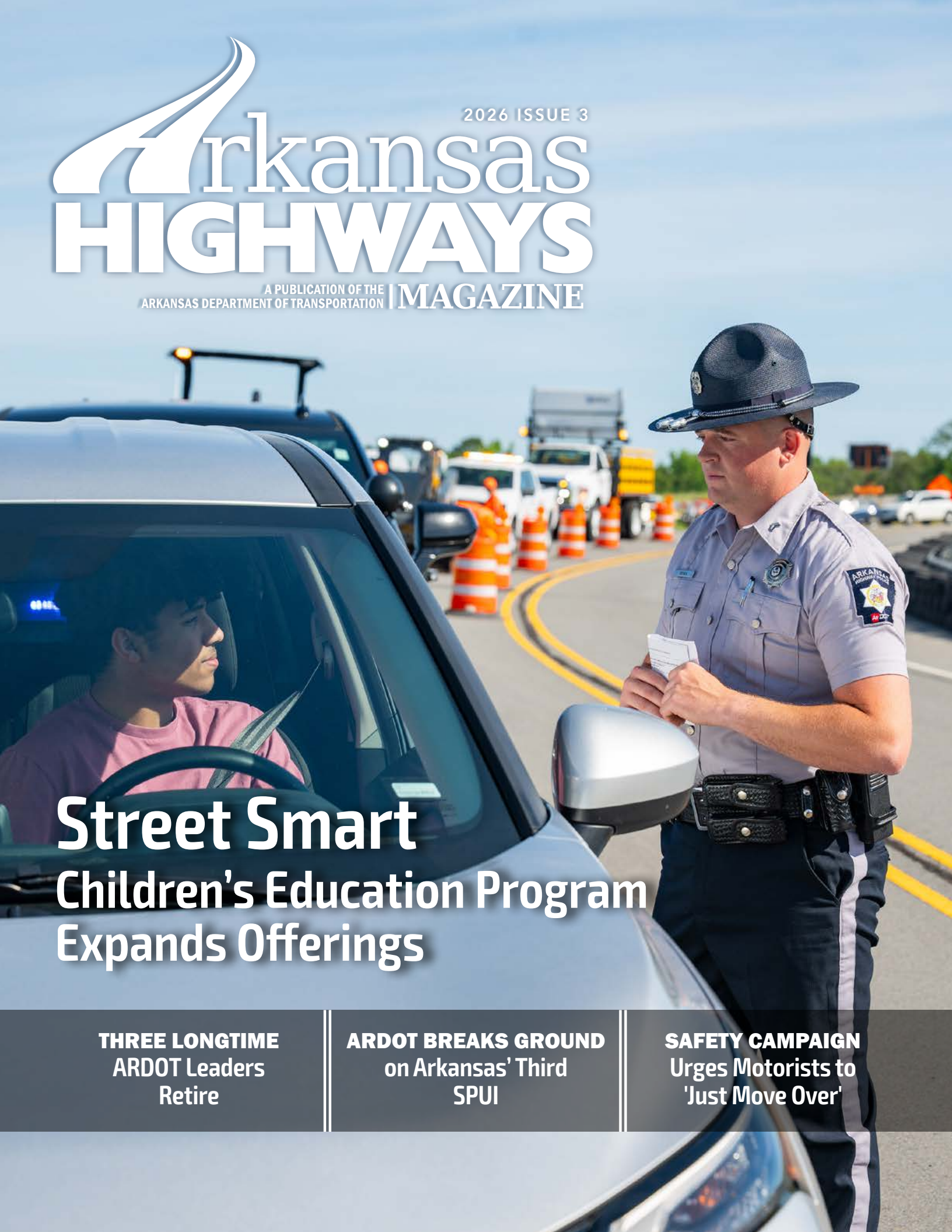


Arkansas HIGHWAYS

2026 ISSUE 3

A PUBLICATION OF THE
ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION | MAGAZINE



Street Smart Children's Education Program Expands Offerings

**THREE LONGTIME
ARDOT Leaders
Retire**

**ARDOT BREAKS GROUND
on Arkansas' Third
SPUI**

**SAFETY CAMPAIGN
Urges Motorists to
'Just Move Over'**

Hello, Arkansas Traveler.

IN THIS ISSUE YOU WILL READ ABOUT AN EVENTFUL AND PRODUCTIVE SUMMER FOR TRANSPORTATION IN ARKANSAS. Department staff and partners are engaged in sizeable construction projects, safety campaigns, educational programs, and beautification efforts. You will also learn about future endeavors that bring optimism and excitement.

Over the past few months, we were joined by many supporters who helped cut ribbons on long-awaited and transformational construction projects. These celebrations were extra special because of the great turnout from community members optimistic about the promise these investments mean for the future. Roadway safety curriculum was developed for high school students and it is my sincere belief that this material will reduce fatal and serious injuries in our young people. In partnership with Arkansas Speaker of the House Brian Evans, Arkansas State Police, and industry partners, a new educational campaign was created urging drivers to move over or safely slow down for emergency vehicles stopped on the shoulder.

In July, we said goodbye to three long-tenured Department leaders who made lasting impacts at the Department. These gentlemen’s legacy of service will resonate for years to come. The effort to beautify The Natural State gained momentum with the addition of the Office of Keep Arkansas Beautiful to the ARDOT team. This momentum was amplified by Arkansas Highway Police Division’s emphasis on reducing the amount of debris and litter along roadways through education and enforcement of our state laws concerning covered loads.

Thank you to all those who braved the Arkansas heat with us to celebrate success and progress. We appreciate the educators who are using Street Smart materials in their classrooms to instill safe behaviors for new drivers. Thank you to those who made the choice to limit distractions behind the wheel and to those who decided to “Just Move Over” for a vehicle stopped on the shoulder of the highway. Our choices shape the future. Together, we choose to make Arkansas safer, stronger, and more resilient.

Jared D. Wiley, P.E., Director



FRONT COVER:
A scene from one of ARDOT’s new Street Smart videos.

BACK COVER:
The new Highway 65B Bridge over Crooked Creek in Harrison.

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Crews film Street Smart videos.

STREET SMART

Children's Education Program Expands Offerings

BY ELLEN COULTER

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION (NHTSA), CAR CRASHES ARE A LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR TEENS IN THE UNITED STATES.

Whether it be distractions from devices, speeding, not wearing a seatbelt, or driving under the influence, there are many pressures and temptations facing younger drivers. These dangers, coupled with an overall lack of driving experience, pose a major threat to that age group – something many parents are keenly aware of, but not the teens themselves.

"I don't think kids know that being behind the wheel is the greatest risk they will take on a daily basis. There are real consequences tied to mistakes made in the driver's seat and they need to be aware of the risks," Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) Director Jared Wiley said.

"For many students, middle school is when they begin moving through their communities with more independence, whether as pedestrians, passengers, bike riders, or soon-to-be drivers," Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) Secretary Jacob Oliva said. "Teaching road safety at this stage helps students build responsible habits before they are behind the wheel. It is a practical, life-protecting investment that can help keep Arkansas students, families, and communities safer."

ARDOT's Strategic Highway Safety Plan embraces a Safe System Approach to roadway safety. The Safe System Approach addresses safety holistically, considering the need

for Safe Road Users, Safe Vehicles, Safe Speeds, Safe Roads, and Post-Crash Care. Street Smart prepares students for their role as Safe Road Users.

"At ARDOT, we work in the engineering realm of roadway safety. We also work with our Highway Police to enforce laws," Wiley said. "But education is something that we've really not jumped off into until recently, and it's an important pillar of roadway safety."

The challenge becomes how to connect with younger drivers about road safety.

That's where Street Smart comes in.

WHAT IS STREET SMART?

ARDOT, in partnership with ADE, developed the Street Smart program in 2025 to increase education and awareness around road safety in children – with the goal being to educate children about roadway safety before they are ever behind the wheel of a vehicle.

Street Smart first became available for grades six through eight for the 2025 – 2026 school year. The ready-made, free program includes presentations, note-taking handouts, classroom activities and experiments, interactive games, and videos featuring real Arkansas teenagers. More than 500 requests for materials came through during the first school year it was offered.

Now, Street Smart is expanding to include a slate of new materials for grades 9 through 12 for the 2026 – 2027 school year.

(continued on page 6)



Crews film a video for Street Smart featuring Arkansas Highway Police Corporal Brandon Bybee.



ARDOT Director Jared Wiley speaks at the press conference announcing the launch of Street Smart in 2025.

“Street Smart stands to improve safety for generations to come.”

— ARDOT Director Jared Wiley

driver navigating around pedestrians, including sharing the road, right of way, stopping distance, and work zone safety.

The materials for sixth through eighth grade include a total of two interactive website games and nine videos, as well as 10 lessons per grade level.

Street Smart has received two awards for its video content production – a national, silver-level Telly Award; and an international, gold-level Hermes Creative Award.

“Those awards validated for me what I had already seen. This product is phenomenal. I’m proud of it. I’m proud of our team,” Wiley said. “This really gives a lot of credence to the quality of the material. I cannot wait to see measurable impacts to safety all across our state.”

ARDOT has brought that same, award-winning energy into the second phase of Street Smart for high schoolers. Street Smart for grades 9 through 12 comes as one package of materials to be used at any point throughout a student’s high school career. Topics include traffic laws and rules of the road, emergency preparedness, work zone safety, speeding, impaired driving, littering, what to do if you’re pulled over, sharing the road, interacting with commercial motor vehicles, navigating roundabouts, and more.

The new materials for grades 9 through 12 include one interactive trivia quiz game, nine videos, and 12 lessons – to be debuted for the 2026 – 2027 school year.

“High school lessons allow us to reinforce the habits students began building in middle school at the point

when the risks and responsibilities become more immediate,” Oliva said. “Road safety moves from something students have learned about to something they are actively practicing as new drivers.”

Street Smart has plans for an additional expansion into elementary school – completing a fully built-out K–12 program.

“Expanding Street Smart into K–5 is equally important because safety habits begin forming long before students are old enough to drive,” Oliva added. “Younger students are pedestrians, bike riders, and passengers every day, and early instruction on crossing safely, buckling up, staying alert, and understanding traffic expectations helps establish habits that can last a lifetime.”

“That third phase starts at kindergarten and goes up to middle school. I think that is going to be especially innovative because we’re going to reach kids really early,” Wiley said. “My desire is that every student in Arkansas sees this at the appropriate time.”

The Street Smart program offers a quality and worthwhile product with the goal of one day becoming a household name in schools.

“Street Smart stands to improve safety for generations to come. I hope one day way in the future, those who come after us at ARDOT are producing an update for Street Smart with new kids and new ideas,” Wiley said. “When that day comes, this material will have educated and influenced an entire generation of Arkansans.”

For more information about Street Smart, visit [StreetSmartAR.org](https://www.streetsmartar.org). ■

The content is designed to evolve with the students each year as they grow and develop – starting with the safety basics in grade six, more advanced safety knowledge in grade seven, preparing for driving in grade eight, and culminating with actively driving and encountering various road scenarios in grades 9 through 12.

All of the subject matter in Street Smart was developed alongside ADE personnel and a panel of real educators from across Arkansas. The topics were chosen based on safety data from ARDOT’s Strategic Highway Safety Plan and the methods of teaching those topics were determined by ADE and the panel of educators.

“Street Smart was developed by the Arkansas Department of Transportation, which recognized the need for a road safety curriculum that could be easily used in classrooms and aligned to Arkansas academic standards. ADE became involved to support that instructional connection by reviewing the lessons, activities, and materials through an education lens and helping ensure they are

practical, standards-aligned, and ready for teachers to use with students across the state,” Oliva said.

Educators can access the content by visiting [StreetSmartAR.org](https://www.streetsmartar.org). The interactive web games and videos are available at any time on the website. To download the classroom materials and answer keys, educators may fill out the request form on the website, and the materials will be emailed to them instantly.

“The middle school material we’re putting out is making impacts,” Wiley said. “I know that as we expand into this next phase, it’s going to resonate with even more students. So, I’m glad we’re pushing ahead to this next chapter.”

AN EDUCATOR’S PERSPECTIVE

Jeff Bise, a middle school teacher in the Heber Springs School District, used the Street Smart program with his eighth-grade students during the 2025 – 2026 school year. Bise teaches a course that covers Hunter’s Education, Boater’s Education, and Driver’s Education.

“We cover about six weeks of each

for the semester. It’s an elective class they can take,” Bise explained.

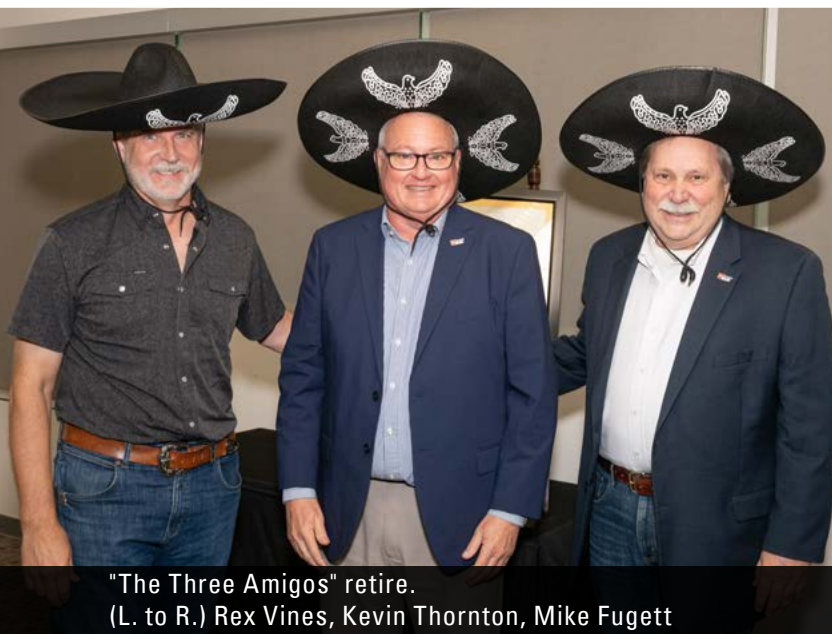
Bise noted that he struggled teaching the Driver’s Education portion of the class.

