The Road to Recruitment

TxDOT unveils a new recruitment campaign to find new talent and share the agency’s values and positive opportunities.
IMAGINING AN END TO TRAFFIC FATALITIES

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Texans are dying — and they don’t have to.

As I write this in late August, more than 2,200 people have died in crashes on Texas roads this year. Last year, the number of deaths topped 3,700. The year before that, it was close to 3,800.

Every day in Texas, on average, 10 people die in a traffic crash. Every day.

Traffic deaths keep stacking up, going largely unnoticed. We seem to have accepted traffic crashes and deaths as a normal part of the driving experience. Many even call them “accidents,” as if they somehow happen without reason. But a crash has a cause; and a death has a way to be prevented.

We have a role in preventing these tragedies.

At TxDOT, we strive to build safe infrastructure. Research institutions help us create materials and products to keep roads in good condition. And our safety messages are shared on every available media.

But each of us must make road safety a personal responsibility. A few days ago, I saw a commercial on YouTube that reminded me of this.

If you’d like to see it, search YouTube for Acura – The Test.

It begins with a technician loading a car with some crash-test dummies that he imagines look like his own family. The test starts and he sends the car — with the eerily familiar looking crash-test dummies — barreling toward a wall. The ad ends with the line, “When you don’t think of them as dummies, something amazing happens.”

It made me think.

What if, every time we design a road, we think of the poor decisions that drivers may make and we account for that by giving them as forgiving a road as possible?

What if, every time we’re maintaining a road, we check to ensure existing guardrail is properly installed or, even consider where it or rumble strips may be needed? It may be us or our family that needs that guardrail or rumble strip for protection.

What if, every time we get behind the wheel, we remember that we’re not just driving for ourselves, but for the people we care most about in the world?

What if, everyone buckled up, put their phones down, eased off the gas and called a cab if they’ve been drinking?

Then maybe, we wouldn’t be talking about traffic fatalities anymore. Instead, we’d be celebrating a new norm when nobody dies in Texas in a traffic crash.

That’s a day to look forward to.

Thanks for everything you do to keep Texas roadways safe. TN
In its new hiring campaign, TxDOT uses a multitude of channels to reach recruits, including the best ambassadors of the department — employees. The campaign aims to showcase the diversity of talent and work available across the entire agency. Featured on the cover: Johnny Hernandez, Derrick Dillard, Alexandra Fite, Brandon Owens and Edrean Cheng.

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THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW RIGHT NOW

1. Barth named new director of Project Planning & Development
   Brian R. Barth was named director of Project Planning & Development in June. In his new role, Brian will be responsible for the Environmental Affairs, Professional Engineering Procurement, Right of Way and Transportation Planning and Programming divisions. He has served as the department’s transportation program officer since 2017 and will continue to be responsible for the Transportation Program Division. Barth launched his career at TxDOT in 1988 as an engineering assistant in the Dallas District.

2. Track your training in PeopleSoft
   This past summer, the Human Resources and Information Management divisions launched a new PeopleSoft training module that makes it easier for employees to track and complete mandatory TxDOT training. The Mandatory Learning Plan will be automatically applied to your training profile to display the status and deadline for mandatory training. Once the new module is deployed, employees can access their Mandatory Learning Plan by logging into PeopleSoft and going to “Quick Links>Learning Plans>Details” to see their training due dates. Additional information and features will be coming soon.

3. Charitable campaign begins
   The State Employee Charitable Campaign, or SECC, has begun. It will run through Oct. 31. Employees may donate to one or more charities. Giving is easy. You can make your donation by payroll deductions or make a one-time donation. If you have not contributed before, please take some time to look at all of the charities. For more information, please check out the SECC webpage or contact your local SECC champion in your district or division.

4. HERO program expands to weekends in Austin
   The Highway Emergency Response Operator, or HERO, patrol service program has expanded to seven days a week on I-35 in the Austin area. During its June meeting, the Texas Transportation Commission approved an additional $2.1 million to expand the program to seven days a week on I-35. In addition to the expanded hours, the HERO program is adding two trucks as well as a dedicated debris removal trailer to help clear crash scenes in a safe and efficient manner. A second trailer will be added to handle lane closures that last beyond two hours.

