1. Behrens to Retire from TxDOT

After 37 years with the Texas Department of Transportation and the last six years as its executive director, Michael Behrens has announced his retirement effective Aug. 31. The announcement was made Tuesday in a letter to Texas Transportation Commission Chairman Ric Williamson.

Behrens, a Texas A&M University civil engineering graduate, noted the changes he has seen at the agency during his career. “The name of the Department itself went from the Texas Highway Department to the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation to the Texas Department of Transportation. When I started, plans were still being drawn by hand, calculations made with mechanical calculators and measurements done using tapes and surveying chains,” Behrens wrote.

Despite the changes, Behrens said the dedication and commitment of the employees to “getting the task done, day in
and day out” has not changed.

TTI Director Emeritus Herb Richardson worked closely with Behrens as they both headed up their respective agencies. “Mike has provided innovative, dedicated and ethical leadership to the Texas Department of Transportation during a time of tremendous change in the transportation enterprise in our state,” Richardson said. “He has been a stalwart supporter of university-affiliated transportation research in Texas, and I wish him well.” Behrens was one of the speakers at Richardson’s retirement ceremony last fall.

“I will always be an advocate for the Department and the need for providing adequate transportation infrastructure for this state. I will continue to inform and educate. Thank you for allowing me to serve the State of Texas in this position,” Behrens wrote.

Read news article:
http://www.statesman.com/search/content/news/stories/local/06/01/1behrens.html

top

2. Homeland Security Partners with TTI for Fence Testing

TTI is working alongside the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Boeing, and Sandia National Labs (SNL) in an effort to secure the nation’s border. TTI is helping to conduct a series of crash tests at its Riverside facility on various types of fencing that might be placed along miles of high-traffic, high-risk border areas. Roger Bligh and Dean Alberson are co-principal investigators on this project.

The results of the crash tests will help determine which types of fences will be used at diverse locations along the Mexico-U.S. border. “TTI has a stellar reputation for crash testing,” said Richard Young, the Fence Lab project manager for DHS. “The Institute has the facility and the know-how to accomplish this very important work.”

Although this is TTI’s first crash-test project with DHS, the Institute has helped the U.S. State Department test barriers for the protection of embassies and other facilities. Alberson, program manager of TTI’s Crashworthy Structures Program, is spearheading the effort to draft uniform standards for fences.

One of many crash tests TTI conducted for DHS for its border fence project.
Donated Children’s Books Distributed across Texas

Just weeks after they were donated by TTI employees, children’s books have been turned over to a Bryan-College Station area community center and a book donation agency. TTI Day staff members Susan Chrysler and Beverly Kuhn presented The Brazos Valley Community Action Agency, Inc. (BVCAA) and Reach Out and Read with some of the more than 500 books that were donated as part of this year’s annual TTI charitable event, the Half Price Books Half Pint Library Book Drive. Texas A&M University System Chancellor Mike McKinney, who was guest speaker for TTI Day, donated numerous children’s books.

“It’s nice to see TTI’s efforts getting to the kids we were trying to help,” said Kuhn, who was head of charitable contributions for TTI Day. “When the children in the waiting room of the BVCAA health center saw us with all the books, their eyes lit up.”

Organizations in other areas of the state where TTI has offices will also receive donated books. Among the Texas recipient hospitals and community centers benefiting from the charitable event are the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children in Dallas, the Far North Austin Community Health Center in Austin, and the CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Center for Children and Families in San Antonio.

“The gifts TTI is giving today will help local children for a lifetime,” said local Reach Out and Read Project Coordinator Marian Stroustrup. “The books that are being donated to the health center will enable countless children to be better prepared to start school and will give them the gift of reading, something so many of us take for granted.”
4. TTI’s Spiegelman Thrust into JFK Spotlight

The last few weeks of Senior Research Scientist and Texas A&M University Statistics Professor Cliff Spiegelman’s life have been a whirlwind of television talk shows, radio programs and endless questions from reporters. “We expected some publicity from this,” Spiegelman said, “but we frankly did not expect this to be the story that it was.”

‘The story’ was the conclusion that Spiegelman and his partner, A&M Researcher Dennis James, reached after analyzing bullet fragments that came from the same type of ammunition that killed President John F. Kennedy in 1963. Their findings suggest that the scientific evidence used decades ago to rule out the possibility of additional bullets and additional shooters in the assassination was flawed.

Although Spiegelman and James have been working on the analysis since 2005, the barrage of publicity started after their findings were published by the Annals of Applied Statistics, which urged a modern analysis of the original bullet fragments.

