1. Securing International Research Is No Monkey Business

With international research among TTI’s top priorities, researchers with experience from around the globe shared their expertise March 25. TTI presented a new research development seminar—an ongoing educational effort organized by Associate Agency Director Katie Turnbull—for those interested in securing international research. It was the most well-attended research development seminar to date.

Associate Agency Director Ed Seymour, who is heading TTI’s international research initiative, organized the seminar. Ed provided an update on recent activities and summarized available resources to support international research. The informal presentations from six researchers shared similar themes: hard work, cultural challenges and immeasurable benefits.

Joe Zietsman won the most unusual story award when he described his trip to India, where two monkeys strolled into the classroom where he was lecturing to steal cookies.

Zietsman’s $100,000 Environmental Protection Agency project is examining the feasibility of turning methane gas from Indian landfills into fuel. He told the group that his collaboration with
a large environmental research group in India was crucial in securing the project. “Without a local partner, this would have been a non-starter,” he said. Zietsman emphasized the need to find a local partner to help facilitate things, no matter where you are working in the world.

Other presentations detailed Roger Bligh’s work conducting tests at Riverside for a bridge project in China, Rafael Aldrete’s assistance on an economic free zone study in Macedonia, Susan Chrysler and Beverly Kuhn acting as reporters on FHWA’s international scan tours, and Shawn Turner highlighting TTI’s interaction with the Beijing Transportation Research Center (BTRC) at Beijing Jisotung University.

All the presenters suggested that securing international projects is made easier because of where they work. “People know TTI and they know the papers you have written,” Turner said. “TTI’s reputation can help you get your foot in the door.”

Read TTI international initiatives, resources:
http://ttinet.tamu.edu/mgmt_org/initiatives/international.stm

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2. Border Project Aims to Save Time, Decrease Pollution

The 35 million passenger cars and commercial trucks heading into Texas from Mexico every year are bringing a big dose of frustration with them. Crossing times vary widely and can range from thirty minutes to more than two hours before the vehicles clear U.S. Customs.

Long and uncertain crossing times negatively impact local commuters and businesses by requiring them to add a travel-time buffer in order to assure on-time arrival at a cross-border destination. This additional time can result in considerable productivity losses. The national and regional economies are also affected by the loss of competitiveness in the global marketplace. TTI researchers think they have a solution.

“We are working on developing a web site and other delivery mechanisms where people can check the current crossing times at a particular border crossing and, depending on the results,
change their departure time or crossing location,” explains Research Engineer Rafael Aldrete, director of the Center for International Intelligent Transportation Research (CIITR), located in El Paso. (Full story)

3. Christiansen Featured in Safety Organization Publication

Director Dennis Christiansen is the featured interview for the April edition of The Road Beacon, a non-profit organization focused on road safety. The question-and-answer interview examines the progress of road safety, safety funding, congestion and the Institute’s impact on transportation and safety.

The Road Beacon was created in 1999 with the sole purpose of promoting a national memorial for the more than 3 million people who have died in U.S. traffic crashes.

Read interview: http://www.roadbeacon.org/10886/index.html

4. TTI Anniversaries

25 Years

Bill Stockton, Associate Agency Director (ADM)

40 Years

Joe Button, Senior Research Fellow (BDV)

5. Internal Survey Shows Improvement, Job
Satisfaction

The results of last December’s online Survey of Organizational Excellence have been released. Virtually all aspects of the Institute were addressed in the survey, from job satisfaction and work place equipment to stress and internal communication.

“TTI is well above those we are benchmarked against in every category measured. All of our responses to all questions are extremely high,” Director Dennis Christiansen wrote in an email to all employees. “It is safe to say that other state agencies would be delighted to have our survey results.”

The survey is conducted every two years and is administered by the Higher Education Excellence Survey. TTI Administration uses the survey to measure and compare performance over time.

“While we can always do better and will continually strive to improve, this survey strongly suggests that we are doing a lot of things right—and keep in mind this was being filled out in the height of the TxDOT funding crisis. We have excellent people and an unmatched breadth and depth of capability. We have a good and a strong organization. Surveys such as this help us to confirm what we already know,” Christiansen wrote.