“It’s been 40-plus years since I took the driving test, and I was pretty lost as far as what to help the kids with,” Bise said. “Going through the driver’s manual got pretty mundane. It was boring for me, and I know it was boring for the kids.”

A parent heard about the Street Smart program, shared it with the school’s principal, and the information was passed on to Bise.

“So I took a look at it and thought, this will help,” Bise said. “I used it probably once or twice a week, depending on the week. There wasn’t much leg work required. Just pull up the lesson, go through it, and open the floor for discussion. I think it helped to drive some communication. They liked the videos and liked that it was more interactive. I really have not seen anything like the Street Smart program before.”

Anecdotes like this from Bise have reinforced the mission of the Street



THREE

LONGTIME ARDOT LEADERS RETIRE

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL

THREE OF THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S (ARDOT) LONG-TIME LEADERS RETIRED ON FRIDAY, JULY 24: KEVIN THORNTON, CHIEF OF ADMINISTRATION; REX VINES, CHIEF ENGINEER FOR OPERATIONS; AND MIKE FUGETT, ASSISTANT CHIEF ENGINEER FOR DESIGN. IF YOU TOTAL THE NUMBER OF YEARS SERVED BY THESE THREE – IT ADDS UP TO OVER A CENTURY'S WORTH OF EXPERIENCE WITH THE DEPARTMENT.

Through their leadership and expertise, ARDOT has become even stronger, helping prepare successors for what tomorrow brings. Before they could ride off into the sunset, we caught up with each of them to discuss their notable careers with ARDOT.

Kevin Thornton, Chief of Administration

40+ YEARS OF SERVICE

FROM INTERN TO CHIEF OF ADMINISTRATION

Kevin Thornton began his career with ARDOT as an engineering intern in the summer of 1985. Before graduation, ARDOT offered him a full-time position in the Roadway Design Division for \$21,008.

When he got the job offer, Thornton was excited and shared the letter from ARDOT with his grandfather.

"This is one of my favorite stories. My grandfather asked, 'What's that number?' And I said, 'Well, that's how much they're going to pay me.' And he said, 'How many years do

you have to work before they're going to pay you that much money?'" Thornton said.

His grandfather thought that he was joking with him about the amount because it was such a good starting salary for a young person, which is something Thornton says he has always been grateful for.

When Thornton replied that this would be his annual salary, he recalls his grandfather saying, "Oh boy, ain't nobody going to pay you that much money for one year."

40-YEAR ORIENTATION OF THE DEPARTMENT

As a young college graduate and a new employee, Thornton never thought he'd still be with ARDOT 40 years later. He says he thinks one of the reasons he has stayed for so long is because he's worked in a variety of areas and roles throughout the years.

"Every time I've taken on a new position and new responsibilities, it just reinforced that there's so much more to learn," Thornton said. "There's so much that we do, and so many dedicated people who do outstanding work every day."

In high school, Thornton enjoyed math and science classes but never set out to be an engineer. When he was getting ready to graduate, his high school counselor suggested that he try engineering.

"It was just a natural fit," Thornton said. "It's a discipline that is focused on solving problems. When you're able to solve a problem – either for yourself or for somebody else – that's the best part of being an engineer."

In 1987, Thornton transferred from Roadway Design to the Hot Springs Resident Engineer Office, where he advanced to Construction Field Engineer I and later to Construction

Field Engineer II. He credits his start in Roadway Design for giving him knowledge and experience that he has utilized throughout his career.

"Working in design gave me such a better understanding of how to build roads," Thornton said. "I understood why they are designed the way they are, which helped me to be a better construction engineer."

In 1990, he transferred to Camden, where he served as an Advanced Construction Field Engineer, and within a year, he was promoted to the Assistant Resident Engineer position. Later, he made a lateral move back to the Hot Springs Resident Engineer Office. Then, he was promoted to Staff Construction Engineer in 2006 and SiteManager System Administrator in 2007.

Eventually, he transferred to the Programs and Contracts Division (now the Program Management Division) where, in 2011, he was promoted to Division Head. From there, he became Assistant Chief Engineer for Planning, then Assistant Chief of Administration, and finally Chief of Administration in 2023.

"Moving into administration, which is not typically an area of the Department where an engineer ends up, had its own challenges," Thornton said. "It also had its own opportunities and provided yet another chance to learn more about everything we do. As I like to say, it kind of completes my 40-year orientation of the Department."

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

Since his start at ARDOT, Thornton has seen how advances in technology have impacted everything from communication to managing construction projects.

While he was working in construction, ARDOT implemented SiteManager, a comprehensive construction management tool that provides data entry, tracking, and analysis of contract data. SiteManager was on the cutting edge of technology and replaced many of the paper reports that the Department was creating, distributing, and analyzing daily.

"It made things more efficient and more accurate, and it reduced the risk of a mistake or lost information. It was, and is, a much more dependable system," Thornton said.

MORE CHALLENGES, MORE OPPORTUNITIES

Helping to manage the day-to-day use of the SiteManager software led to Thornton meeting former ARDOT Director Lorie Tudor. She was the Assistant Division Head of Programs and Contracts at the time and introduced him to planning and financial project development. The rest is history.

"She brought me over to the Planning side, and that led me to be able to move up and to become the Assistant Chief of Planning," Thornton said. "That was when the world really opened up. I'm so grateful to her for being willing to give me that opportunity."



Kevin Thornton



(L. to R.) Arkansas Highway Commissioner Jerry L. Halsey, Jr., Kevin Thornton, ARDOT Director Jared Wiley, Arkansas Highway Commissioner Marie Holder

When looking back on his career, one of the first things Thornton says comes to mind is his gratefulness for all the opportunities that he has had in his different roles in the Department. From being involved at the local, state, and national level at different times to witnessing advances in technology and materials, Thornton reflects on the lasting impact of it all and the positive improvements that ARDOT was able to make in our statewide transportation system.

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Kevin Thornton participates in ARDOT's 2026 Spring Clean-Up.

"You begin to think about all the people whose quality of life has been positively impacted because of the improvements," Thornton said. "To know that economic development has followed and flows into the families of Arkansas, raising their standard of living, and now, to see that benefit continue to future generations, to know that it will continue long after I'm gone – that's very rewarding."

AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

Thornton has had several mentors throughout the years. He worries that if he starts mentioning names, he'll forget someone who was important to his success.

"I am grateful for everyone that has shared not only information about the job, but also about how they approach life," he said. "I truly believe that my life is better for having worked with all of them."

He reflects on his career as an incredible journey with lifelong learning.

"It's not just about the experience you gain in the job you have—it's about how you do that job," Thornton said. "Success is built on a commitment to accuracy, timeliness, integrity, and grit. If I could offer one piece of advice to my successor—or to anyone beginning or continuing a career in public service—it would be to pursue those qualities every day and to approach your position as an opportunity to serve others."

RETIREMENT

The day after retirement, Thornton married Tammy Catlett. They enjoyed a honeymoon trip to Europe, Thornton's first trip outside the United States.

As far as what comes next, he said, "I've been thinking I would like to find some organizations to volunteer with, find out what I'm passionate about, and continue to serve."



(L. to R.) ARDOT Director Jared Wiley and Rex Vines.

Rex Vines, Chief Engineer for Operations

33+ YEARS OF SERVICE

NO PLANS TO SLOW DOWN

Rex Vines began working at ARDOT a week after he graduated from Arkansas State University (A-State) in 1993. He didn't attend his graduation ceremony because he didn't want to wait in line, so he had his diploma mailed to him.

Knowing that, it only seems fitting that Vines doesn't plan to slow down in retirement.

Vines said. "I'm going to continue to work – just in consulting, and I'm moving to Fort Worth, Texas."

DESTINED TO BECOME AN ENGINEER

While growing up in the rural farming community of Hickory Ridge, Arkansas, an engineer was not something Vines aspired to be.

"I wanted to be a basketball coach," Vines said. "My dad was a math teacher and a basketball coach, so that was originally my plan."

His dad convinced him that he should try something different. After overhearing his dad talking with a friend about engineering, he decided that he would give it a try because he liked math and science.

"Growing up, I always liked building things," Vines said. "I lived on a farm, so I was always playing in a creek, building dams, and creating ponds. That naturally came to me."

UP THROUGH THE RANKS

Vines began with ARDOT as a Civil Engineering Technician in the Wynne Resident Engineer Office. He didn't have high hopes for a long career with ARDOT.

"When I started, the highest position that I was able to

take with my degree was Assistant Resident Engineer because Arkansas State's degree was a Bachelor of Science in Engineering with a concentration in civil engineering," Vines said. "Everything above Assistant Resident Engineer required a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering. That slight, minor wording made a difference."

After changes to the educational background requirements for ARDOT's engineering positions, Vines was able to advance within the Department. First, he was promoted to Construction Field Engineer I in 1994 and Construction Field Engineer II in 1995. In 1997, he transferred to the Texarkana Resident Engineer Office as an Advanced Construction Field Engineer and became the Assistant Resident Engineer in 2000.

"When I moved to Texarkana, we were building Interstate 49 from Texarkana to Shreveport, that's why I took that position," Vines said. "It was all new-location interstate. I worked as hard as I've ever worked but had the most fun as I've ever had at the Department."

From there, he continued to advance to Resident Engineer in Osceola in 2001, then back to Wynne as District Construction Engineer in 2004, District Maintenance Engineer in 2008, and District Engineer in 2014.

"I've worked in southwest, northeast, and central Arkansas and been exposed to a lot of really great people with ARDOT," Vines said. "I've said many times that you don't succeed in this business, in this world, unless you have a servant's heart. There are a lot of servants with ARDOT. The wealth of service that we have never ceases to amaze me."

After working for three different ARDOT Districts (District 1, District 3, and District 10), Vines was promoted to Assistant Chief Engineer for Operations in 2019. In 2021, he was named Deputy Director and Chief Engineer. Then, in 2023, he became Chief Engineer for Operations.

"There are a lot of opportunities within the Department if you're willing to take risks and seize them," Vines said. "But if, like with any job, you are satisfied with the status quo, that's what you're going to get. If you're willing to work, there are a lot of opportunities."

He says that the best part of being an engineer is being part of the solution.

"We identify problems and find solutions," Vines said. "That's the part I enjoy the most – just trying to find the best way. I think that's true at every level of engineering, from the time you start working out in the field solving problems to this level where you are solving big policy problems."

THREE WEEKS INTO THE JOB

Vines had been Chief Engineer for three weeks when during a routine inspection on May 11, 2021 a crack was found in the structure of the Interstate 40 (I-40) Hernando de Soto Bridge over the Mississippi River between West Memphis, Arkansas, and Memphis, Tennessee.

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Rex Vines tours the Interstate 40 Hernando de Soto Bridge over the Mississippi River with former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg.

“Three weeks – and at that point, I’m still looking for my office every day,” Vines said.

Former ARDOT Director Lorie Tudor was in a similar situation – she’d only been director a little over a year.

“That was, easily, the most difficult time in my career,” Vines said. “Lorie and I developed a really strong bond through that, and we really had to rely on each other. It was a tough time for everybody.”

The discovery forced an emergency closure of the bridge, followed by an in-depth investigation into why the fracture hadn’t been discovered and reported in previous inspections.

“When something like that happens, it is a tough call, ‘Who’s truly to blame?’” he said.

Vines continued, “Besides all the other stuff going on, you’ve got the people that are involved whose livelihoods and careers have been affected. That’s such a hard balance to strike.”

Vines and other ARDOT leaders faced the situation head-on with transparency, a full investigation into what needed to change, and new policies and procedures to prevent a similar situation in the future.

COLLABORATIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Vines says that his proudest accomplishment with ARDOT is the culture change in its relationship with the contracting industry. He describes this relationship as becoming more collaborative and more of a partnering relationship.

“I would like to say the Spec Book rewrite that we’re doing

as well, there is so much credit to be given out, there are so many people who have spent many hours making the update come to fruition, but I’d have to give up so much credit to Chad Adams, ARDOT Assistant Chief Engineer for Construction because he’s really done the heavy lifting and the legwork on it,” he said.

The Spec Book is the Arkansas Standard Specifications for Highway Construction, which was last published in 2014.

“The goal of updating the Spec Book was to codify the partner relationship that we felt like we had developed – the changing atmosphere, the culture,” Vines said. “We’ve tried to balance the risk a contractor carries so that they don’t have to worry about how we’re going to handle an unexpected situation – they know up front that if this unexpected thing happens, the Department is going to handle it this way.”

Vines says that former Director Tudor warned him it was “a big lift.”

“She knew in her wisdom how big a lift that was,” he said. “Even after being warned, it was a much bigger lift than I expected.”

Vines started work on the rewrite at the end of 2023. It wasn’t published before he left, but a final draft was ready for the next step in ARDOT’s rigorous testing procedures prior to approval and publication.