The publicity included mentions in newspapers across the country and as far away as Iran. Spiegelman learned how television news programs are put together after in-studio appearances with three Fox News shows and interviews with CNN, NBC and CBS. His involvement with the research also included an Australian TV appearance. He and James may appear on the National Geographic Channel for part of its Discovery series.

The calls from reporters and producers have finally subsided, and Spiegelman is not disappointed. “I’m happy now to go back to the person I was before,” he said.

Read article:
5. Research Development Seminars Get Underway

A series of seminars kicked off in May to support TTI’s research diversity goal. The one-hour seminars are being held in room 102 of the Gibb Gilchrist Building with links to the urban offices. All TTI employees are encouraged to attend.

“The seminars provide information on research programs and research opportunities at the local, state, national and international levels,” noted Agency Associate Director Katie Turnbull. “The seminars support the Institute’s goal to diversify research funding while at the same time enhancing internal communication, promoting professional development and fostering collaboration among TTI staff.”

The first seminar addressed the TxDOT Research Management Committee (RMC) program. “Even though we are diversifying the research base, TxDOT is and will continue to be our number one sponsor,” Turnbull said at the initial seminar. “It is critical that we continue to meet the department’s needs by providing high-quality research addressing key issues.”

The first seminar included an overview of the RMC program, the focus of the different RMCs and internal TTI coordination on project statements and proposals. Susan Adams from RDO, Randall Taylor of the Business Office and Rhonda Brinkmann from Communications highlighted the support provided by their groups.

Additional seminars will be held over the summer. For a schedule of seminar topics and dates, visit http://ttinet.tamu.edu/spp&e/docs/Research_Development_Seminars_Flyer.pdf

6. TTI Anniversaries

5 Years

Lauren Geng, Systems Analyst I (AMA)
Jeff Miles, Associate Transportation Researcher (FSM)

10 Years
7. Motorcycle Awareness/Safety Program

TTI is working with the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) on a new statewide motorcycle safety campaign set to kick off in September. The campaign seeks to promote motorcycle safety in several important ways.

“We hope to increase motorists’ awareness of the growing presence of motorcycles and motorcyclists in traffic, improve riders’ awareness about the dangers of riding impaired by alcohol or drugs and encourage new and returning riders to get properly trained,” says Associate Research Scientist Patricia Turner of TTI’s Center for Transportation Safety. “The ultimate goal is to reduce the number of motorcycle crashes and resulting injuries and deaths on Texas roads,” says Turner.

DPS Motorcycle Safety Unit Coordinator Cliff Burdette says many people ride motorcycle after their kids are grown. Others ride because, with rising gas prices, motorcycles are more economical than larger vehicles. “Rider education and training are the best defenses against motorcycle crashes and injuries if a crash does occur,” says Burdette.

The campaign will include the development of a new logo, safety messages, website and promotional materials urging riders to attend DPS’s safety program, The Course for Motorcycle Riders. The material is also designed to educate the public about safely sharing the road with motorcyclists.
8. Trejo Receives Barclay Fellow Award

David Trejo, TTI division head for constructed facilities and Texas A&M University associate professor in the Construction, Geotechnical and Structural Engineering Division, has been named a Charles H. Barclay ’45 Fellow.

The honor was presented to Trejo during the spring meeting of the engineering faculty on May 3.

Colleagues describe Trejo as “energetic, enthusiastic and innovative and a leading researcher in the field of corrosion of metals and service-life prediction for construction materials.” Trejo has conducted more than $3 million in research for TxDOT alone. He has twice been awarded an Eisenhower Faculty Fellowship and twice a NASA Summer Fellowship.

9. Truck Stop Electrification Project Enters New Phase

TTI researchers have completed the first phase of a 3-year, $3 million project for the US. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that is designed to reduce the estimated 500 tons of nitrogen oxides released into the atmosphere each day by emissions from idling trucks.

The project, headed up by Associate Research Engineer Joe Zietsman, has resulted in a nationwide deployment strategy for truck stop electrification (TSE) and a user-friendly web tool that pinpoints ideal locations for this technology. The web tool is expected to be launched this month.

The project identified a total of 15 major truck corridors along the interstate highway system and prioritized potential locations for the idle reduction technology. “We used criteria such as corridor length, major activity centers, truck volume, truck growth rates, non-attainment areas and existing TSE sites,” Zietsman said. “Local and state governments as well as other entities concerned with air quality will be able to use the web tool to identify the best locations to install this emission reduction equipment.”
10. New Internet Team to Enhance TTI’s Website

Nine months after the rollout of TTI’s redesigned website (http://tti.tamu.edu), a newly formed team of researchers, Communications personnel and NIS staff will begin work to improve how information populates the site.

