presence. In addition to their superior sense of smell, canines are suited to drug detection work because they can search an area much faster and more accurately than humans. Dogs can also search for illegal drugs without physically disturbing the environment, which maintains the integrity of the search.³

AHP'S K-9 PROGRAM

The AHP previously had a K-9 program with four dogs and four handlers. It ended in 2006 when the dogs reached the end of their service life to the State and were retired to their handlers. Most law enforcement agencies retire their K-9s when they reach the age of nine.

The AHP recently started its new K-9 unit with two dogs and two handlers so they could train as a pair. Emrick and Murphy volunteered for the handler positions and then interviewed with a panel of former AHP K-9 officers, Captain William Scott and Captain Jack Stepp, as well as AHP Major Pete Lopez and AHP Captain Louis Hatchett with Special Services.

"As time progresses, we will look to add more, if possible," Jeff Holmes, AHP Chief, said. "Having a K-9 program is a lot of work for the handlers, administrative staff, and support staff. It takes a lot of commitment."

One of AHP's former K-9 handlers, Captain Stepp, volunteered to work with the K-9 unit after serving with the AHP for eight years. He was interested in working in drug interdiction and felt like being part of a K-9 unit was a good way to focus on that discipline.

When he volunteered, there were three positions open for K-9 handlers and he applied for all three.

"I moved from West Memphis to Fort Smith for the K-9 handler position," Stepp said.

Stepp's K-9, Nero, a German Shepherd, was retired to him in 1996. He lived with Stepp's family until he passed away in 2002. Stepp is now serving his 37th year with the AHP.

"I didn't realize how attached to him I would get," Stepp said. "There really is a bond there. You take care of the dog, but you know that if something happens, he will be there to protect you."

DRUG TRAFFICKING IN ARKANSAS

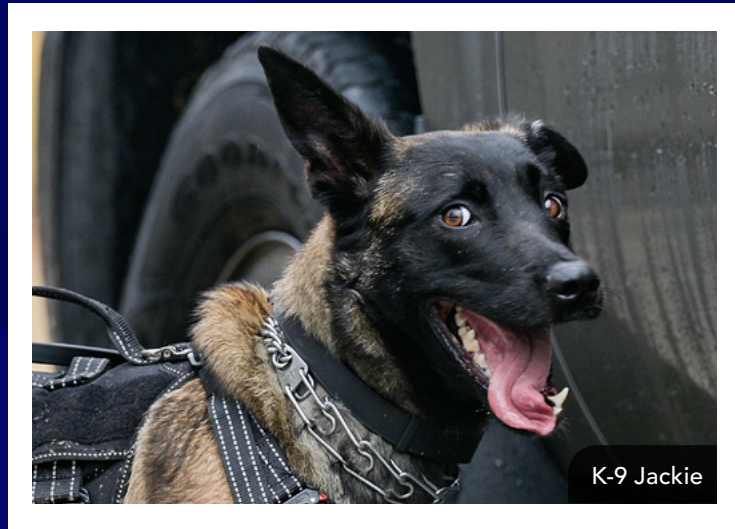
AHP's K-9s are trained for a dual purpose, meaning they are trained to provide patrol duties and detect illegal drugs. Based on numbers from past AHP drug seizures, Mack and Jackie's assistance is welcome. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), in 2024, 16,982.17 pounds of illegal marijuana, 269.59 pounds of cocaine, 509.46 pounds of methamphetamines, and 6.29 pounds of fentanyl were confiscated in Arkansas.

"Trafficking of illegal drugs continues to be a huge problem that affects all Arkansans," Holmes said. "This program gives the officer in the field a much-needed tool to help combat the problem."

So far, 2025 has seen the seizure of 6,215.91 pounds of illegal marijuana, 218.27 pounds of cocaine, 2.47 pounds of methamphetamines, and 9 pounds of fentanyl (Source: DEA). From the way things are shaping up, Mack and Jackie have their work cut out for them. Luckily, Emrick and Murphy will be right there with them. ■



Captain William Scott with his K-9, Yvo, in 2005.