Read survey: http://ttinet.tamu.edu/mgmt_org/survey_org_excellence/

6. Study Pinpoints the Value of Moving Cargo by Barge

Results of a TTI study for the National Waterways Foundation and the U.S. Maritime Administration highlight the benefits of moving cargo by water. For example, barges move a ton of cargo 576 miles for each gallon of fuel expended. That’s a much better average than railroads (413 miles) and trucks (155 miles).

Results of the study, entitled “A Modal Comparison of Freight Transportation Effects on the General Public,” were released last month. “In addition to better fuel efficiency, the TTI study shows just how much safer inland marine freight transportation really is, both in terms of injuries and hazardous material
“Spills,” says Jim Kruse, director for the Center for Ports and Waterways. “The study shows how important it is to use marine transportation when there is a choice of modes.”

The year-long study was conducted by TTI researchers Kruse, Les Olson, and Annie Protopapas.

Read more: National Waterways Foundation News Release

7. Delta-T Launched with Inaugural Meeting

The eleven members of Delta-T, the first internal leadership development program for TTI, attended their first of four workshops on March 25. Members of Delta-T—an acronym for Developing Leaders for Today and Tomorrow—were selected by a committee to participate in the year-long program.

“Results from the survey of excellence told us that TTI employees want more opportunities to develop their leadership skills. One big benefit to providing these opportunities is that the skills apply not just to leadership within TTI but also to professional and civic organizations,” says Gary Thomas, director for the Center for Professional Development and Delta-T’s program coordinator. “Delta-T is generally patterned after a very successful leadership development program at Trinity Industries that focuses on developing employees to become better leaders.”

In the first workshop, members heard presentations from Director Dennis Christiansen, Transportation Modeling Program Manager Dennis Perkinson and Research Scientist Jeff Arndt.

Members of Delta-T for 2008 are Carlos Chang, Mark Coppock, Bill Eisele, Melisa Finley, Heather Ford, Tina Geiselbrecht, Justin Malnar, Cesar Quiroga, Beverly Storey, Tony Voigt and Joe Zietsman.

In addition to attending the four workshops with guest speakers, members will conduct group projects, organize small group activities and provide an end-of-year presentation to the TTI Leadership Team.
8. TTI in the News

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

Congestion impacts family relationships (*Los Angeles Daily News*) March 29

Cable barriers editorial (*News-Enterprise*) March 29

Potholes (*Chicago Journal*) March 26

Technology to help congestion (*Washington Post*) March 25

The congestion debate (*Rocky Mountain News*) March 21

Mass transit and the future of transportation (*Providence Business News*) March 18

Working from home and congestion (*Federal News Radio*) March 12

Infrastructure needs (*The Grand Island Independent*) March 12

Construction project (*Asheville Citizen-Times*) March 11

Congestion frustration (*Tampa Tribune*) March 6

Highway funding alternatives (*Longview News-Journal*) March 6

Cost of car crashes (*CNN Money.com*) March 5

Texas high-speed rail (*Fort Worth Weekly*) March 5
9. TTI Honored for Helping People with Disabilities

For its efforts in purchasing products from Texas residents with disabilities, TTI has been honored with a customer appreciation award by Texas Industries for the Blind and Handicapped (TIBH).

“We have been making it a priority to purchase products and temporary services through the State Use Program and TIBH,” says Financial Management Supervisor Kathy Cowen. “TIBH helps provide employment, through the State Use Works Wonders Program, for over 7000 Texans with blindness and other disabilities.”

In addition to TTI, the Texas A&M University System and the Texas Engineering Extension Service were given customer appreciation honors during a recent TIBH Houston region awards luncheon.

10. Researchers Contribute to Institute-Sponsored Forum

The 49th Annual Transportation Research Forum, hosted by TTI and sponsored by BNSF Railroad, was attended by 125 transportation professionals March 16-19 in Fort Worth.