RECRUITMENT AND LEGACY

As a leader, Vines has been responsible for identifying and promoting many of the District Engineers and Operations leadership.

“I’m really proud of the hands I’m leaving Operations in,” he said. “I’ve always heard if you surround yourself with good people, you’ll be successful. I believe I did that well. Especially if you consider Steve Frisbee, ARDOT Assistant Chief Engineer for Maintenance, and Chad Adams, ARDOT Assistant Chief Engineer for Construction. These two are good men, great leaders, and true servants.”

He advises his successors to “Be patient with the process and be patient with the people. Don’t take life too seriously.”

ON TO THE NEXT ADVENTURE

Just like he did after college, Vines plans to start work soon after retirement.

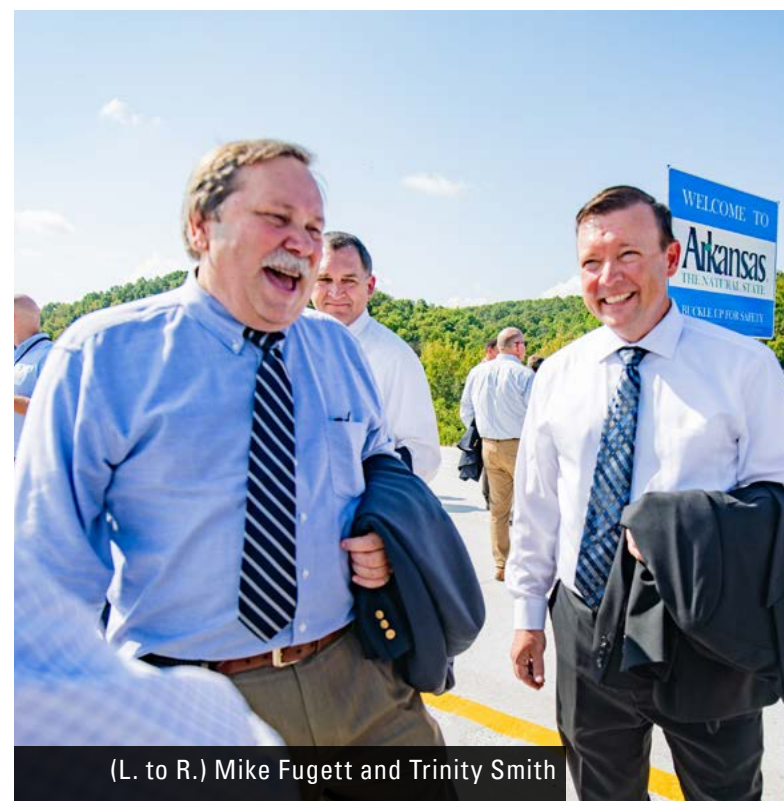
“I’m probably just going straight to work – I might take a week off,” he said. “I just have to keep working.”

He isn’t the kind of person who sits still well.

“My dad has never quit working and that’s why I think he’s still moving as good as he is at 85. He doesn’t sit still,” Vines said.

In addition to a new job, Vines will also have a new home. Moving to Fort Worth puts him closer to his adult sons, Luke and Matt.

“I’m looking forward to being close to my boys,” Vines said.



(L. to R.) Mike Fugett and Trinity Smith

Mike Fugett, Assistant Chief Engineer for Design

40+ YEARS OF SERVICE

A DOOR OPENING

When Mike Fugett graduated from Memphis State University (now University of Memphis) with his bachelor’s degree in civil engineering, he knew he wanted to work at ARDOT. He had always lived in Central Arkansas and was familiar with the Department, so it seemed like a natural progression.

“I wanted to work in the Materials Division,” Fugett said. “I had a solid foundation in soil mechanics from one of the best soil engineers at the time, Dr. Thomas S. Fry. Under his leadership at the university, we won awards for concrete and mix designs.”

Fugett also had a friend whose family owned a materials and testing company in Little Rock. He spent a lot of time in the lab with his friend at the family business, testing concrete cylinders and asphalt, as well as running other tests.

After graduation, Fugett went to the Department to inquire about a job and was given a tour of the Materials Division. When the tour ended, he was told they didn’t have a position for him.

A few days later, the Roadway Design Engineer called him and told him he’d been looking through his college transcript.

“He said, ‘Mike, we’re starting Alma to Fayetteville (Alma to Fayetteville was the start of Interstate 540, connecting Interstate 40 and Highway 71), a new interstate. Would you be interested in coming to Roadway Design and helping us with that?’ And I said, ‘Well, what do you do?’”

That was the beginning of Fugett’s career with ARDOT and his career in design.

“So, 40 years later, I’ve always been on the design side,” he said. “God’s got a plan – He closed one door but opened up another one and that became one of the best doors I was ever given the chance to go through.”

DRAFTING TO DESIGN

As a kid, Fugett always loved drawing and thought he wanted to be a drafter. He took drafting classes in high school and at the University of Arkansas – Little Rock. While there, he became friends with two students whose dads were engineers. They told him about engineering and how he could solve problems and still be able to draw.

“Everything was done by hand with an ink pen,” he said. “Back in the day, there were only a few engineers in the Design Division, but there were a lot of really talented men

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(L. to R.) ARDOT Director Jared Wiley and Mike Fugett.



– some of them artists – who were as knowledgeable as an engineer. They just didn’t have the degree. Some of them were the best of the best.”

The artists were the division’s drafters. The engineers gave their plans to the drafters, who drew the plans on full set sheets.

COMPUTERS AND CHANGE

Prior to computers, it was considered a big deal for an engineer or draftsman to have a calculator.

“If you had a calculator, that was the cat’s meow,” Fugett said. “When computers came in, there were only two per floor, and they were as big as a desk. Our drafters had to sign up for a time to be able to use the computer to do their work, and that’s where it started.”

When the Department began to design the Interstate 540 (I-540) route from Alma to Fayetteville, engineers were still using paper plans. According to Fugett, computers were by far the biggest change to highway design during his 40-year career.

“There was a computer program that we purchased that had the capability of drawing the existing ground on a piece of paper,” Fugett said. “We knew the center line of Alma to Fayetteville from our plans, and this new program told us what the ground looked like under that line. So, we took a roll of paper and taped it on the wall in the hall, from one end to the other, and made one turn, one end to the other, and we used a roll of thread to set the grade for the interstate.”

THE BEST OF THE BEST

Fugett advises college students and recent graduates to find something they love to do and stick with it.

“If you’re fortunate to find that in your career, that’s a true blessing,” he said. “I was fortunate – something put me on the path, and I really, truly loved what I did.”

In addition to loving his job, Fugett also stayed because of the relationships he formed at ARDOT. He enjoyed collaborating with other engineers and solving problems together.

“I had the best of the best. I really did,” he said. “There was no way I was going to leave this.”

MEMORABLE PROJECTS

Fugett has been a part of designing more highway projects than one can easily count. From plan preparation to facility improvements, there isn’t much that he hasn’t been a part of in some way or other.

“You can look back and say, ‘Yeah, I was involved in that, I was involved in this.’” Fugett said. “We’ve done a lot of good things for Arkansas.”

One of the first big jobs he worked on was widening Highway 10.

“Now, I get to watch the young guys widen it even more,” he said.

To Fugett, the memories are good ones. But talking to him, you also sense how closing out such a long career is bittersweet.

“Now, we’re going back and updating, widening, reevaluating all the stuff that I did years ago,” he said. “That’s what helps you decide, ‘Hey, it’s time for me to go.’ When jobs you did are being redone.”

NOTHING WE CAN’T DO

Fugett is a firm believer that there isn’t a problem out there that can’t be solved.

“As designers, a lot of what we do is solve problems,” he said. “The more projects you’re exposed to, the more problems you’re exposed to, the more problems you solve. When you get to my age, for most of the decisions you are making, you’ve already used the same solution before, and you know it works.”

His advice for future engineers and administrators is “There’s nothing you can’t do. There’s always a solution.” He also encourages his successors to talk to their staff and let them try new solutions.

“Knowing there’s nothing you can’t do – listen to your staff,” Fugett said. “They’ll bring you something – a solution or a problem with a solution – and it might not be the way that you would have done it, but if there’s nothing wrong with it, then let’s try it and see.”

He credits his mentors and teachers for his success as an engineer: Bob Walters, Phil McConnell, Charlie Clements, and Dave Burnett.

“They communicated with me,” he said. “They were approachable. They cared about their staff and the product

we were producing. They expected a lot out of us, but that’s what made us the best. And they were truly gifted engineers.”

RETIREMENT PLANS

Fugett doesn’t have any concrete plans for retirement.

“Hopefully, my wife and I will figure it out. She was my best friend when we were teenagers, and she’s still my best friend,” Fugett said.

However, he has ideas of things he’d like to explore in retirement.

“I have a lot of wannabes,” he said. “I want to be a trout fisherman. I want to be a world traveler. I want to be a great granddaddy.”

When asked what his favorite highway is, Fugett didn’t hesitate in naming the Pig Trail, Scenic Highway 23. He talked about his love of Arkansas’ scenic highways.

“There’s nothing better than just getting in the car and driving,” he said. “Back in the day, before kids, my wife and I would throw a bag in the car and drive. I would look at projects under construction or ones that were being designed. She would do her thing over in the passenger seat. We’d find a place to spend the night. We still do it today – just get in the car and drive.”

Between his love of driving on scenic highways with his wife and his list of “wannabes,” Fugett will no doubt have plenty to do, and chances are, he’ll get there by driving on a highway that he had a part in designing. ■



ARDOT's Interstate 57/Highway 5 groundbreaking event in May 2026.



Sen. Ricky Hill speaks at the groundbreaking event.

ARDOT Breaks Ground on Arkansas' Third SPUI

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL

AS CABOT AND JACKSONVILLE HAVE GROWN INTO BIGGER SUBURBS OVER THE PAST DECADE, THE INTERSTATE 57 (I-57) AND HIGHWAY 5 CORRIDOR HAS BECOME A MAJOR COMMUTER ROUTE BETWEEN LONOKE AND PULASKI COUNTIES. In addition, Highway 5 has become one of the most traveled non-interstate highways in the Cabot area.

As many as 60 percent of Cabot residents work in cities to the southwest, like Little Rock and Jacksonville. With this continuous growth, traffic on I-57 has increased, outgrowing the current interchange design and calling for improved traffic flow and reduced congestion.

ENTER THE SPUI

On May 28, the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) held a groundbreaking event to celebrate

the improvement project at the I-57 and Highway 5 interchange which will construct a Single Point Urban Interchange (SPUI) and replace the current overpass at I-57.

SPUIs are a type of highway interchange designed to move large volumes of traffic by funneling all motorists through a single point controlled by one signal.

"Businesses are growing, families are moving here, neighborhoods are expanding, and more and more people are recognizing what folks that have lived here for a long time know and hold dear to heart – Cabot is a great place to live, to work, to raise a family, and to build a future for generations to come," Arkansas Speaker of the House, State Representative Brian Evans said. "Growth works best when communities plan ahead. This is not just an investment in highways and bridges. It's an investment in people."

Evans, Weaver-Bailey Contractors President Don Weaver; State Senator

Ricky Hill; Cabot Mayor Ken Kincade; and ARDOT Director Jared Wiley spoke at the event held at the New Life Church in Cabot.

Work began on the project in May 2026 and is expected to be completed by mid-2028. Weaver Bailey Contractors, Inc. of Conway was awarded the \$53.9 million project in January 2026.

AREA'S GROWTH DRIVES IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Cabot has become the 19th largest city in Arkansas with a population of 26,569 (2020 U.S. Census). Not surprisingly, Highway 5 carries 18,000 vehicles per day north of I-57 and 21,000 vehicles per day south of I-57.

"The traffic count numbers in this area alone tell you that improvements are needed," Wiley said.

The I-57/Highway 5 Interchange was due for an upgrade to keep up with this fast-growing area's needs. ARDOT chose to use a SPUI in this area because SPUIs reduce congestion, handle high traffic volumes efficiently, and reduce delays. Traffic from ramps, free right turns, and opposing left turns all move quickly through a SPUI. The SPUI in Cabot will be the third SPUI in Arkansas.

"We've built two SPUIs in the state

already, one in Northwest Arkansas in Benton County on Interstate 49 and 71B between Bentonville and Rogers, and one on Cantrell Road/Highway 10 and Rodney Parham in Little Rock," Wiley said. "They are working beautifully and moving a lot of traffic through those areas safely."

Another benefit of building a SPUI in a tighter urban space like Cabot is that they require less right of way compared to a traditional interchange, making it easier to fit with less impact on the built environment. Less congestion, better traffic flow, and fewer delays create a safer interchange.

"We're not even going to recognize this town in three, four, or five years," Hill said. "It's going to be unrecognizable as we see it now, which I think is going to be great for Lonoke County and Central Arkansas."

CONNECTING ARKANSAS TO THE GREAT LAKES AND BEYOND

In the past 10 years, ARDOT has undertaken 92 projects covering 360 miles, totaling \$394 million in Lonoke County. And, in the next several years, ARDOT has scheduled eight more projects in this area, covering 33 more miles and \$123 million.

The I-57/Highway 5 Interchange project, paired with the ongoing I-57 widening efforts in the area, and an upcoming project to reconfigure the I-57 and Highway 89 interchange, will significantly improve mobility and better connect travelers in Cabot.