K-9 Jackie

AHP's K-9s are trained for a dual purpose, meaning they are trained **to provide patrol duties and detect illegal drugs.**

Confiscated in Arkansas in 2024:
16,982.17 pounds of illegal marijuana
269.59 pounds of cocaine
509.46 pounds of methamphetamines
6.29 pounds of fentanyl

^{1,3} <https://vetadvises.com/how-are-dogs-trained-to-smell-drugs>

² <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada-us-history/detection-dogs>



A FAMILY BUILT ON Hard Work and ARDOT Pride

BY EMMA GOAD

IN DISTRICT 7 OF THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (ARDOT), A SOUTHERN REGION OF THE STATE, ONE FAMILY DOESN'T JUST WORK TOGETHER, THEY EMBODY A SPIRIT COMPOSED OF DEDICATION, COMMUNITY, AND THE UNMISTAKABLE RAWLS WORK ETHIC.

Steven Rawls, a Maintenance Specialist in Bradley County, started his journey with ARDOT in June 2015 thanks to a friend's suggestion, trading the log woods for the open roads.

"My family had mostly worked in the log woods, and my buddy that I worked with called me and asked if I would like working at the Highway Department. I was like, 'Yeah, man. Absolutely,'" he said.

That decision set in motion a path that would ultimately bring the entire Rawls family into the ARDOT fold.

According to Marilyn Rawls, his wife, Steven's enthusiasm for the job was contagious. She left her work in preschool education to join ARDOT as a station attendant. Although she started in Cleveland County, she now works in Dallas County.

"His enthusiasm got me out of the preschool, and I started working at ARDOT," she said. "I loved it. I loved the challenges. I loved learning new skills."

Their twin daughters, Marly and Myla, followed suit almost immediately after graduating high school.

"When they both graduated on May 18, 2023, they started at ARDOT as summer help on the 22nd, a few days later," Marilyn said. "I told them, if you like it, you can apply for a full-time position. Of course, they both did."

Both daughters even passed their commercial driver's license (CDL) exams before officially joining the team.



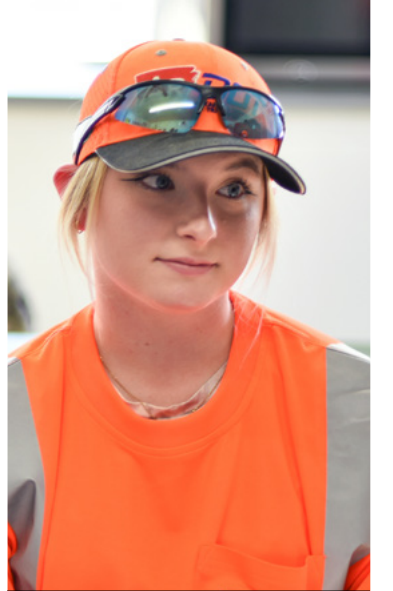
STEVEN RAWLS
Maintenance Specialist



MARILYN RAWLS
Maintenance Aide II



MYLA RAWLS
Maintenance Aide I



MARLY RAWLS
Maintenance Aide I

For Marly, the decision to follow in her parents' footsteps was easy.

"I didn't want to do any more school. I wanted to work. I've always wanted to work," she said.

Myla, on the other hand, had planned to only stay on as a seasonal hire before heading to college.

"I ended up staying full time and started college through an online school," she said. "I didn't plan to be out here and doing this for this long, but I figure I'm enjoying myself, and it's nice to learn the job more while I'm still in school."

Myla is currently enrolled in an environmental science program.

"I keep telling her, you're going to school for environmental science. You can stay with ARDOT if you want to," Marilyn said.

The Rawls family takes pride in their strong work ethic. According to both Marilyn and Steven, this is something they worked hard to instill in their daughters.

"We were both raised with great work ethic, and we really tried to teach and express the importance of it to both of them," Marilyn said. "If you want things in life, you're going to have to work for it. Hopefully, they get that."

All four members of the Rawls family expressed that they found more than

just careers. They found a second family.

"You've got that sense of community here. Another family, a bigger one, that belongs here at ARDOT," Marilyn said. "It's not just the county, it's the state."

Faith also plays a significant role in their work environment.

"We're a member of the church just down the road, and I think it's really special that every morning my supervisor has someone pray for not just our shop, but all of the shops in all of the counties," Marilyn said. "It's the best part of the day. It just makes you feel good when you know you work for a place like ARDOT that's in your corner."

When you work with your family, even at home, work discussions are inevitable.

"We come home, and we say that we give each other five minutes to talk about our days at work, but it does turn into an hour-long discussion," Marilyn said. "We start talking about new things that we've learned, or what happened that day. We really get going."

For Steven, watching his daughters excel in this field fills him with pride.

"When I leave this world one day, the best part of me will be those two right there. We just want them to succeed.

It's just a blessing to get to work with our kids," he said.