5. Results of Survey of Employment Engagement available
   The results of the 2017-2018 Survey of Employee Engagement administered by the University of Texas are now available on the Human Resources Division’s Crossroads page. The survey results are available by district and division and an executive summary is also included. The results are used to develop the state’s overall strategic plan and are provided to state legislators for use during the biennial legislative sessions. The survey is specially focused on key drivers relative to the organization’s ability to engage employees toward successfully fulfilling its vision and mission.
When wildfires threatened North Texas this past spring, the Abilene District was there to lend a helping hand, and space, to the Texas A&M Forest Service.

Last April, the Texas A&M Forest Service was in the final stages of remodeling its office when extremely dry conditions in the High Plains and Trans Pecos regions of the state caused higher than normal incidents of wildfires. Abilene District Engineer Carl Johnson and the district’s staff offered the Forest Service space at the district’s headquarters to manage its operations.

At district headquarters, the Forest Service used the emergency operations center, the training room and the parking lot for about two weeks.

“The facility in Abilene was a perfect fit and strategically located,” said Tom Boggus, director and state forester for the Forest Service.

The headquarters became the place for the Forest Service to receive firefighters from around the country, check them in and then dispatch them where needed. The Forest Service was able to efficiently manage operations from one area and to park its firefighting equipment in TxDOT’s secured yards between assignments.

The partnership between TxDOT and Texas A&M Forest Service goes back many years and has been mutually beneficial. It began when Johnson was with the Brownwood District and needed some extra equipment for responding to a winter storm. Since that beginning, the Forest Service has provided equipment and manpower for fighting winter storms to the Abilene, Amarillo, Brownwood and Lubbock districts. In the summer, TxDOT helps out with fuel response and traffic control when the Forest Service is fighting fires.

“It’s been a very beneficial relationship for both agencies,” said Johnson. “They’ve been fantastic to work with.”

TxDOT may have even been a good influence on the firefighters. Executive Assistant Traci Graham challenged them to participate in the district’s Stretch and Flex activities in the morning. Some firefighters were impressed enough with the program to want to implement something similar in their departments when they got home.

“Everything worked very smoothly and it went off without a hitch,” said Johnson. “Our employees were real troopers and very welcoming to our guests. Partnerships like the one we’ve built with the Forest Service are a result of TxDOT’s philosophy of partnering with others and the commitment of our employees. If it wasn’t for the employees, it wouldn’t work.”
Texas Clear Lanes project opens in Austin

In June, officials held a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the recently completed I-35 at 51st Street project. The $16.5 million project includes a new roundabout at the southbound I-35 frontage road and 51st Street intersection, a southbound intersection bypass lane underneath 51st Street and reconfigured entrance and exit ramps. The project also includes bicycle and pedestrian enhancements, such as raised crosswalks and pedestrian safety beacons.

The project is the second Texas Clear Lanes project to open in Texas and the first in Austin.

The ceremony included Texas Transportation Commission Chairman J. Bruce Bugg Jr., State Sen. Kirk Watson, State Rep. Celia Israel and City of Austin Director of Transportation Rob Spillar.

“Funding for Texas Clear Lanes projects is growing in our major metropolitan areas and is designed to provide congestion relief at some of our biggest choke points around the state,” said Bugg. “The I-35 at 51st Street project is proof of our commitment to keep traffic moving in this region.”

In addition to the Texas Clear Lanes funding, the city of Austin invested $9.2 million in the project, which helped pay for the pedestrian and bicycle upgrades.

Grand opening of I-35W cause for celebration

The grand opening of I-35W in downtown Fort Worth was held on July 19 as local and state officials came together to celebrate the project’s completion. This opens the 10-mile project that rebuilt and widened I-35W from north of I-30 to U.S. 81/287.

The $1.6 billion project doubled the capacity of I-35W by adding two TExPress Lanes in each direction, auxiliary lanes and some frontage roads.
**Houston District recognized for work with quiet concrete**

Employees in the Houston District were honored with the Government Official of the Year Award from the International Grooving & Grinding Association, or IGGA. They were recognized for their efforts to advance the understanding and use of quiet concrete pavement surface textures using the Next Generation Concrete Surface in the state of Texas.