"The SPUI at the I-57/Highway 5 Interchange is one of the final pieces in connecting I-57 between North Little Rock and Cabot and is part of the bigger work that's going to connect central Arkansas up to the Missouri state line along Interstate 57," Wiley said. "It will connect this metro area with the larger metro areas of St. Louis and Chicago, bringing prosperity and improved mobility to our region as well."

With the completion of this project and others along I-57, the Department looks forward to completing Arkansas' connection to the state line and the opportunities this will create for the people of Arkansas.

"This project will make travel safer, smoother, and more efficient for the people who drive this corridor every single day," Evans said. "Highways and corridors are much more than just traffic, because in Arkansas, roads connect people to opportunity." ■

Despite Summer Heat, Harrison Community Turns Out to Celebrate NEW HIGHWAY 65B BRIDGE

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL

THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (ARDOT) HOSTED A RIBBON-CUTTING EVENT ON FRIDAY, AUGUST 14, TO COMMEMORATE THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE NEW HIGHWAY 65B BRIDGE OVER CROOKED CREEK IN HARRISON. Despite it being a cloudless, humid day with high temperatures pushing 100 degrees, more than 200 people attended the event. From families with children in strollers to retirees and everyone in between, spirits were high as the long-awaited opening of the bridge had finally arrived.

Truly a community event, guests parked at the nearby Creekside

Community and Aquatics Center and were shuttled to and from the bridge by the North Arkansas Transportation Service. Harrison High School's Golden Goblin Marching Band provided celebratory music as guests arrived.

Harrison Mayor Jerry Jackson, State Representative Ron McNair, State Senator Bryan King, and ARDOT Director Jared Wiley gave remarks. Afterward, ARDOT and local dignitaries cut a ribbon and the bridge was officially opened to traffic as Mayor Jackson drove across in a red classic convertible car.

AN ENTRANCE TO HARRISON

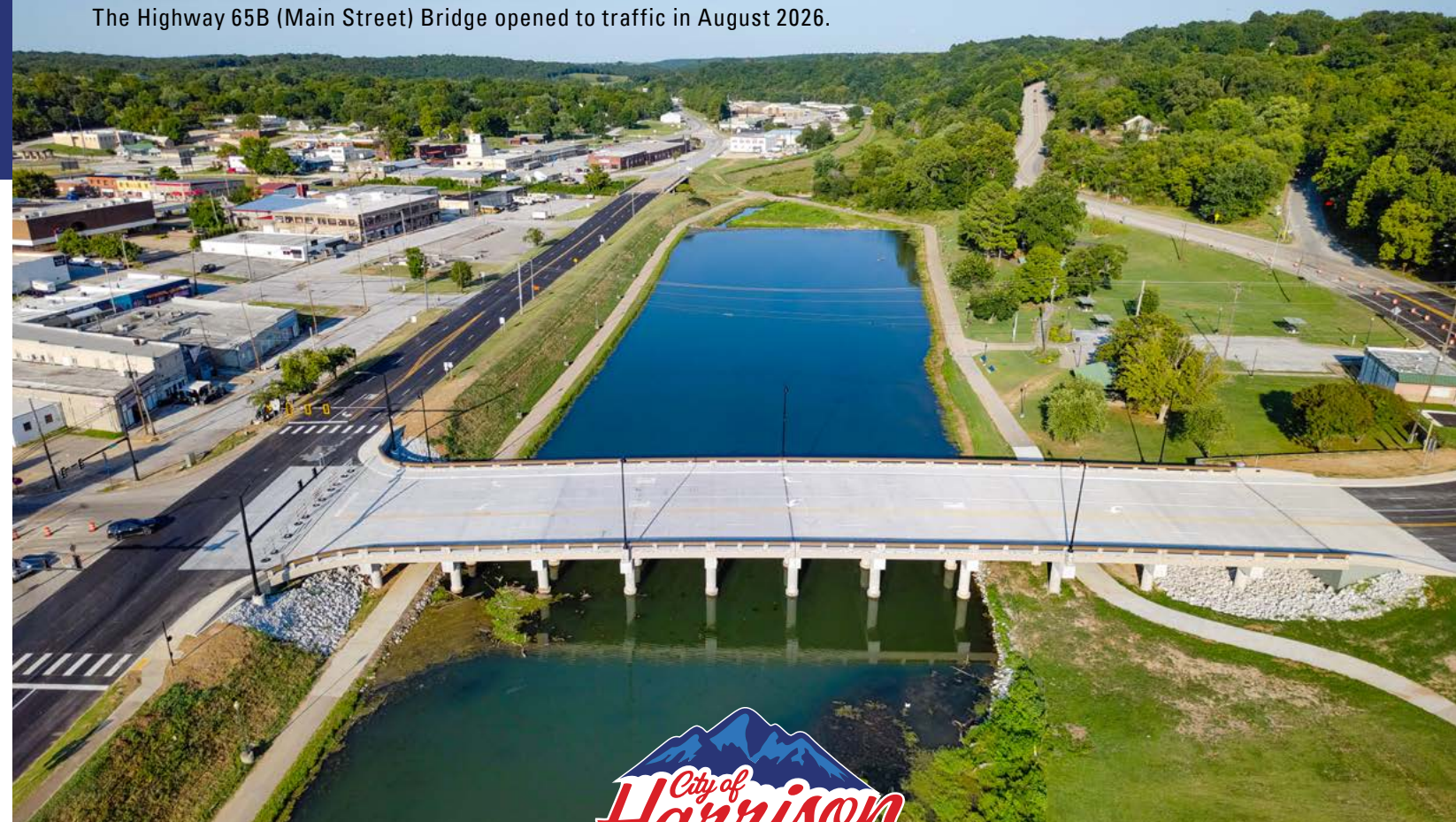
The original Highway 65B bridge was built in 1930 and carried thousands of vehicles per day. The condition of the original bridge was deteriorating, and it needed to be replaced before its condition worsened. The job was let to

contract in September 2023 and was awarded to West Plains Bridge and Grading, LLC of West Plains, Missouri for \$9.8 million. It was closed in January 2024 to begin demolition and construction of the new bridge on the existing alignment.

"Not only does this bridge replace the previous structure, it replaces it with a better structure," ARDOT Director Jared Wiley said. "This bridge has many upgrades that are going to serve the community for decades to come."

As part of ARDOT's ongoing effort to modernize key infrastructure corridors across Arkansas, the new bridge includes wider travel lanes, a dedicated center turn lane, expanded sidewalks, and an updated traffic signal. It will enhance safety, accommodate modern traffic needs, and provide long-term durability.

The Highway 65B (Main Street) Bridge opened to traffic in August 2026.



"The connectivity for pedestrians and bicycles has significantly improved over the old bridge – having six-foot sidewalks on both sides, that's good because that connects our downtown and our parks with our community center," Wade Phillips, Harrison Chief Operating Officer and City Engineer, said. "I'm glad to see people being able to use the bridge and see some of our traffic patterns get back to normal."

The bridge also features aesthetic treatments similar to the stonework found in this part of the state. Mayor Jackson said that although Harrison residents have been happy to see the end of construction, they also appreciate how well the design fits with the aesthetic of downtown and the city's Lake Harrison Park, which is adjacent to the bridge.

"It's kind of an entrance to Harrison," Jackson said. "This highway connects with our main Highway 65 corridor.

People will get off there and come through here to go to downtown and other places. This kind of investment means so much to Harrison."

Tony Valentine's restaurant, T's BBQ, is located near the Main Street bridge. Although the construction and detour were challenging for his business, he appreciates the beauty of the new bridge and what that will bring for his community.

"I don't know that there's a prettier bridge in the state of Arkansas to be honest with you," Valentine said. "I'm really excited to have it back open – anything that's going to bring more people together for a positive reason for the community, for our business, we're behind it a hundred percent."

ARDOT'S CONTINUING INVESTMENT IN HARRISON

Over the last decade, ARDOT has invested \$100 million in Boone County, including 12 projects in the vicinity

of Harrison covering 44 miles of work. This includes the intersection improvements along Highway 43, Highway 65, and Rock Springs Road which were completed in 2023, as well as current intersection improvements on Highway 65 at Airport Road (Highway 980), Walmart Drive, and Hester Drive and a portion of Harness Street, expected to be completed later this year. A \$20 to \$30 million partnering project with the City of Harrison is in development to improve the intersection at Highway 65, Industrial Park Road, and Main Street and widen Highway 65 from Industrial Park Road to Highway 7.

As Harrison continues to grow, these projects will support continued economic development, regional mobility, and recreation for the city and surrounding areas.

As Mayor Jackson said, "This bridge plays a part in all of it." ■



The Highway 65B (Main Street) Bridge ribbon cutting in Harrison.



Scenic view along Highway 7

BY LACEY KANIPE-MARSH

A **ARKANSAS HAS BEEN COINED THE NATURAL STATE FOR GOOD REASON.**

In Arkansas, you are bound to see vast expanses of natural forests lining the state's highways, rolling hills that seamlessly blend with urban landscapes, mountainous terrain, lakes or rivers ideal for outdoor enthusiasts, and countless acres of crops cultivated by generations of farmers. No matter where your travels may take you in the Natural State, you can discover something that is uniquely Arkansan along the way.

To celebrate the people, places, and roadways that connect these experiences, the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) has launched an annual, interactive quest called Explore AR Highways.

The goal of Explore AR Highways is to encourage the traveling public to get out on the road to explore everything Arkansas has to offer. Whether you're discovering historic landmarks, scenic overlooks, or hidden gems at the diamond mines, every journey is made possible by the more than 16,000 miles of highway that ARDOT maintains.

In the previous issue of the Arkansas Highways Magazine, a teaser about Explore AR Highways was included in an article titled the "The Five Most Instagrammable Locations in

Arkansas," featuring information about City Rock Bluff, Great River Road, Highway 7, Pig Trail Scenic Byway, and the Cossatot River. Before you hit the road to explore these picturesque destinations, check out the dedicated Explore AR Highways website (ardot.gov/explore) to find a detailed map highlighting the coordinates of where you'll need to stop, as well as some of the best places to discover during your travels.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

To complete the quest, you must visit all five of the recommended stops and snap a selfie at each one. Post your photos to Instagram or Facebook along the way, tag ARDOT, and use the hashtag #ExploreARHighways. Once you've checked every place off your list, you'll head back to the quest website and complete the online form to officially claim your reward! Don't forget to include a link or screenshots of your travels on the form.

ADVENTURE ISN'T THE ONLY REWARD

Every participant who completes the quest will receive an exclusive bumper sticker illustrating one of the five locations featured in the quest. The location featured on the bumper sticker will be decided via public voting on ARDOT's social media pages, so be sure to follow ARDOT on Facebook and Instagram. After voting closes,

keep an eye out for the grand reveal of the winning location's design!

Additionally, the first 250 participants who complete the quest will get a special gift. For displaying initiative and commitment to partnering with ARDOT in this inaugural experience, participants will receive a commemorative ARDOT Challenge Coin. Designed by ARDOT's Creative Services Section, these challenge coins are a meaningful token of appreciation reserved for special occasions.

SHAPED BY THE ROADS WE TRAVEL

The driving force behind Explore AR Highways is to cultivate relationships with people across Arkansas while promoting outdoor exploration. This quest offers the public the opportunity to explore the Natural State, enjoy scenic routes, and have a little fun along the way.

As you travel from destination to destination for Explore AR Highways, there is a special opportunity to gain a deeper appreciation for Arkansas highways. You aren't just seeing the work of ARDOT's maintenance crews, construction staff, and engineers; you're experiencing it. Whether you're on a rural highway or busy interstate, your journey is made possible by a transportation network that has long connected us and continues to shape how we live, work, and travel. ■



New ARDOT Safety Campaign Urges Motorists to 'JUST MOVE OVER'

BY ELLEN COULTER

A ROAD WORKER WHO WAS INJURED IN A WORK ZONE ... A CLOSE CALL BETWEEN A TOW TRUCK OPERATOR AND A SPEEDING CAR ... A POLICE OFFICER WHO WAS CONDUCTING A TRAFFIC STOP AND WAS NEARLY HIT BY A DRIVER WHO WASN'T PAYING ATTENTION ... THESE REAL EXPERIENCES FROM ARKANSANS ARE WHAT DROVE STATE REPRESENTATIVE BRIAN EVANS, SPEAKER OF THE ARKANSAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, TO INITIATE A COORDINATED EFFORT TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND ENFORCEMENT AROUND ARKANSAS' MOVE OVER LAW.

"For me personally, it all started with an instance where I received a phone call one evening from a lady who was very distraught. They were about to lose their home, their vehicle, utilities were being shut off," Evans said. "When I asked her what's going on, she said her husband was a contractor working on a highway construction project and a car came barreling through and clipped him. He suffered some severe injuries and was out of work for a long time."

Not long after that conversation, Evans was driving home from work and witnessed a speeding car very nearly hit a tow truck operator assisting a stalled vehicle.

"He had on all the safety apparel. He had triangles set back away from the scene. I mean, he had done everything right," Evans noted. "Yet someone would not just move over and slow down."

(continued on page 22)



On another day, while Evans and his wife were traveling Interstate 49, they witnessed a police officer conducting a traffic stop very narrowly avoid getting hit by a speeding vehicle. He was driven to take action.

"My wife said, 'What are you going to do about this?' That kept rolling around in my mind. I did a little research on the Move Over Law and saw who all was involved in that – emergency vehicles, law enforcement, fire, ambulance, road workers, tow operators, utility trucks," Evans said. "I didn't know if there had ever been a full, collaborative effort around this. I thought that I could pull all the different stakeholders together and let them share their stories and brainstorm and collaborate to try to make a difference."

The Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all motorists in Arkansas, and this extends to those working on and along the roads.

"It's a common issue. I see it all the time," ARDOT Director Jared Wiley said. "And it's not just about moving over for those flashing lights – it's about moving over for a guy who stopped to change a tire, too. Their lives are just as important as the ARDOT worker or the police officers who are out there working. So yes, it's a real problem, and data shows that moving over saves lives."

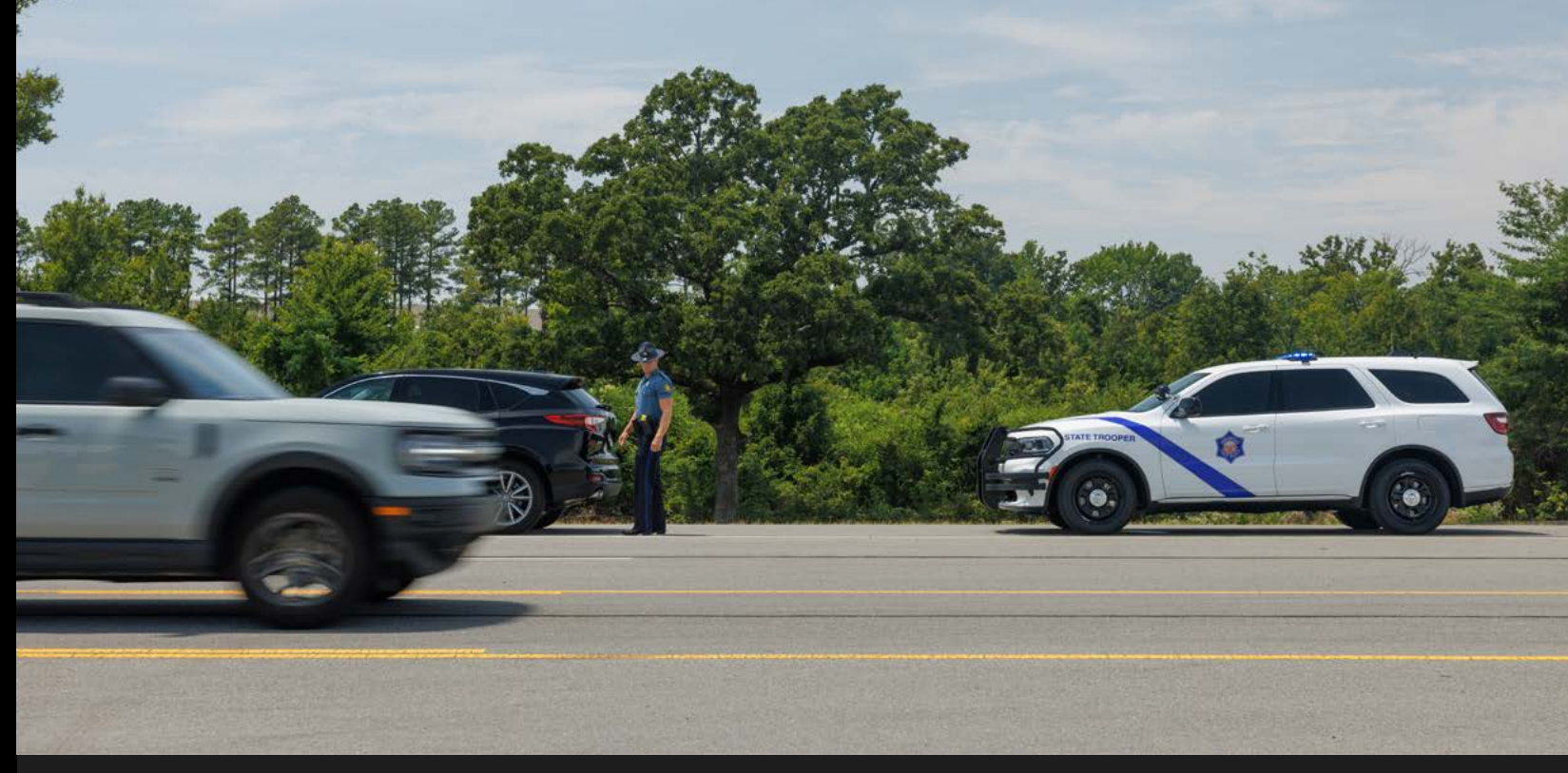
ARDOT supported the need for a unified campaign around the Move Over Law, and so did fellow stakeholders.

"I was really encouraged by the amount of support that we had across a broad spectrum of professionals in Arkansas, industry leaders, legislators, law enforcement, towing industry, just a lot of folks out there that know that it's important to move over and give workers space to do their jobs safely," Wiley said. "I'm thankful the Speaker came up with this idea."

ARDOT agreed to partner with the Arkansas State Police Highway Safety Office on the initiative in the form of a statewide safety campaign called Just Move Over – which launched in September 2026. The campaign features public service announcement (PSA) videos, graphics, and educational materials about the state's Move Over Law.

ARDOT committed \$500,000 in Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funding and received a \$250,000 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) grant from the Arkansas State Police Highway Safety Office to produce the campaign and place media buys.

"We're blessed at ARDOT to have that safety funding that we can tap into, to have the expertise here to run a campaign like this. It's just really a privilege and an honor to be part of it," Wiley said.



LAW & COMMON COURTESY

Arkansas Code § 27-51-310, also known as Arkansas' Move Over Law, outlines the rules for passing authorized vehicles stopped on a highway. An authorized vehicle must display a flashing, revolving, or rotating blue, red, amber, white, or green light, and the vehicle must be one of the following:

- Emergency response vehicle
- Law enforcement vehicle
- ARDOT vehicle
- ARDOT contractor vehicle
- Utility company vehicle
- Vehicle used in a towing operation

When approaching an authorized vehicle that is stopped on a road or the shoulder of a road, the passing motorist must move to the farthest possible lane until they have passed the authorized vehicle. If the passing motorist is unable to move over, they must reduce their speed and exercise caution until they have passed the authorized vehicle.

A motorist found in violation of the Move Over Law may be charged with a misdemeanor. Penalties could include fines up to \$1,000, community service, a suspended license, and/or imprisonment.

"Someone in the State Legislature with me once said that we can make all the laws that we want to make, but it's really about awareness and enforcement. And that stuck with me," Evans said.

The Just Move Over campaign will emphasize both awareness of what the law says and enforcement of the law through warnings and citations.

Although the law currently only covers moving over for authorized vehicles, the Just Move Over campaign implores common courtesy for all stopped vehicles on or along a road.

"The law requires us to move over or slow down when we cannot move over for emergency vehicles and roadway workers. We should also move over for someone who is not equipped with flashing lights while tending to vehicle issues on the side of the road," Wiley said. "These individuals are someone's husband, cousin, or mother, and they are likely not aware of the real danger they are in while parked at the roadside."

Wiley and Evans both say they hope to see behavior modifications and increased safety as a result of the Just Move Over campaign.

"A win for us is a behavior modification or change. When I see blue lights or green lights or yellow and amber lights flashing, I want to see people moving over. If I see somebody stopped on the side of the road, it would be great to see somebody move over. That's a win," Wiley said. "If we do this and we just save one life, it's worth the effort."

"Could this help a local family in my district? Yes. But could this also help a family in Van Buren and a family in Carlisle and a family in Arkadelphia and a family in Fordyce? Yes," Evans said. "And if it prevents them from suffering what I've seen people suffer with, and if it keeps us from having to put another brick in that memorial at ARDOT headquarters, then we've accomplished something."

To learn more about the Just Move Over campaign, visit ardot.gov/justmoveover. ■

Devon Burns with Spring River EMS (top photo), Shelton Wood with Foster Towing & Recovery (middle photo), and Alan Kumpe, ARDOT District 6 Bridge Superintendent (bottom photo), were featured in videos for the Just Move Over campaign.



BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL

CITY OF LITTLE ROCK RECEIVES \$30 MILLION Commitment for Development of 30 Crossing Park

ON JULY 7, CITY OF LITTLE ROCK OFFICIALS HELD A PRESS EVENT TO ANNOUNCE THAT LITTLE ROCK HAS BEEN SELECTED TO RECEIVE A \$30 MILLION COMMITMENT FROM THE BEZOS EARTH FUND’S GREENING AMERICAN CITIES PROGRAM TO DEVELOP 30 CROSSING PARK ON 20 ACRES OF GREEN SPACE IN DOWNTOWN LITTLE ROCK. The green space became available for development as a result of the Arkansas Department of Transportation’s (ARDOT) 30 Crossing project, completed in November 2024.

A destination park, 30 Crossing Park will transform a 20-acre site in downtown Little Rock into an urban

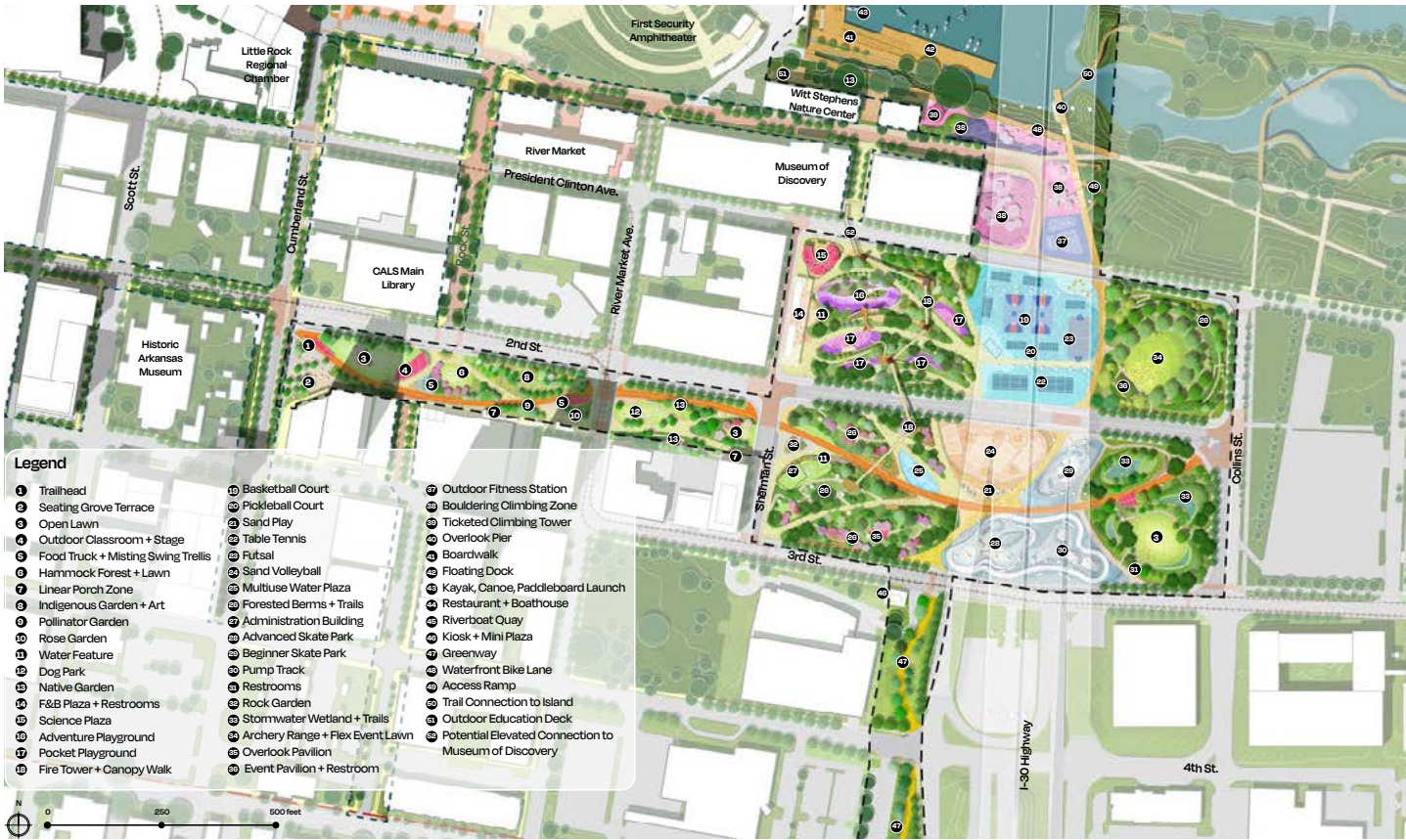
park using nearly 16 acres of green space reclaimed through the redesign of Interstate 30 (I-30). It will connect more than 100 acres of green space along the riverfront, linking the Clinton Presidential Center and the existing Riverfront Park into a recreational and cultural corridor.

"Projects like 30 Crossing reflect ARDOT’s commitment to listening to local communities and transforming feedback into meaningful improvements that enhance safety and reduce congestion," ARDOT Director Jared Wiley said. "The project’s impact extends beyond the roadway, laying the foundation for the development of 30 Crossing Park by creating space for a vibrant community gathering place. ARDOT is proud to continue to partner with city and state partners and local organizations to help make this vision a reality and remains committed to

improving the quality of life for all Arkansans."

The property that 30 Crossing sits on is owned by the Arkansas Highway Commission (AHC). ARDOT and the AHC entered into an agreement that allows the City of Little Rock to develop the property into a park. The City will maintain the property and is responsible for developing the land. ARDOT is a project partner but isn’t responsible for development or maintenance.