That work ethic and dedication haven't gone unnoticed. Steven is particularly proud of how quickly his daughters earned their CDLs.

"They made Dad feel proud for getting their CDL as easily as they did. And I thought to myself, hey, Marilyn and me did pretty good," Steven said.

But at work, Marly makes it clear that she's not just Steven's daughter. She's a coworker.

"I tell him all the time: I'm not your daughter at work."

Steven is learning to adjust.

"Yeah, yeah. She's a coworker," he replied. "That's hard to shake off. But my supervisors have been awesome about that. If I'm not around watching for her safety, I know that my guys here at ARDOT are gonna teach her everything. I'm able to relax. I know she's going to be okay, and that way I'm able to do my job to the best of my ability."

The Rawls family represents more than just a dedicated workforce—they embody the values that make ARDOT such a close-knit community. Through hard work, faith, and an unwavering support system, they have built a legacy that speaks for itself. ■

TAP AND RTP GRANTS

Provide Funding for Alternative Modes of Transportation

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL

IT HAS OFTEN BEEN SAID THAT TIME SPENT OUTDOORS IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL.

For those living in urban areas, finding opportunities to be outdoors can be a challenge. Trail facilities make being outdoors more easily accessible for those Arkansans.

The Arkansas Department of Transportation's (ARDOT) Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) and Recreational Trails Program (RTP) fund projects in communities across the state that help Arkansans travel outdoors. RTP was established by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act in 1991. When TAP was established by the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act in 2012, RTP was incorporated into TAP. In the past ten years, ARDOT has awarded over 350 TAP projects and 120 RTP projects.

The TAP and RTP are federal funding programs specifically designated for smaller-scale transportation projects defined as "transportation alternatives" for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized forms of transportation. TAP and RTP initiatives include pedestrian and bicycle facilities, recreational trails, safe routes to school programs, safety assessments for vulnerable road users, and more.

RTP projects, funded through a portion of TAP funds set aside for recreational trails, include maintenance and restoration of existing trails, construction of motorized and non-motorized recreational trails, and trailhead facilities and trail linkages.

TAP and RTP program initiatives are funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). This reimbursement-type program provides an 80 percent federal share for eligible project costs and requires a 20 percent local match from eligible applicants. Strictly allocated for transportation



alternatives, these Federal-aid funds must be returned to the Federal Highway Administration if the funding is not utilized by the State as intended.

ARDOT makes every effort to award all available funds each year. However, as projects develop, some sponsors may encounter challenges that make it no longer feasible to move forward, resulting in project cancellation. In these cases, funding is returned to the overall pool and reallocated in the next application cycle. This ensures that Federal-aid funding remains within Arkansas and is used for another TAP or RTP project.

Each year, approximately \$15 million is available under TAP and approximately \$1.4 million is available under RTP. In 2024, a total of fifty-four TAP projects were awarded for approximately \$16.7 million and a total of eleven RTP projects were awarded for approximately \$2.5 million.

The 2024 list of awarded projects includes a variety of on-road and off-road trail facilities, including walking trails, sidewalk improvements or replacements, hiking trails, bicycle trails, pedestrian bridges, boat launches, and more.