The award ceremony took place at the 2018 TxDOT-CCT Concrete Conference held in April in Austin. The award recognized the Houston District’s efforts to incorporate the ultra-quiet and smooth Next Generation Concrete Surface into several major highways, including I-10, Harris County’s U.S. 290 and the 610 Loop. Houston is placing about 3 million square yards of the concrete in total. Officials from the association praised the district for its willingness to innovate and adopt new technologies.

Founded in 1972, IGGA is a nonprofit trade association promoting development of the diamond grinding and grooving process for surfaces constructed with portland cement concrete and asphalt.

**Getting the safety message out in Abilene**

Inspired by the Occupational Safety Division’s new safety campaign “Safety is Intentional,” Abilene District Safety Officers Bill Parrot and Mike Hines were looking for a way to get the message out. At a safety meeting, Traffic Systems Specialist Jesse Gonzales suggested transforming the dull brown garage doors in various district buildings into billboards with safety slogans and best practices.

Putting the slogans on the garage doors meant district employees could see them frequently and keep the message of safety front and center. Parrott and Hines quickly worked to get the messages on the doors before the district’s Safety and Wellness Fair that kicked off the 123 Safe Days of Summer.

“Our mission in the Abilene District is the safety of our employees,” said Hines. “Any creative way to keep employee engagement and focus on this mission is a top priority.”

Employee safety is a driving factor that is recognized at every job level. The signs have been an excellent reminder that the goal is to achieve safe production, especially during the busiest season of the year.

“I want the Abilene District team to keep their minds set on safety in all measures. The 123 Safe Days of Summer slogans on the garage doors is a visible reminder that their decisions about safety impact both themselves and their teammates. We want to build a safety culture that is intentional, with each individual investing into the program wholeheartedly,” said Abilene District Engineer Carl Johnson.
In July, TxDOT employees welcomed the new PeopleSoft Travel and Expense Module, which automated the agency’s manual process of preparing, submitting and approving travel and expenses. The Information Management and Financial Management divisions worked closely to ensure the transition to the new system. The new submission process is now paperless and faster.

With the new process, employees can now establish personalized profiles to expedite recurring travel transactions and also check the status and history of their submissions. Other benefits include greater accuracy of submitted information, automatic approval routing and other shortcut tools to save time.

Since deployment, thousands of transactions have been successfully submitted, reviewed and approved. More importantly, employees have been reimbursed more quickly than in the past.

The learning curve for a new tool is always challenging, but job aids, videos and interactive training are available to all employees on the Financial Management Division’s Crossroads page. The feedback on the new module has been positive.

For questions about this new process, please contact the travel coordinator for your district or division.

Clinton Hyatt, assistant maintenance supervisor in the Fort Worth District, has an unusual hobby: He coaches the team for the National Archery in Schools Program, or NASP, at a local elementary school.

Hyatt has worked in Parker County in the Fort Worth District for 22 years, starting as an equipment operator. His interest in archery began as a teenager when he taught himself to bow hunt at 14. When his daughter, Avery, expressed an interest in the sport, he took on coaching duties.

“Avery wanted to do what her dad did,” said Hyatt.

Hyatt was certified by the NASP and volunteered to coach at Brock Elementary School while his daughter was competing. She won two state championships. When she moved to the middle school team last year, he continued to coach at the elementary level.

“It’s hard to coach your own kid,” he explained. “And the elementary kids are really engrossed in the program and coachable.”

The Brock Elementary team ranges from 30 to 50 students each year and faced archers from more than 80 schools at last year’s state tournament.

This year, Hyatt’s team finished second in the state. Several of his archers qualified for the national tournament and two team members even advanced to the international competition.

“The main lesson I try to teach my students is to not give up,” said Hyatt. “Archery is 95 percent mental over physical.”

Hyatt is also proud of his team’s safety record at home and at competitions.

“We have never had an accident on the range, not even a close call,” he said. “Archery is a great activity for kids, especially if they like to be outdoors.”
EDITOR’S NOTE: TxDOT101 is a new feature that focuses on explaining a common topic for the agency.