"The heart of the 30 Crossing project was the bridge replacement over the Arkansas River," Keli Wylie, ARDOT Assistant Chief Engineer for Design, said. "The bridge was functionally obsolete and structurally deficient, so we knew we had to replace that key component."



The terms functionally obsolete and structurally deficient are based on National Bridge Inspection Standards used to describe an existing bridge compared with its condition if it were new. However, bridges with these ratings are not considered unsafe. If a bridge is deemed functionally obsolete, it is too narrow for current traffic needs. If it is found structurally deficient, then it requires significant maintenance and repair to remain in service, eventually requiring rehabilitation or replacement.

The problem was that the bridge extended far enough south that it was also part of the Cantrell Road Interchange, which meant that ARDOT had to find a way to reconstruct the interchange to still be functional with I-30. As part of ARDOT’s normal process, input was sought from the community as well as officials with the City of Little Rock, the City of North Little Rock, and Pulaski County. A total of eight public meetings were held to ensure the end result was a design (also called an alternative) that

balanced the needs of the people that live and work in downtown Little Rock and North Little Rock with the traffic needs of the area.

"At the fifth public meeting, when we took our alternative to the public, we hit a wall, literally," Wylie said. "The alternative stretched from Third Street in downtown up to Second Street. And for that alternative, we would have to remove part of the Rock Region Metro Streetcar."

The public was insistent that this was not acceptable and ARDOT needed to go back to the drawing board.

"It really makes me proud that this alternative was borne out of public comment and what the people and the communities in downtown Little Rock wanted," Wylie said. "The 30 Crossing that we built is so much better because of the public input and the public comments that we received."

The 30 Crossing Park investment is a collaboration between the Bezos Earth Fund and local partners including the Little Rock Regional Chamber, the City of Little Rock, ARDOT, the Arkansas

Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism, and the Arkansas Congressional delegation. With estimated annual visits between 1.5 million and 2.75 million per year, 30 Crossing Park is a central pillar of the Downtown Little Rock Master Plan that aims to boost economic growth, connectivity, and urban density.

"To see children grow up today and to see a green space, to imagine what it could be, that’s something that doesn’t happen in most cities across the nation," Little Rock Mayor Frank Scott, Jr. said. "It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have an active green space in the middle of your downtown that really reconnects residents and reconnects cities together."

The Bezos Earth Fund grant supports the initial phase of the project, with an additional \$60 to \$70 million needed to complete the vision set forth in the Downtown Little Rock Master Plan. ■

Park plan extracted from the Little Rock 30 Crossing Park Design Report created by the City of Little Rock and Downtown Little Rock Partnership.

KEEP ARKANSAS BEAUTIFUL AND ARDOT JOIN FORCES

BY EMMA GOAD



McKenzie McMath Coroneel, Keep Arkansas Beautiful (KAB) Section Head spoke at the KAB Advisory Board Meeting in July.

ON JULY 1, KEEP ARKANSAS BEAUTIFUL (KAB) OFFICIALLY BEGAN A NEW CHAPTER AS PART OF THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (ARDOT). The move recognizes a partnership that has existed for decades and brings together two organizations with a shared interest in caring for roads, communities, and natural spaces in Arkansas.

McKenzie McMath Coroneel, KAB Section Head, sees the transition as a homecoming for an organization with roots at ARDOT.

"Keep Arkansas Beautiful has evolved alongside state government for nearly four decades," McMath Coroneel said. "In many ways, it feels like a return to where our story began."

Arkansas first implemented the Keep America Beautiful program through ARDOT during Governor Bill Clinton's administration in 1989. Following the passage of Amendment 75 in 1996 under Governor Mike Huckabee, which established permanent Conservation Tax funding for Arkansas' natural resources, Keep Arkansas Beautiful became a state agency and Division within the Department of Parks and Tourism (later named the Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism) and then to Arkansas State Parks. Through each move, KAB continued working with communities across the state to encourage volunteerism and care for Arkansas' natural beauty.

This most recent shift to ARDOT came about through special language legislation during the Arkansas State Legislature's fiscal session in spring 2026.



KAB Advisory Board Meeting

"ARDOT has been one of Keep Arkansas Beautiful's strongest partners for decades," McMath Coroneel said. "Whether it's supporting volunteer cleanups, Adopt-A-Highway, public education or litter prevention campaigns, we've been working toward the same goal from different angles."

KAB joined ARDOT as a section within the Department's Communications Division.

WHO IS KAB?

Beyond highway cleanups, KAB works with schools, local governments, civic groups, businesses, and nonprofits to encourage recycling, litter prevention, and community beautification. The organization supports 13 Keep America Beautiful affiliates in communities across the state, helping local leaders build programs that fit their own towns.

"At its heart, Keep Arkansas Beautiful is about people," Robyn Taylor, KAB's Program Coordinator, said. "Our job is helping communities care for the places they call home."

Taylor said partnerships have shaped the organization's work for years. That approach will continue as Keep Arkansas Beautiful joins ARDOT.

TWO MISSIONS, ONE DIRECTION

ARDOT maintains more than 16,000 miles of highway across Arkansas. Keeping those roads clean and the landscapes along them well-kept takes the manpower and hours of ARDOT maintenance crews. It takes people who care.

Because the two organizations have worked side by side for so many years on several different initiatives, working under the same roof gives them a chance to collaborate in a more interconnected way.

The transition creates opportunities to connect community programs with the Department's statewide transportation network. In addition to litter prevention, McMath Coroneel said the partnership can support initiatives such as roadside wildflowers, scenic byways, and community beautification projects that contribute to the character of Arkansas' landscapes.

"Roads don't stay clean because of maintenance alone. They stay clean because people care about them," McMath Coroneel said. "Keep Arkansas Beautiful has always focused on building that sense of ownership and pride."

Taylor said joining ARDOT also allows the organization to work more closely with employees across the state while continuing to serve the volunteers, educators, nonprofit organizations, and local leaders who have long supported its mission.

"We're excited to find new ways to connect transportation, conservation, and community stewardship while expanding programs that already make a difference across Arkansas," Taylor said.

For Arkansas communities, the mission remains familiar. KAB will continue to advocate for keeping Arkansas 'Natural' while working alongside ARDOT to care for the places that connect people across the state. ■



UNIVERSAL TESTING MACHINE

Still Pulling Its Weight After 61 Years



The Universal Testing Machine

WHEN YOU DRIVE ACROSS A BRIDGE, YOU PROBABLY DON'T GIVE MUCH THOUGHT TO THE TENSILE STRENGTH OF THE BOLTS HOLDING THE STEEL TOGETHER OR OF THE REBAR AND PRE-STRESSING WIRE USED TO STRENGTHEN THE CONCRETE. Fortunately for the traveling public, the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) has a machine that tests the strength of these critical materials and thus the safety of our roads and bridges. That machine is a Tinius Olsen Super "L" Universal Testing Machine (UTM).

WHAT IS TENSILE STRENGTH?

Tensile strength is the maximum pulling or stretching stress that something can withstand before it is permanently damaged or broken. Knowing a material's tensile strength helps engineers determine if it is strong enough to safely support the stresses a road or bridge will experience throughout its service life.

THE UTM

A mammoth of a machine, the UTM is one of the oldest pieces of testing equipment still in operation at ARDOT. Purchased in 1965 for \$53,000, it pulls 400,000 pounds of tension to test the strength of the materials used in our roadways and bridges.

"Primarily we use it for tension testing," James Dean, ARDOT Staff Materials Engineer, said. "When you pull on something, like a rope, you're putting that rope in tension. When we're looking at the bolts used on bridges, we want them to be able to withstand tension. We want them to be able to handle the weight of vehicles and not break."

Like a person pulling on a rope, the UTM uses hydraulics to apply tension to the material it is testing. High-strength bolts, rebar, and pre-



stressing wire must meet minimum tension requirements as specified by ASTM International, formerly known as American Society for Testing and Materials. ASTM standards specify procedures and regulations for materials used by manufacturers, laboratories, retailers, and consumers. If a bolt, rebar, or pre-stressing wire breaks before the minimum tension required by ASTM, it fails the test.

The company that manufactures the UTM was founded by its namesake Tinius Olsen, who received a U.S. patent for it in 1880. Olsen affectionately nicknamed the UTM "The Little Giant." ARDOT's Little Giant is located in the Materials Division, where its foundation extends down into the basement. The ceiling above the machine has a special cutout to accommodate its height. With its size and the amount of pressure it exerts, staff can feel the vibration of the machine throughout the building.

MEASURING THE TENSION LEVEL

Originally, the UTM measured tensile strength using a large dial gauge. That system was eventually replaced by a desktop computer which now runs a special kind of software. The computer continuously records how the test specimen responds as tension is applied, measuring stress and strain throughout the test. It produces a graph showing the material's behavior and precisely identifies the point at which a bolt fails.

Tinius Olsen still makes UTMs, although they are a little different from the model that ARDOT owns. The newer machines are less bulky, but the concept remains the same. In addition, other manufacturers make testing machines, but Tinius Olsen was the first to manufacture a universal machine. Previously, materials testing required separate machines, each dedicated to a specific testing function. Olsen's was the first testing machine that could accurately perform a variety of materials tests.



Andrew Littleton, Laboratory Coordinator, ARDOT Materials Division

OPERATING THE UTM

Currently, ARDOT's UTM is operated primarily by Andrew Littleton, Laboratory Coordinator in ARDOT's Materials Division. Littleton learned how to operate the machine "on the job." Because the machine has been in production for so long with many of the older machines still in use, a training program for the Tinius Olsen UTM isn't practical.

"I learned through trial by fire," Littleton said. "The big challenge to any type of training program is that so many of these machines are unique to their individual setups."

Littleton is over the Structures lab where they test concrete, cement and other cementitious materials, fly ash, and slag. He is training some of the other lab technicians in how to use the UTM. He says that there isn't any particular background required to operate the machine.

"It is a very unique piece of equipment," Littleton said. "And it's cool getting to break things."

"I like to say it is cool getting to break things and not get into trouble for it," Dean added.

After all these years, ARDOT's UTM continues to break things and, ironically, doing so helps ensure the safety of our roads and bridges. Perhaps the Little Giant will still be going strong in another 61 years. ■

See "Entertainment Corner" on Page 41 for a UTM-themed word scramble.



Nicholas Dial, ARDOT Advanced Natural Resources Specialist, waters plants at the ARDOT nursery.



FROM THE GROUND UP:

The ARDOT Nursery

BY EMMA GOAD

EVERY YEAR, THOUSANDS OF NATIVE TREES AND WILDFLOWERS HELP RESTORE HABITATS, SUPPORT POLLINATORS, AND STRENGTHEN ARKANSAS ECOSYSTEMS. MANY OF THOSE PLANTS BEGIN THEIR JOURNEY AT THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (ARDOT) NURSERY, A FACILITY THAT HAS QUIETLY SUPPORTED THE DEPARTMENT'S ENVIRONMENTAL EFFORTS FOR MORE THAN THREE DECADES.

The nursery, originally established in the 1990s, serves as a hub for growing native trees and wildflowers that support the Department's mitigation efforts and conservation programs. While many Arkansans know ARDOT for building and maintaining roads and bridges, the nursery highlights another side of the work: restoring habitats, protecting native plant species, and helping Arkansas' natural landscapes thrive.

A NURSERY WITH DEEP ROOTS

The nursery's origins can be traced back to 1994 with the inception of the Department's Wildflower Program, inspired by a nationwide push to beautify highways with native flowers and trees.

For years, the nursery served as a valuable resource for ARDOT's environmental programs. However, after key staff retired in the early 2010s, the facility fell dormant.

"There was a period from about 2013 to 2021 where the nursery just sat there, and really, nothing was done," Nicholas Dial, ARDOT Advanced Natural Resources Specialist, said. "Trees were growing through pots, and the shade house was in bad condition."

That changed in 2021.

Dial and Eric Sanders, Retired ARDOT Natural Resources Technician, spent much of that summer revitalizing the property. Together, they cleared overgrown vegetation, rebuilt planting beds, repaired infrastructure, and replaced the deteriorated shade cloth. It marked the start of a new era for the nursery.

Today, Dial and Will Kearby, ARDOT Environmental Technician, oversee the facility's daily operations.

SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

The nursery's primary purpose is to support ARDOT's Mitigation Program.

When transportation projects impact streams, wetlands, or other natural resources, federal regulations require agencies to offset those impacts through restoration and conservation efforts. One of ARDOT's methods is purchasing and managing mitigation properties across the state. A mitigation property is a protected and restored area of land or water designed to offset ecological damage caused by development elsewhere.

The trees grown at the nursery help restore these sites.

Each year, environmental staff monitors mitigation properties to evaluate tree survival rates. When areas need additional planting, Dial uses those results to determine what species should be grown at the nursery for future projects.

"We're planning a year ahead," Dial said. "We're looking at what species were planted, what survived, and what areas need to be replanted."

Unlike bare-root seedlings that are commonly planted during restoration projects, the nursery grows containerized trees. Because they are larger and already have established root systems, containerized trees often have higher survival rates once planted in the field.

AS SEEN IN YOUR BACKYARD

Every tree grown at the nursery is native to Arkansas.

Before a mitigation property is restored, the environmental staff evaluate the site and document the species naturally found in the area. Those observations help determine what trees will be planted.

"We're not going to plant a species where it doesn't naturally occur," Dial explained. "We try to match what's growing in that region and in that habitat."

That means considering both geography and environmental conditions and determining whether to utilize wetland species or drought-tolerant species. The goal is to create healthy, sustainable ecosystems that closely resemble the natural landscapes that belong there.