Ninety percent of the content is dynamically generated by a database, which pushes information to pages through a couple of different methods. The first method is based on the organizational structure of the Institute and uses program ad-loc codes to place information. For example, the Groups and People pages work this way. A second method is based on TRB’s Transportation Research Thesaurus (TRT). Selected TTI projects and publications are currently indexed to a number of TRT terms. The terms assigned to them determine where they display on the Research Area pages in the left navigation of the homepage. Your name and bio appear in certain places based on both your program code and the information in your resume.

“The system is very sophisticated and complex,” explains Director of Communications Richard Cole. “And we need everyone to feed it current and accurate content.” Helping people understand how to do that, finding the most efficient way to capture all the information and making sure the TRT is applied effectively and consistently across all of TTI’s people, projects, publications and groups are the goals of this team.

If you’d like to be involved with this team, please contact Kelly West. The members welcome your participation and input.

11. TTI in the News

There have been numerous mentions of TTI and our experts in recent articles. Here are links to some of the stories.

Houston Metro incident (Houston Chronicle) May 23
12. Fitzpatrick Honored for Being Volunteer, Role Model

Research Engineer Kay Fitzpatrick has been recognized by the Girl Scouts Bluebonnet Council as one of five local Women of Distinction. The honor was determined based on her positive affect on young women.

Fitzpatrick was cited for being a role model to girls and other women, demonstrated by her activities as a professional, a parent, and a dedicated community member through her work with Destination Imagination and Girl Scouts. Her work as a transportation research engineer, devoted mother and community leader has helped to save and improve lives.

Read news coverage:

Kay Fitzpatrick
13. Editor’s Corner: Don’t Remove the Appendix

Reports for Research Management Committee (RMC) projects and other technical documents often require one or more appendix sections. How do you know when to use an appendix or how to format it? Here are a few suggestions.

When to use an appendix

Place information in an appendix when it would interrupt the flow of the main document. For example, you might be tempted to include a set of step-by-step instructions in the main body of a document on methodology. On the other hand, your report might read more clearly if you separate the instruction steps into an appendix and simply refer the reader to the appendix to find out exactly how to conduct a test.

How to refer to appendices

If you have only one appendix, call it “Appendix” with no letter designation. When referencing multiple appendices, call them out in order and indicate contents. For example: See Appendix A for the survey instrument distributed to districts. Appendix B shows responses to the survey by district.

Where to place appendices

Except in special circumstances, appendices are the last items in a document. For RMC reports, they usually follow the references or bibliography section. That placement can cause complications if you use automatic endnotes to generate your reference section, so you will probably want to store the appendices in a separate electronic file. For Microsoft Word® tips on handling large files, freezing generated lists, and other handy tips, see Appendix E of the Guidelines for Preparing, Editing, and Submitting TxDOT Technical Reports.

How to format appendices

Material in appendices doesn’t need to follow a special format or conform to the appearance of the report’s main body. Appendix material may be presented in any form that best conveys its
content – however, all information should be clearly identified. In RMC reports, each appendix begins on an odd-numbered, right-hand page. If practical, you can simply put the appendix identification and title at the top of the first page. In cases where that’s not practical, insert a numbered cover page followed by a blank even page, then begin the content of the appendix.

Where to get information

For more information about appendices in RMC reports, see pages 29 and 51 of Guidelines for Preparing, Editing, and Submitting TxDOT Technical Reports or contact TTI research editor Rhonda Brinkmann.

14. Calendar/Reminders

June 4-7—RMC Meetings, San Antonio

June 12—Research Development Seminar
    “National Cooperative Research Programs”
    Rm. 102 Gilchrist  8:30am – 9:30am

June 19—Research Development Seminar
    “Federal Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ)”
    Rm. 102 Gilchrist  8:30am – 9:30am

June 21—Research Development Seminar
    “Federal Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ)”
    Rm. 102 Gilchrist  12:00pm – 1:00pm

July 4—Independence Day Holiday

July 18-20—Texas Transportation Forum, Austin
    For more information, registration: http://www.dot.state.tx.us/ttf/

Nov. 5-8—RMC Meetings, San Antonio
CenterLine is a production of TTI Communications. We encourage your comments and suggestions for articles about TTI people and research efforts. Please send email to news@ttimail.tamu.edu or call Rick Davenport at (979) 862-3763.