For many, congestion and Texas are synonymous. Most every major road in most every major metro area is drowning in traffic. And while many concede that the solution to mounting congestion is not always more construction, the prospect leaves TxDOT seeking and using alternatives. Enter the concept of managed lanes.

Managed lanes is an umbrella term for types of traffic-control strategies. The basic premise is to reduce congestion and improve travel times by taking vehicles out of heavily travelled lanes and into special-purpose lanes.

These special lanes go by several different names including:
- High-occupancy vehicle or HOV lanes allow drivers who carpool, vanpool or use public transportation to bypass traffic on nearby crowded lanes.
- Express lanes have limited access points and are physically separated from other lanes.
- Restricted lanes are limited to specific vehicle types like trucks or buses.
- Value priced lanes help cut congestion during specific times of the day, for example during morning peak travel times.

The basic premise is to reduce congestion and improve travel times by taking vehicles out of heavily travelled lanes and into special-purpose lanes.

Managed lanes offer drivers who choose to use them more reliable travel times. And contrary to common misconceptions, not all managed lanes require a fee or toll. In fact, the majority of managed lanes in Texas do not have a fee associated with them.

Of the 58 managed lane facilities in the Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio and Waco districts, 64 percent of them do not have a fee component, according to research conducted by the Communications Division. Of those facilities that require a fee, like the TEXpress lanes on a portion of I-30 in the Dallas District, the pricing component encourages drivers to alter their route or to time their trip to take advantage of free or reduced pricing during periods of less travel demand. This decreases traffic volume during peak hours and increases travel speeds.
INSPIRING
HIRING

Pictured (clockwise from left): Edrean Cheng, Lyon Harris, Daniel Wilson and Johnny Hernandez.

TxDOT photo

Pictured (clockwise from left): Edrean Cheng, Lyon Harris, Daniel Wilson and Johnny Hernandez.
TxDOT IS HIRING AND THE HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION NEEDS YOUR HELP TO GET THE WORD OUT!

TxDOT is always looking to recruit the best and brightest to join our family. This fall, Human Resources launched a major recruitment campaign to build awareness about TxDOT and its recruitment efforts. The division hopes to boost attendance at recruitment events and convey that TxDOT welcomes and values diversity.

The campaign will include print materials, social media and videos. It is being rolled out in phases and will continue throughout the year. Also the Communications Division is revamping the career section of the agency’s website, txdot.gov. It will include many new features and new content.

A primary focus of the campaign is to develop a network of charismatic ambassador employees who can talk to potential recruits about their jobs. Plus, TxDOT employees can be awarded 8 hours leave for a referral, if the person is hired.

The campaign is intended to appeal to talented, well-qualified candidates. It will emphasize that the agency is a diverse organization with many career opportunities and great benefits. It will also emphasize TxDOT’s purpose in making the lives of Texans and the family environment at the department better.

“Working for TxDOT, you’re doing something really big every day,” said Sheila Brooks, recruitment specialist with the Human Resources Division. “We want to use this campaign to show a modern TxDOT and, hopefully, change some outdated perceptions about us.”

Human Resources also wants to include the great stories of the people who work here.

“Our employees are our best recruitment resource. We have people who have spent their entire careers here,” said Brooks. “The number one reason people leave our agency is retirement. We want to tell those stories to attract a wide variety of candidates.”

With all of the great opportunities available at the agency, TxDOT is more than a job, it’s a career. Keep an eye out for our new hiring campaign.

*If you're interested in being a part of this effort, contact Human Resources at careers@txdot.gov.*

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Beyond the many miles of Texas highways lies a story of discovery and wonder! Our state is full of natural treasures like the Davis Mountains and is rich in human history dating back 10,000 years. Did you know TxDOT plays a big part in preserving these resources and sharing stories of our hidden past?

While many people outside of TxDOT may be familiar with our Don’t mess with Texas® or Drive Clean campaigns, not many people know about the department’s other environmental responsibilities. Like the fact that TxDOT discovered Inner Space Cavern near Austin in 1963 or the ruins of the farmstead of a freed slave dating back to the early years after the Civil War. Or the Environmental Affairs Division’s most recent finding while doing environmental studies for a project in Lubbock: the discovery of a mammoth dating back to the Ice Age (see the May-June issue of TN for more about this project).