MORE THAN TREES

In addition to growing trees, the nursery also supports ARDOT's Wildflower Program (learn more about this program at ardot.gov/wildflower-program). Native wildflowers that are grown at the facility are used in beautification projects across the state, helping create colorful roadside displays while supporting pollinators and other wildlife.

The nursery also serves an important role in protecting rare plant species. When construction projects encounter uncommon native plants that would otherwise be destroyed, ARDOT's environmental staff may carefully remove them from the project area and transport them to the nursery.

There, the plants are grown and maintained until they can be replanted at a suitable location.

Dial recalled one Highway 82 widening project near Lake Village where staff rescued approximately 100 rare

plants before construction began. The rare plants found were called Corkwood, a species tracked by the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission. The Corkwood population is becoming exceedingly rare as it grows in the Mississippi Delta and faces habitat loss to agriculture.

Dial and his team dug up the rare plants in the dormant season (December/January), put them in plastic totes, and drove them back to the ARDOT Central Office. They were then potted with compost to grow in the nursery through that next spring and summer. The following winter, they were planted at ARDOT's Lower Delta mitigation site.

Years later, the population continues to thrive and reproduce.

"It makes you feel like you're doing something good," Dial said. "That population was going to be completely wiped out, but we saved it and planted it somewhere else."

AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE OF ARKANSAS

Maintaining the nursery requires year-round effort, from watering and mowing to maintaining irrigation systems and planning future plantings. The benefits extend far beyond the nursery's fences.

By growing trees and plants in-house, ARDOT strengthens its ability to restore habitats, improve mitigation sites, and preserve native species throughout Arkansas.

The valuable impact from this work can be seen across the state in restored wetlands, growing forests, blooming wildflowers, and thriving native plant populations.

For Dial, that's what makes the nursery special.

"It's supplementing our Mitigation Program," he said. "It's helping us do more for Arkansas' natural resources while supporting the work ARDOT does every day." ■

CHECKING THE REARVIEW:

BELLA VISTA BYPASS

BY KAITLIN WORLEY

BELLA VISTA IS A THRIVING RECREATIONAL COMMUNITY AND ONE OF ARKANSAS' FASTEST-GROWING CITIES. That growth, and the transportation network that supports it, was the result of decades of planning and coordination.

Bella Vista was established in Northwest Arkansas in 1917 as a summer resort destination, laying the foundation for the recreational haven it is known as today, with an extensive network of trails, golf courses, scenic lakes, parks, and community spaces.

The population in Northwest Arkansas has been growing exponentially for many years, and Bella Vista, especially with its many attractions, has not been immune to that growth. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Bella Vista's population increased from 16,582 in 2000 to 30,104 in 2020 – nearly doubling in 20 years.

As the region has continued to grow, traffic volumes have risen as well, placing higher demands on the area's infrastructure.

For decades, U.S. Highway 71 served as the primary north-south route through the city, carrying local traffic, commuters, and commercial vehicles through the heart of the community. The increased congestion created challenges for residents, businesses, and travelers. A study conducted by Texas A&M University estimated that congestion along the corridor had cost the region millions of dollars annually in lost time and fuel.

To address those concerns, the Bella Vista Bypass was proposed as a long-term solution.

"The possibility of a Bella Vista Bypass has been discussed for more than 25 years and has been considered a priority not only by officials in Arkansas and Missouri but by federal transportation officials as well," Former Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) Director Lorie Tudor said at the project's ribbon-cutting celebration in September 2021.

The bypass also represented a critical link in the decades-long effort to complete Interstate 49 (I-49), an 879-mile corridor connecting Kansas City, Missouri, and Lafayette, Louisiana. Recognizing the route's significance to regional and national transportation, Congress designated it as High Priority Corridor 1 in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991. Groups in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Missouri collectively joined forces to promote the completion of this corridor, and the Bella Vista Bypass would provide a significant portion toward the completion of the corridor.

Construction of the Arkansas portion of the bypass began in 2011 and included over 14 miles of four-lane interstate and 14 bridge structures. The six-segment corridor extends from U.S. Highway 71B to the Missouri state line and serves as a critical link in the I-49 corridor, connecting Fort Smith to Kansas City.

"The objective of the project was to enhance the efficiency and continuity of the regional roadway network by providing a direct access connection to business and community areas situated south and west of Bella Vista," Stacy Burge, ARDOT District 9 Engineer, said.

Throughout the process of planning and construction, the project gained increasing public attention.

"The potential for reduced truck volumes and shorter travel times generated considerable interest among project stakeholders," Burge said.

TODAY

"This new highway we stand on today is going to improve travel in Bella Vista by alleviating congestion," Tudor said at the ribbon cutting. "Local motorists are going to see immediate improvements in traffic flow once we open this highway. Mid-America will benefit from increased safety, increased tourism, and new economic development."

As Tudor promised, since opening, the Bella Vista Bypass has significantly changed travel throughout Northwest Arkansas.

One of the most noticeable impacts for locals has been reduced travel time. Residents have reported that trips that previously took approximately 20 minutes through Bella Vista can now be completed in as little as five to seven minutes using the bypass.

According to Burge, the trucking industry has shown strong preference for the new alignment. Truck volumes traveling through Bella Vista have been reduced from roughly 4,100 per day to slightly more than 500, as most traffic has shifted to the bypass facility.

"By getting the large trucks to go around Bella Vista on I-49, it has made the traffic much less congested and more free-flowing on Highway 71," Bella Vista Mayor John Flynn said.

The city has experienced other benefits since the completion of the bypass as well.

"Our city sales tax increased by 12 percent last year – one

of the fastest growth rates in the entire state," Flynn said. "Bella Vista was the third-fastest growing city in the state last year and was the second-fastest growing over the last five years. Due to the growth of the region, the bypass has been a welcome addition."

The benefits have extended beyond Bella Vista itself. Nearby communities have experienced improved access to the interstate system, creating new opportunities for economic development, commercial investment, and future growth.

These regional benefits are part of a much larger picture. The construction of the bypass completed a major step toward the I-49 corridor, which, upon total completion, will ultimately connect New Orleans, Louisiana, to Kansas City, Missouri, allowing travel continuously via interstate through the multi-state region. By improving connections between regional industries and national markets, the corridor supports economic growth beyond Northwest Arkansas.

"The bypass is a vital link in the I-49 corridor from Fort Smith to Kansas City, connecting with the Port of New Orleans and Great Lakes shipping routes," Burge said. "This streamlines logistics for regional industries."

The long-awaited Bella Vista Bypass brought major benefits not only to Northwest Arkansas but the entire Mid-America region. It improved regional connectivity, reduced traffic through local communities, and helped position one of Arkansas's fastest-growing regions for continued growth in the years ahead. For Bella Vista residents, it also meant fewer vehicles traveling through the city, allowing Bella Vista to preserve the peaceful, scenic atmosphere that has long defined the community. ■



KEEPING IT COVERED:

Combating the Natural State's Not So Natural Issue

BY HOLLY BUTLER & CADEN KEY

IF YOU'VE DRIVEN ARKANSAS HIGHWAYS ON A WINDY DAY, YOU MAY HAVE SEEN IT: A PLASTIC BAG TUMBLING ACROSS THE SHOULDER, A STRAY CUP FLYING AFTER TRAFFIC PASSES, OR BITS OF DEBRIS SCATTERED LIKE CONFETTI ALONG THE EDGE OF THE ROAD. To you, it may just be a moment during your drive, but those pieces of litter add up to a costly and persistent problem.

The Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) spent nearly \$10 million in 2025 addressing litter. This number continues to rise as crews battle a steady stream of trash along our highways.

This summer, ARDOT is turned its attention not just to where litter ends up, but where it starts. The Department has launched a statewide awareness and enforcement campaign aimed specifically at one of the biggest sources of roadside debris – waste that escapes from commercial hauling vehicles. This is evident by the more than 300 citations and warnings that Arkansas Highway Police (AHP) has issued since the beginning of 2026.

The campaign began with hundreds of letters sent to waste hauling companies, landfill operators, transfer stations, and local governments statewide, reminding them to review their load securing practices, educate drivers, cover their loads, and secure their materials.

The letters to mayors, judges, and legislators emphasized what ARDOT calls a renewed focus on the laws governing

the secure transport of waste and encouraged officials to share the information with their communities.

“Our goal is not to write tickets or to generate revenue,” ARDOT Director Jared Wiley said. “Rather, our goal is to promote compliance with state law and encourage responsible behavior that helps reduce litter along Arkansas highways.”

Under Arkansas Code Annotated (A.C.A.) § 8-6-406, the Arkansas Litter Control Act, it is unlawful to “drop, deposit, discard, or otherwise dispose of litter upon any public or private property.” Additionally, commercial or for-hire hauling “shall not transport litter, trash, or garbage unless the truck or other vehicle is covered to prevent its contents from blowing, dropping, falling off, or otherwise departing from the truck or other vehicle.” Violations can result in Class A misdemeanors, fines, community service, and even the requirement to clean up the litter caused by the violation.

All fines are determined by the court where the offense occurred and collected by that court. Fines resulting from an offense under the Litter Control Act are distributed in two ways. First, if the municipality or county is a certified affiliate of Keep Arkansas Beautiful and participates in litter-control programs, the fine is placed in the city or county general fund. If a municipality or county is not an affiliate of Keep Arkansas Beautiful or does not participate in litter-control programs, the fines are deposited in the Keep Arkansas Beautiful Fund Account for litter prevention. The funds may only be used by the office of Keep Arkansas Beautiful to encourage litter prevention, anti-litter education, and

“... if you can get compliance with the law before the truck ever gets on the road, that's the best thing to do because everybody wins.”

— AHP Chief Jeff Holmes

increasing awareness of litter law enforcement statewide.

Another statute, (A.C.A.) § 27-35-110, covering load spill prevention, adds further responsibility: “No vehicle shall be driven or moved on any highway unless the vehicle is so constructed or loaded as to prevent any of its load from dropping, sifting, leaking, or otherwise escaping therefrom.” This violation is also treated as a misdemeanor and may be subject to fines and/or community service.

All fines assessed under this section are determined by the court where the offense occurred and collected by that court. These fines remain with the jurisdiction of where the offense occurred, either in a municipality or county. ARDOT does not receive any of these funds.

Litter from unsecured loads creates more than an eyesore. It creates safety hazards for motorists and the maintenance crews tasked with removing the debris.

“Roadside litter is ugly. We're the Natural State, and litter is anything but natural,” Wiley said.

Since haulers might travel long distances, a single unsecured load can leave a long path of debris that crews must then devote hours or days to picking up.

By shifting attention to enforcement, ARDOT and AHP hope to reduce the volume of debris reaching the shoulder in the first place.

“Well, you know, we're all about compliance,” AHP Chief Jeff Holmes said. “And if you can get compliance with the law before the truck ever gets on the road, that's the best thing to do because everybody wins.”

The intent is clear: every agency involved in moving waste

plays a role in keeping Arkansas highways clean.

This enforcement campaign is designed to complement existing efforts, not replace them. ARDOT's mowing and sweeping crews, contract mowers, inmate litter programs, non-profit partnerships, Adopt-A-Highway volunteers, and Keep Arkansas Beautiful (KAB) remain essential to keeping the state's roadways safe and attractive.

Every piece of litter on the shoulder tells a story, not just about where it landed, but where it came from. While crews and volunteers continue to remove debris, preventing those items from landing on the roadway is a shared responsibility that is less costly than picking it up piece by piece. Reinforcing the Department's litter efforts depends on partnerships between haulers, local leaders, and the traveling public.

“If we're successful in this effort, Arkansans will see more beautiful roadsides. They'll see less litter cluttering their views,” Wiley said. “But we'll also see reduced expenditures. We'll see the Department be able to reallocate tax dollars away from litter cleanup and back into pavements and bridges.” ■

Learn more about
**commercial
litter efforts.**

SCAN THE QR CODE





DELTA BLUES HIGHWAY CRUISE: Johnny Cash Memorial Highway

BY KAITLIN WORLEY

DELTA BLUES HIGHWAY CRUISE IS A LIMITED SERIES, DEDICATED TO THE HIGHWAYS NAMED IN RECOGNITION OF THE RICH MUSICAL HISTORY OF THE ARKANSAS DELTA. In each installment, I'll drive the length of one of these commemorative highways, and together, we'll explore the lives and legacies of the artists honored by these roadways, their connections to Arkansas, and the experience of traveling the highways that bear their names.

The first route on this expedition is the Johnny Cash Memorial Highway.

In 2017, the Arkansas General Assembly enacted legislation dedicating highways to four influential Arkansas musicians. Among the four was Arkansas native Johnny Cash. Highway 14 from Dyess to Wilson became officially designated as the Johnny Cash Memorial Highway.

THE MAN IN BLACK

Born in 1932 in Kingsland, Arkansas, J. R. Cash grew up to become one of the most significant figures in American music. Iconically known as the "Man in Black" because of his signature all-black stage wardrobe, Cash carried the spirit of the Delta through his soulful songs and the powerful stories they told.

When Cash was just three years old, his family relocated

from Kingsland to Dyess, Arkansas, a small farming colony that was established thanks to relief programs instituted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation. The colony was created during the Great Depression. Cash's family was one of only five families chosen from all of Cleveland County for this economic experiment.

At five years old, Cash began working on cotton fields alongside the rest of his family, an experience that shaped his understanding of hardship, resilience, and compassion for the working class.