This year’s Transportation Research Forum topics included corridor planning, transportation funding, energy and the environment, air cargo, railroad growth and competition, consumer gas prices, ethanol and agricultural transportation, traffic safety, opening the U.S.-Mexico border to international trucking and the future of federal surface transportation policies.

BNSF Railroad Chief Executive Officer Matt Rose was the keynote speaker and Chairman of Southwest Airlines Herbert D. Kelleher was the recipient of the President’s Award.

Numerous TTI researchers spoke at the event including Jeff Warner, Beverly Kuhn, Christopher Poe, Ben Sperry, and Tara Ramani. Panel members or moderators included Juan Carlos Villa, Linda Cherrington, Jeff Arndt and Ed Hard. Jessica Franklin helped coordinate and organize the
11. Pineda Retires after Quarter-Century

After 25 years with TTI, Senior Research Services Administrator Denise Pineda is retiring. Many of her friends, family and co-workers wished her well during a retirement party March 28. The event included presentations from Director Dennis Christiansen, Assistant Director Gene Buth, Associate Director Katie Turnbull, and Susan Adams, Director of TTI’s Research Development Office.

“At TTI, there are those that do research and there are those that look after those that do research,” Christiansen said. “Denise is one of the best of those, and we are going to miss you very much.” Christiansen gave her a clock plaque and told her that if she was lucky, the clock might work about half the time.

Pineda told the crowd that TTI was very good to her. “They appreciate their people. They promote their people. And I’m going on a cruise.”

12. Editor’s Corner: Word Processing Editing Tools

Microsoft Word® has some helpful editorial tools you can use to keep your document files on track. The following sections describe a few Word editing tools frequently used when working in technical report files.
Verifying word spelling and choice. Most Word users are familiar with spellcheck (Tools/Spelling and Grammar), which not only checks spelling but helps you make sure you’ve defined acronyms in your document. You might not know, however, that Word has a basic thesaurus that can suggest word choice alternatives (Tools/Language/Thesaurus or right-click over the word you want to check). It’s not as comprehensive as separate published reference books, but it often jumpstarts your brain.

Reviewing readability. Word also helps you review the readability of your document. To get readability statistics, go to Tools/Options and choose the Spelling & Grammar tab. Check the boxes for “Check grammar with spelling” and “Show readability statistics” then select OK. The next time you spellcheck your document, you will see a dialog box. It shows word counts for your file along with percentage of passive voice sentences and grade level. As general guidelines, I recommend reports have less than 10 sentences per paragraph, less than 20 words per sentence, and passive voice under 50 percent. For less technical audiences, aim for a grade level number of 8 to 10. Highly technical documents could go up to a grade level of 14.

Handling appendix files. In many technical reports, the references section should be placed after the main body of the report but before any appendices. However, Word allows an autogenerated list of references (endnotes) to come only at the ends of sections or end of the file. To solve this dilemma, maintain the appendices in a separate file and start the page numbering manually based on the last page of the previous section.

Freezing field text. If appendices are in a different file, how do you add their heading information into the main table of contents? When you copy and paste lists such as tables of contents or lists of figures and tables from one document to another, automatically generated text can no longer find corresponding source text. To avoid the resulting error messages, select the list in the appendix file and press CTRL+SHIFT+F9. This step freezes the list, changing it to stable text that you can copy and paste into the main file. Don’t save the appendix file after freezing the lists, though, since you will no longer be able to update them.

Editor’s Corner is written by Rhonda Brinkmann, research editor in TTI Communications. Rhonda is happy to take requests for column topics.
13. Reminders/Calendar

April 10 — Customer Focused Research Research Development Seminar
           Noon–1:00 p.m.
           102 Gilchrist

April 20–22 — Texas Transportation Forum
              Austin, Texas
              For more information:
              www.texastransportationforum.com

April 29 — TTI Day
           For more information, registration:
           http://ttinet.tamu.edu/Mgmt_org/TTIDay/index.stm

April 30 — Construction Celebration for TTI State Headquarters
            and Research Building

May 26 — Memorial Day Holiday

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.