The Environmental Affairs Division is ready to spread the news about this exciting work through a new campaign called Beyond The Road.

Environmental Affairs is teaming with other TxDOT divisions and districts to take one message out to the public: progress is a two-way street. The agency builds projects around the state’s natural splendor and we want the public to be a part of that. Step one in that goal is to simply let people know what TxDOT does. Engaging the public more about TxDOT’s work beyond roads can pave the way for better project outcomes in the future.

Whether TxDOT is building a new bridge, repairing damaged roadways after a natural disaster or creating safer intersections, its teams of archeologists, historians and environmental scientists ensure that progress is balanced with preservation. All of this happens before road construction.

For instance, a new brochure created with the Travel Information Division details how TxDOT designs bridges that double as bat roosts. Congress Bridge in Austin and six other bridges in Texas have become the place-to-be for visitors and bats alike. The brochure is now available at the Capital Travel Information Center. Districts and external organizations can request these publications on txdot.gov.

Environmental Affairs employees want to help districts engage their local citizens during environmental planning and during project environmental reviews. Reaching out to the public proactively with this information will increase and enhance the public’s engagement in National Environmental Policy Act planning.

Creating educational materials is not new for Environmental Affairs. Sharing these stories is an important part of the division’s responsibility as it follows national and state environmental laws as part of district projects. Division employees create school lesson plans for archeology, videos for historic bridges and local museum exhibits about neighborhood history as part of TxDOT’s obligation under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Be sure to follow TxDOT’s social media accounts or go to txdot.gov, keyword “Beyond The Road,” where you can dig deeper into the agency’s exciting environmental work with podcasts, videos and more.
In June, TxDOT and Webber employees visited an Austin community with a front-end loader for children to get an up-close look at the equipment used in highway construction. The visit was part of TxDOT’s ongoing community outreach efforts for the MoPac Intersections Project in Austin.

The front-end loader was a big hit with the kids. More than 100 children got a closer look at equipment that had fascinated them for a long time. In addition to the front-end loader, children learned about safety by suiting up in personal protective equipment, including hard hats, safety vests and goggles.

The MoPac Intersections Project recently switched traffic flow in the area to allow for construction on a new diverging diamond intersection. TxDOT engineers were on hand at the Touch-a-Truck event to explain the new traffic switch to parents and give the latest construction updates.

The MoPac Intersections Project will construct underpasses for Slaughter Lane and La Crosse Avenue in South Austin. It will cost $53.5 million and should be completed in 2022.
RACING WITH THE WIND
Houston’s Paul Eley Takes to the High Seas

When he’s not immersed in working with contractors and TxDOT team members on some of the Houston District’s most high-profile projects, a Houston District employee enjoys racing sailboats.
Houston District Lead Inspector Paul Eley developed a passion for sailing as a child. By the time he was in middle school he began to race competitively. He continued to sail during his teen years but he ultimately sold his small sailboat to help pay for college.

His sailing activities were held to a minimum as he began his career at TxDOT in 1988. His professional career took off as he took on pivotal roles on transportation programs throughout the Houston District. These projects included the construction of the Fred Hartman Bridge, the reconstruction of the I-69/I-610 Interchange and the I-10 Katy Freeway expansion, the largest project ever coordinated by the Houston District. He was also the lead inspector on the West Dallas Bridge project over I-45, which was demolished and rebuilt in a matter of a few weeks.

Away from work, Eley yearned to return to racing sailboats again. He got his chance in 2002 when he joined a group that competitively sails all over the country including the Gulf of Mexico, Narragansett Bay, the North Atlantic Ocean, Rhode Island Sound, Long Island Sound and Buzzards Bay. The group has had plenty of success. The team finished third in the PHRF National Championship at Key West Race Week 2008 and sixth in the 2010 Regata DeAmigos XXII Galveston to Veracruz race. It was first in class and first in fleet in several other races as well.

In recent years, Eley has been a part of significant victories in the New England area including a first place finish at the 2014 Nantucket Race Week and first, second or third place finishes at New York Yacht Club Race Weeks and New York Yacht Club Annual Regattas. However, the biggest victory came in 2016 when the team placed first in class, first in fleet, first overall and won the Rolex Cup for their performance in New York Yacht Club's 162nd Annual Race Around the Island.