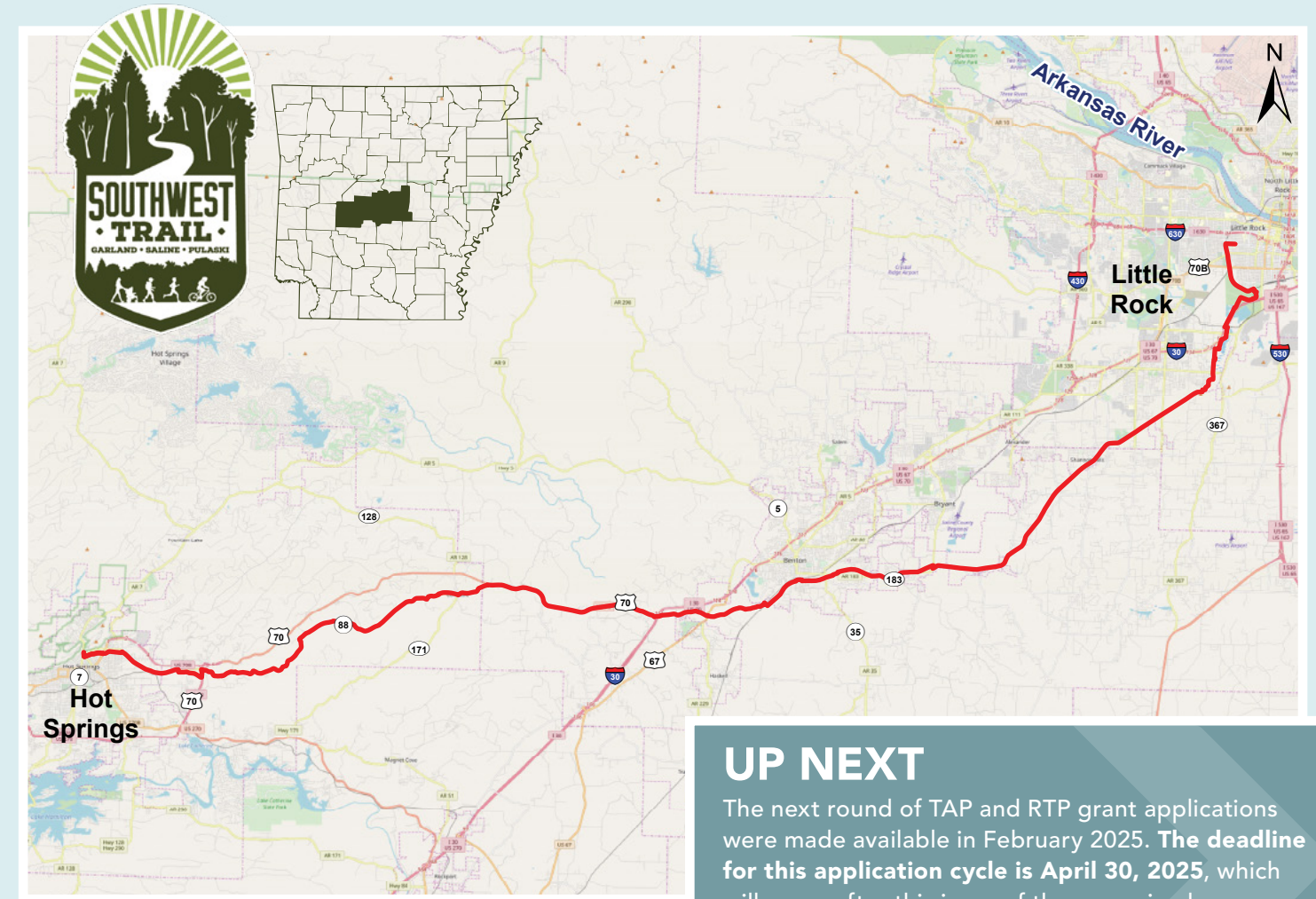
2024 PROJECTS OF NOTE

Some of the grants fund a phase of a larger project, like the 2024 award to Pulaski County for the Southwest Trail Project. This award will fund Pulaski County's third phase of the Southwest Trail, proceeding from Baseline Road to 65th Street in Little Rock.

The vision for the entire Southwest Trail project is to ultimately build a 60+ mile trail connecting Little Rock to Hot Springs, adding another trail network to the State of Arkansas.

ARDOT and Metroplan have awarded Federal-aid funds for various portions of this trail network since 2017. The 2024 TAP award provided an additional \$500,000 to the Southwest Trail. Currently, more than \$27.7 million of Federal-aid funds have been awarded for the Southwest Trail.

"This project is truly a community-driven effort with Pulaski County, Saline County, the City of Benton, and the City



UP NEXT

The next round of TAP and RTP grant applications were made available in February 2025. **The deadline for this application cycle is April 30, 2025**, which will occur after this issue of the magazine has been published. Awards will be announced later in the year.

of Bryant all receiving Federal-aid and contributing their own matching funds for the design and construction of the Southwest Trail," Minghua Qiu Miller, ARDOT Staff Engineer for the Local Programs Division, said.

One of the goals of the TAP program is to fund projects that provide safe access to transportation alternatives within our communities. The Booneville Pedestrian Bridge Project received \$245,000 in 2024 TAP funds to build a pedestrian bridge along Highway 10 in Booneville.

In February 2024, Booneville Mayor Edgar Baker and Arkansas State Senator Gary Stubblefield wrote a letter to ARDOT requesting the pedestrian bridge be built alongside an existing bridge on Highway 10. Sidewalks existed along Highway 10 on either end of the bridge, but pedestrians had to enter the roadway to cross Booneville Creek on the shoulder of Highway 10.

"ARDOT's Planning & Research Division performed a safety study after receiving the letter, but did not find any historical evidence of pedestrian-related vehicular crashes. In an effort to help the City find a solution to this issue, ARDOT staff suggested that TAP could be a good funding opportunity for the City," Miller said. "The City sprung to action and submitted a TAP application that same year, which was selected for funding."