"He loved the very rock and soil of the fields where he grew up," his daughter, Rosanne Cash, said in 2024 during an event honoring him in Washington, D.C. "Those rocks, that soil, the river, the floods, the hard times, and the radio at the end of a long day, which pulled him towards his future – they all showed up cinematically in his lyrics."

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY: CASH'S BOYHOOD HOME IN DYESS

While his life took him many places, Cash never lost his love for his home in Dyess, so I started my trek at his boyhood home – not too far from the Johnny Cash Memorial Highway.

The small, modest house sits along the side of a thin, gravel road. A chain link fence squares off a simple little yard – several oak trees circle the home where red-winged blackbirds perch and call out to passersby.

Vast, sprawling agrarian fields surround the little plot,

bordered by distant trees along the edges. While the spacious beauty of the lush fields is stunning, especially juxtaposed with the little white house, the most striking feature of the area is the silence. Only the sounds of the nearby birds and a couple of buzzing insects dot the soundscape of the land, creating serene stillness that felt untouched by time.

It's easy to conjecture that such a gifted mind could be cultivated in a place like this. The spacious sky and quiet earth give abundant space for thoughts to wander and create.

Cash said in a 1982 interview with Harry Reasoner that "Pickin' Time" was his favorite song that he had written – a song not only about his humble beginnings on this very land but of a hopeful future just around the corner. Staring out onto the field surrounding his home while listening to the simple song, I imagined the elation young Cash must've felt when "pickin' time" came around each year.

My venture began when I pulled my car out of the small, gravel lot beside the house, and just as I made it past his childhood home, I saw a large, white Great Egret take off, almost as if we were beginning our journeys in sync. A bird that often represents grace and transformation only seems befitting for a man who was described by his daughter as a "living redemption story."

HIGHWAYMAN

Only one other house, also modest, lined the road in the two-mile distance from Cash's home to Highway 297, known as the Johnny Cash Highway. Named by the city of Dyess and approved by the Arkansas Highway Commission, the Johnny Cash Highway connects Cash's childhood road to the portion of Highway 14 known as the Johnny Cash Memorial Highway.

As my car approached the humble highway, it only seemed fitting to listen to "Highwayman." The gritty guitar nearly echoed over the open fields of soybeans, cotton, and the occasional juvenile rice plants. While Cash sang of lifetimes of struggle and survival, I watched Killdeer birds scurry across the marsh-lined highway.

It was not long before I reached the Johnny Cash Memorial Highway, leading me across a bridge over the thin and murky Tyronza River. Little by little, buildings and homes began to pop up among the open fields and trees.

Right before passing the mid-century modern campus of Rivercrest High School, I passed over the Interstate 55 bridge – a transformative addition to the area that wasn't built until long after Cash's early years and now connects this once-isolated farming community to a much broader transportation network.



A mile and a half down the road, "Ring of Fire," began to play on the radio as I turned right to continue onto Highway 14S toward Wilson. On my left, I saw Rivercrest Gardens, a small but pleasant cemetery. While Cash sang about the intensity of falling in love, the cemetery reflected the endurance of love after loss.

As my journey continued, the landscape returned to a wide, open field that stretched on, seemingly unending. Sometimes the fields had crops, and sometimes, they had grass with patches of gravel, but they were always under an endless open sky.

As I fared closer to Wilson, I began to see more homes and buildings peppering the landscape, until I suddenly found myself in a cozy little suburban area. Not far past this little neighborhood is the quaint center of town and Gunns Grocery. The modest town center appeared almost metropolitan in comparison to the rural expanse that led there. Just beyond was Highway 61, the Blues Highway, and the end of the Johnny Cash Memorial Highway.

The journey from Cash's boyhood home in Dyess down the highways named in his honor is valuable for those who wish to experience the same fields and views that influenced him. The drive provides insight into the man who made such a mark on his home state, the world of music, and the people around him. ■

Featured photo, page 36: LOOK Magazine Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [Reproduction number e.g., LC-L9-60-8812, frame 8].



HUNTING PEOPLE IN TREES:

A Side Gig as an Investigative Genetic Genealogist

BY RUTHIE BERRYHILL

FOR THE PAST 14 YEARS, STEPHANIE WYATT HAS HUNTED PEOPLE IN TREES – NOT FORESTS, BUT FAMILY TREES USING DNA ANALYSIS.

Wyatt is a Staff Auditor for the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) by day. She's also a graduate student at the University of Arkansas – Little Rock where she's working on a master's degree in applied communications. In her free time, she works as an investigative genetic genealogist with Parabon NanoLabs and has volunteered as a Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy (FIGG) consultant with the Arkansas State Police (ASP) and the Little Rock Police Department.

WHAT IS GENETIC GENEALOGY?

Genetic genealogy combines DNA analysis with genealogical research to build family trees and help adoptees find biological relatives. FIGG uses the same techniques to help law enforcement identify remains, as well as perpetrators in unsolved cases.

THE BEGINNING

Wyatt became interested in genealogy and genetic genealogy after her father, who is adopted, began having medical issues. She began researching her father's family tree, looking to identify his biological relatives.

With the help of "search angels," she was able to identify who her father's biological mother was, but not his biological father. Search angels are volunteers who help adoptees (or family members of adoptees) conduct research to fill in the branches of their family tree.

In an effort to give back, Wyatt began helping adoptees with their research. Adoption agencies often provide adoptees with non-identifying information about their biological parents – such as eye color, hair color, age, occupation of the grandfather and grandmother, etc.

However, the records don't always provide a path to identifying an adoptee's biological origins. That's where DNA takes over. Eventually Wyatt was introduced to genetic genealogy research and, through that process, she learned how DNA matches

fit together, forming a picture of the family tree from a DNA sample.

At the time, direct-to-consumer DNA tests had only recently become popular, and the databases provided limited information due to their small sample size.

"DNA was this new tool without any instructions, and we were learning how DNA relatives can identify families of origin," Wyatt said. "Direct-to-consumer DNA testing changed the landscape of identifying people from distant relatives using a DNA sample."

According to Wyatt, the average American today would be able to find closer matches in the same database.

"If you were to test, you're likely going to have second cousins in the database," Wyatt said. "When I first started working with DNA, most of the time I was working with third and fourth cousins. Using the smaller pool of DNA matches taught me a unique skill set that was helpful when I encountered difficult law enforcement cases."

In 2019, she was asked to become part of the world-renowned team at Parabon NanoLabs as an investigative genetic genealogist.



“

These cases matter. They matter to the families. They matter to the victims that have passed away. They matter to the surviving family members. They matter to the survivors of brutal attacks. **Every one of these cases matters to one or more people. I just find the time.”**

— Stephanie Wyatt, ARDOT Staff Auditor

RETURNING AN ARKANSAS WOMAN'S NAME

In the past six and a half years, Wyatt has worked with law enforcement-related investigations, and she has provided credible leads in approximately 65 cold cases.

Earlier this year, Wyatt volunteered to help ASP with a case that had been unsolved since 1994. The remains of an unknown woman, known only as Conway County Jane Doe, were found along railroad tracks near U.S. Highway 64 between Morrilton and Plumerville. The woman's identity was discovered with Wyatt's help.

Wyatt learned of the case after her neighbor, retired ASP Major Ron Casey, introduced her to ASP Major Stacey Rhodes and Captain Joe Carter of the Criminal Investigations Unit. They met with Wyatt and provided her with permission to assist with the investigation.

"Within 24 hours, I was able to provide a name to Arkansas State Police as a potential lead," Wyatt said.

Wyatt's information led to the identification of the woman, Jamie Ann Moore. Just one match in the DNA

database helped push the case forward toward identification.

"You may not realize that you have someone in your family out there who's missing because they're a second or third cousin, but your DNA can make a difference," Wyatt said. "Sometimes it's just one match that populates the database that takes a case from unworkable to solved."

Wyatt says DNA testing isn't the only piece of the puzzle.

"The other key piece is recognizing that these individuals who may have tested have to choose to utilize GEDmatch, FamilyTreeDNA, or DNA Justice," Wyatt said. "Because if they're not in those databases, we can't see them or use their results to solve mysteries."

Law enforcement is only able to use the databases GEDmatch, DNA Justice, or FamilyTreeDNA in investigations. Until a person opts to share their DNA profile with law enforcement, either by opting in when they send their DNA in for testing at FamilyTreeDNA or by directly uploading to one of these databases, law enforcement is unable to use it in an investigation.

MAKING THE TIME

Some might think that working full time, attending graduate school, and being a mother and wife, wouldn't leave much spare time for something like investigative genetic genealogy. Those people would be wrong.

Wyatt finds a way to work it all in.

"These cases matter," she said. "They matter to the families. They matter to the victims that have passed away. They matter to the surviving family members. They matter to the survivors of brutal attacks. Every one of these cases matters to one or more people. I just find the time."

OTHER PROJECTS USING GENEALOGY

Wyatt's genealogy skills have been helpful in other ways as well. When ARDOT was preparing for the dedication of its Fallen Worker Memorial in 2025, the planning team needed to contact next of kin to let them know about the Memorial and invite them to the dedication. Wyatt

(continued on page 40)

was able to put her genealogy research skills to work and help increase the efficiency of the process.

“It was quite a task, but I was able to provide living next of kin for many of our fallen workers, including ones that passed more than 80 years ago,” Wyatt said.

Currently, Wyatt is volunteering on a team that is assisting with the Tulsa Race Massacre Graves Investigation. The project seeks to identify individuals buried in mass graves from the 1921 massacre of Black residents in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

“Just as a whole, it sticks with me that the atrocity occurred and that we still haven’t identified all of the individuals who lost their lives during the massacre,” she said.

“My work has led to resolutions for families and hard news as well; a perpetrator I identified was sentenced to 650 years in prison,” Wyatt said. “I’ve shared with people that the person they grew up believing was their father was not their biological father. The news isn’t always easy but the answers from DNA are typically conclusive.”

A CALL TO ACTION

The investigative genetic genealogy field has helped significantly in providing answers and closure to families. The potential to solve more cases exists and every person can help.

“Anytime I have the opportunity to share about my DNA work, I like to encourage people to test and share their DNA with the databases that we are able to use to help provide closure to families,” Wyatt said. “Just like Conway County Jane Doe, it took one match and a little bit of work, and ASP was able to bring her home.” ■



Stephanie Wyatt poses with a photo of Conway County "Jane Doe."



UNIVERSAL TESTING MACHINE (UTM):
Word Scramble Edition

After reading “Universal Testing Machine Still Pulling Its Weight After 61 Years” on page 28 see how many terms you can unscramble to answer the question below.

teesnil	○									yaduihlcrs									○				
rtghnste										○	peerusrs			○									
berar											egaug												
nluilpg											nasrit												
gtehwi											breka												
btlso											ingchtetrs												
tersss											tyfeas												

What nickname did Tinius Olsen give the Universal Testing Machine?
○○○ ○○○○○○○ ○○○○○○

Dear ARDOT

TO THE GOVERNOR, DIRECTOR OF ARDOT, AND DIRECTOR OF PARKS, HERITAGE AND TOURISM:

I just returned from four days in your beautiful state. I noticed immediately the condition of your highways and byways. Your roads are amazing. They are the best I've driven on in any state. We're told in Oklahoma that is impossible. We must have turnpikes if we want well maintained roads and you have proved them wrong.

Also, kudos for how well you maintain your forests, lakes and recreational areas. Gorgeous. I enjoyed every minute of my visit. You have a beautiful state, and I'm impressed with how well you govern and manage this jewel.

*Sincerely,
Terri Howard*

LITTER LETTERS ON HIGHWAY 70

I've been wanting to reach out since seeing the new display on Highway 70 between Benton and Hot Springs. I LOVE IT! Whoever came up with the campaign idea is amazing.

I was in Key Club in high school and we picked up litter on the side of the highway often. It has always been a pet peeve of mine and I'm the first to tell someone cigarette butts are litter! I've always said, if you've ever picked up litter on the side of the road, you wouldn't be throwing it out. I think it should be part of the fine for littering. Not just financial, but physical. Maybe it would make more of an impact.

I love the display on 70 and think it has been executed well. Thanks to everyone that keeps Arkansas NATURAL.

Dana Austen, PT, DPT, CBIS



HARRISON WELCOME CENTER

The following letter was sent to Stacy Burge, ARDOT District Engineer, District 9 from Tena Riley, Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism (ADPHT) Travel Consultant at the Harrison Welcome Center. Arkansas Welcome Centers are owned and maintained by ARDOT and are staffed by ADPHT. The letter references Darold Rogers, ARDOT Rest Area Attendant II, District 9, Boone County.

A visitor came into the Welcome Center with his wife. We were talking and they were admiring the Welcome Center and how clean and fresh it smelled. I told him the building was almost 8 years old.

He later told me that he was a retired health inspector and when he walks into a place he always smells if it is clean and he said he would have given us a gold star. I gave credit to Darold as he is the one who works hard to keep it clean. He said Darold deserves a gold star.

*Tena Riley, Travel Consultant
Harrison Welcome Center*

ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

ARDOT'S ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY PROGRAM WAS CREATED IN 1987 TO SOLICIT PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN LITTER CONTROL 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 the Arkansas Highways magazine, we spotlight an Adopt-A-Highway volunteer. This edition's volunteer spotlight features Mountain Home Walmart #11. A part of the program since February 2024, the group adopted a portion of Highway 62 in Baxter County.

We extend a warm thank you to Mountain Home Walmart #11 for their dedication and service to the Adopt-A-Highway Program.

Learn more about Adopt-A-Highway.

Scan here!



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