Eley brings to competitive sailing the same focus, knowledge and determination he has while on the job.

“All members of the racing team work full time and sail as a hobby,” Eley said. “The team works hard and plays hard.”
TUITION ASSISTANCE OFFERS GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

JUST ASK CAROL CAMPA

TxDOT’s Tuition Assistance Program, or TAP, provides opportunities for employees to pursue educational growth through academic programs. Participants may pursue an associate, bachelor’s or master’s degree through the program.

One TxDOT employee who benefited from the program is Carol Campa, a traffic safety branch supervisor in the Traffic Safety Section of the Traffic Operations Division. Campa has been with TxDOT for 21 years. She started in the El Paso District as the administrative assistant to the district engineer. Since she is participating in TAP, we asked about her pursuit of higher education.

What degrees have you completed through TAP?
I completed the following degrees through TAP:
• Associate of Arts in business administration from El Paso Community College in 2003.
• Bachelor of Science in business management, magna cum laude, from Park University in Fort Bliss in 2005.
I am currently earning a master’s degree in public administration from Texas State University and will graduate this year.

Why did you initially apply for TAP?
I realized that in order for me to successfully advance my career, I needed a college degree. I was concerned at the time about the cost of a college education and the amount of time I would be away from home because my children were very young. I was also apprehensive about going back to school after being away for several years. However, TxDOT’s TAP gave me the opportunity to go back to school, and my family’s love and support enabled me to finish successfully.

How has participating in TAP affected your career?
Participating in TAP has been very beneficial to my career. In 2006, I was appointed as the El Paso traffic safety specialist. I became the State Safe Routes to School coordinator in 2009. In 2011, I joined the Traffic Safety Section and since then have served as a traffic safety program manager, Austin District traffic safety specialist, traffic safety program lead worker and currently as traffic safety branch supervisor. Each of these roles has been a positive step in my career.

What advice would you give to someone who is thinking about applying to TAP?
It’s never too late to go back to school.

Do your research: What is your goal? What kind of degree do you need to get you there? Which school do you plan or need to attend? Talk to the school advisor. Get support from your family. Have career discussions with your supervisor. Talk to your TAP administrators. Apply to TAP. Don’t get discouraged if you are not selected the first time. Continue applying until you get accepted into the program.

Know that it will take a lot of time and a lot of effort, but continue to persevere.

You are allowed to think about giving up, but don’t do it! Celebrate your accomplishment. Celebrate your future successes.

If you are interested in learning more about the Tuition Assistance Program, please email Education@TxDOT.gov or call 512-416-2700.
It is human nature to stereotype. We all do it, whether we know it or not. How many times have you heard that baby boomers are not tech savvy or millennials are entitled? Every day, we make unconscious judgments about people based on characteristics such as race, gender, age and sexual orientation. The list of stereotypes is endless.

Unconscious bias refers to the stereotypes we have that can affect how we see and treat people. Our biases have been formed over many years by our upbringing, experiences, culture, community and the media. We don’t have full control over them but through self-awareness, we can ensure they don’t negatively influence our decisions.

When biases affect decision-making in the workplace, they influence who is interviewed, hired and promoted. Ultimately, unconscious bias hurts diversity, recruitment, retention and employee development.

Bias that leads to discrimination such as imposing a negative employment action or failing to hire a person due to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, genetic information (for example, a family member’s medical history), military status or age is illegal. It is also illegal to discriminate against people with disabilities if they can perform the essential functions of a position with reasonable accommodation.

Bias has inappropriately affected decision-making if, for example, a woman is not promoted because of her gender or an African-American job applicant is overlooked because of his or her race.

The first step to not letting unconscious biases influence our decisions is to recognize that we all have them. Then, we should always question our first impressions. Take a minute to ask yourself why you are reacting to a person in the way you are and what might be influencing you.

The Human Resources Division’s Ethics and Equal Employment Opportunity Section can answer questions or concerns you may have concerning discrimination in the workplace. Contact them at EEO@TxDOT.gov.