The project will connect two existing sidewalk sections

and add a pedestrian bridge along Highway 10. The bridge, which will be 113 feet long when completed, will make the route more accessible to individuals regardless of their mobility.

While all of the TAP projects aim to fund transportation alternatives, RTP projects specifically focus on recreational trails. The Searcy Riverside Park Boat Launch Improvements Project was funded in 2024 for \$330,000 as an RTP project.

After completing a two-year long master planning process, the City of Searcy identified several priority areas to develop, including the City's largest park, Riverside Park.

"Park improvements and trail development were high on the community-identified list of priorities in the Master Plan," Miller said. "With all of the opportunities for improvement, the City identified the park's proximity to the Little Red River as one of the key features of the park."

This project will improve accessibility for vehicles to the boat launch and provide access for motorized and non-motorized boats. The City will also build an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-accessible terrace along the river for riverside fishing with the goal of making the boat launch accessible for everyone. ■

Dear ARDOT

SNOW CLEARING APPRECIATION

I just wanted to write and compliment your Department for the excellent job they did in clearing the roads after our most recent snowstorm. We live in Fort Smith, after moving here from California. My husband and I were most impressed with the work that was done by your staff to make sure that the roads were as clear of snow as possible and safe for drivers.

We had to drive from Fort Smith to Van Buren on Sunday to attend church and were very happy to see the condition of the 540 Interstate and all of the streets that we drove on to reach our destination. Thank you for doing such a great job; I am aware that your staff had to work around the clock to keep us safe on the roads and this was much appreciated!

Also, having moved here from California as previously stated, we are very pleased with the great job your Department does on keeping the roads maintained so that we can enjoy a smooth ride. In California, there was a special tax added that was supposed to go for improving the highways and freeways, but that never materialized and so the interstates and intrastates continue to be rough with no improvement in sight. So again, thank you for the great job you do in not only maintaining the roadways but in keeping them clean as well. Please share our sincere thanks with all your staff. Keep up the good work!

— Pilar Samoulian, Fort Smith

EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION

Last Thursday, 1-16-25, I had a blowout on I-30 at Bryant. While digging out my spare a DOT team shows up behind me. Being on the side of the interstate alone and helpless – the two angels appeared, reassuring [me] they were there to help. They had lights flashing to make aware to oncoming motorists to stay clear. The young man, without me asking, went to work helping me to get the spare out. He and the young lady changed out the shred. Their hearts were big enough to help me even though it wasn't in their job description. I have a grateful heart and prayers for all ARDOT employees.

— Karen Laing, Little Rock



JT Thomas, Maintenance Aide II, and Lee Bailey, Maintenance Aide I, of District 6 in Saline County.

FACEBOOK COMMENTS

That's some amazing work to see ARDOT do everything they can to keep the public moving. Thank you to everyone who has been working to keep the roads open.

Mark Eckelkamp (April 2025)

Y'all are doing great. Thank you for all your hard work. I drove all over Arkansas today and saw you guys out working in this wind.

Brad J. LaBorde (March 2025)



APPRECIATION FOR YOUR SUPPORT DURING SEVERE THUNDERSTORM

Dear Team,

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Arkansas Department of Transportation for your invaluable help, cooperation, and participation during the severe thunderstorm that impacted our region on April 5, 2025.

Your efforts during the day shift from 0600 to 1600 were instrumental in ensuring the safety of our roads and communities. The collaboration between our agencies allowed us to respond swiftly and effectively to the challenges posed by the weather conditions.

Thank you for your dedication and professionalism. We could not have managed this situation without your support.

Sincerely,

Sgt. Cleyton McDonald #192

Sergeant Post 3, Troop A

Arkansas State Police Troop A Highway Patrol

On March 31st a crew picked up some large furniture that had been dumped on Hwy 94 East of Rogers. I wish the people that left it there would have been caught. Thank you to you all for clearing it up and making it look beautiful again.

Tess Amorelli Beasley (March 2025)

ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

ARDOT'S ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY PROGRAM WAS CREATED IN 1987 TO SOLICIT PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN CONTROLLING LITTER ALONG SELECTED SECTIONS OF STATE HIGHWAYS. Since that time, more than 4,500 organizations have adopted stretches of Arkansas highways. The program has the impact that it does because of its exceptional volunteers.

In each edition of Arkansas Highways we spotlight an Adopt-A-Highway volunteer. This edition's volunteer spotlight features the **Bella Vista Police Explorer Post 3771**. A part of the program since 2017, the group adopted a section of Highway 340 in Benton County.

We extend a warm thank you to the Bella Vista Police Explorer Post 3771 for their dedication and service to the Adopt-A-Highway program.

Learn more about Adopt-A-Highway

Scan here!





OUT & ABOUT

CALENDAR OF EVENTS AROUND THE STATE

As you travel Arkansas over the next few months, consider checking out some of these listed events. Our state is full of interesting things to do, no matter what highway you take. For additional event listings, check out [Arkansas.com/events](https://www.arkansas.com/events)

- * **MAGNOLIA BLOSSOM FESTIVAL AND WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STEAK COOK-OFF:** What started off as the Sidewalk Art Show in 1950 is now a weekend full of steak and entertainment. This week-long festival has something for everyone, whether you're a dog-lover or an art connoisseur. • May 10 – May 17
- * **FAYETTEVILLE STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL:** Downtown Fayetteville Coalition is hosting its 2nd annual Fayetteville Strawberry Festival on May 18. This event is the gift that keeps on giving, from specialty cocktails, pie competitions, live performances, and more. Local farms will have strawberries for sale. • May 18
- * **2025 MEMORIAL DAY FIREWORKS DISPLAY:** Let Lake Hamilton be your destination this Memorial Day for all things fireworks. Load up the boat and set sail for a major display, and don't forget to tune in to US97 Country (97.5FM) to hear what songs they've synced the fireworks to. • May 25
- * **RODEO OF THE OZARKS:** Saddle up and ride at this year's Rodeo of the Ozarks! Each performance will feature heart-stopping rodeo events – from bareback riding to steer wrestling. No matter how old you are, there's something for everyone at the rodeo. There will be children's events, hilarious clown features, and delicious food that gives you a bite of the south. • June 25 – June 28
- * **FAT COW 5K FUN RUN:** New, improved, and back for the second year – Fat Cow 5K Fun Run! Join for a ton of fun. There will be timed results and finisher awards as well as a free health fair and a watermelon U-Pick on the farm. You don't want to miss out on the only 5K in Arkansas where you'll get to see farm animals as spectators throughout the course. • July 26

MAY 10 - MAY 17

MAGNOLIA BLOSSOM FESTIVAL AND WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STEAK COOK-OFF
Historic Downtown Magnolia Square
Magnolia, AR

MAY 18

FAYETTEVILLE STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL
Downtown Fayetteville Square
Fayetteville, AR

MAY 25

2025 MEMORIAL DAY FIREWORKS DISPLAY
Lake Hamilton
Hot Springs, AR

JUNE 25 - JUNE 28

RODEO OF THE OZARKS
Parsons Stadium
Springdale, AR

JULY 26

FAT COW 5K FUN RUN
St. Joseph Farmstead
North Little Rock, AR



DISTRICT 5

CONSTRUCTION

CORNER



WEST PLAINS BRIDGE & GRADING, LLC WAS AWARDED A \$5.1 MILLION CONTRACT TO REPLACE TWO REINFORCED CONCRETE BOX CULVERTS ALONG HIGHWAY 175 AND HIGHWAY 175S IN CHEROKEE VILLAGE, LOCATED IN SHARP COUNTY. The project, which began construction in December 2023, is designed to raise the roadway elevation and aims to prevent road closures caused by high water conditions.

This section of Highway 175 serves as a vital route for the citizens of Cherokee Village and the surrounding areas. When the road is closed due to flooding, travelers must take a 15-mile detour. The improvements will provide long-term reliability and safer travel conditions for residents and commuters.

Additionally, the project will help mitigate flood-related disruptions that have historically impacted this area, reducing emergency response times and other travel inconveniences.

A unique feature of this project is the construction of a weir upstream of the reinforced concrete box culverts. A weir is a low dam built across a body of water to help control water flow, regulate water levels, and reduce erosion. The weir will retain water and allow a pool to form, maintaining the aesthetic appearance of the area. By incorporating this element, the project aligns with the natural landscape and ensures the local ecosystem remains balanced while enhancing flood management capabilities.

Work on the project has been progressing efficiently, with construction already surpassing a significant milestone of being 51 percent complete while only using 29 percent of the allotted time. This project is estimated to be complete in March of 2026.

Once completed, the improved section of Highway 175 will offer enhanced safety, reliability, and accessibility for the community. ■





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