**Take a minute to ask yourself why you are reacting to a person in the way you are and what might be influencing you.**
FOR THE BIRDS

TxDOT GIVES HELPING HAND TO FEATHERED FRIENDS
During a project to replace dynamic message signs, TxDOT contractors discovered a large nest of Quaker Parrots high above Cesar Chavez Street in Austin and TxDOT went the extra mile to safely remove them to a rescue center.

Quaker Parrots are not native to Austin but many call it home. Imported from South America as pets in the 1970s, some Quaker Parrots escaped from their owners in central Texas and began mating.

The parrots, also known as Monk Parakeets, like to make their nests on tall structures that mimic the soaring trees of their native land. They’re also known for building multiple nests in the same area, sort of like their own condominium complex. This is why TxDOT discovered so many eggs on one of its signs.

“At TxDOT, we strive to be good stewards of the environment,” said Austin District Environmental Supervisor Shirley Nichols. “While our mission is focused on transportation, we take our environmental responsibilities seriously and we’re always looking for ways to avoid or minimize harm where we can.”

Employees from the Austin District and its contractor, Austin Traffic Signal, delicately removed 17 Quaker Parrot hatchlings and 35 eggs from the sign located at Cesar Chavez and MoPac. In April, the chicks and eggs were delivered to the Austin Wildlife Rescue Center.

“We get all sorts of different birds here. They’ve either fallen from a nest or a nest isn’t in an ideal spot for the birds, such as power lines,” said Kristie French with the rescue center. “We put the eggs in an incubator until they hatch. At that point, volunteers provide round-the-clock care, feeding the birds by hand every couple of hours.”

When feedings slow to three or four times a day and the nestlings are significantly feathered, the parrots are given to special caregivers who foster them. When they are old enough, they are offered for adoption. Judy Pavone is one such caregiver. She stepped in to help with the nesting Quakers.

“Pavone has fostered about 20 or more parrots so far this year. All of the birds rescued from the TxDOT sign are doing very well, she says.

“I love [fostering birds] and my kids have learned wonderful lessons about the environment and our place in it,” said Pavone.

Quaker Parrots make great pets. They are able to learn a broad vocabulary and tend to speak clearly. The species also has a long lifespan. They can live up to 25 years or more in captivity. They are the only animals the rescue center will put up for adoption.

To adopt one of the Quaker Parrots, contact the Austin Wildlife Rescue Center. The $100 adoption fee is tax deductible and goes toward the cost of rehabilitation.
Roadway departure crashes represent more than 50 percent of fatalities on Texas roadways each year. TxDOT and TTI successfully tested a short-radius guardrail design at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute’s Proving Ground. Photo provided by TTI.
Preventing Roadway Departure Crashes

Roadway departure crashes represent more than 50 percent of fatalities on Texas roadways each year. TxDOT is always working to improve this number and keep drivers safe on our roads. In its efforts to meet new roadside safety hardware standards, TxDOT has found some innovative ways to keep motorists and TxDOT workers safe.

Roadside safety is ever-evolving, and over the years, it’s changed to meet the changing needs of transportation users. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, or AASHTO, first published its Manual for Assessing Safety Hardware, known as MASH, in 2009. The new requirements changed compliance standards and the way roadside safety hardware is tested.

A MASH-implementation agreement was jointly developed and adopted by the Federal Highway Administration and AASHTO. It established deadlines for developing roadside safety features. On projects let after the deadlines, only MASH-compliant hardware is eligible for new installations on the National Highway System.

The Bridge, Design, Maintenance, and Traffic Operations divisions reviewed their standards for roadside safety devices and identified 36 roadside safety systems that needed testing to assess MASH compliance. The systems are being tested in three phases over three years.

The Texas A&M Texas Transportation Institute, or TTI, was awarded the project last year. TTI operates one of a handful of testing grounds in the nation and its facility in College Station is one of the best. Already its testing has yielded some remarkable results.

One notable accomplishment is the successful testing of a short-radius guardrail that passed test level three testing standards. These standards involve a large pick-up hitting the guardrail at 62 mph. This guardrail provides additional safety at the intersections of major and minor roadways where there is limited room for roadside safety hardware.

“This guardrail is a real breakthrough, not just for TxDOT, but nationally,” said Ken Mora, roadway design section director for the Design Division. “Multiple computer simulations and several tests with various placement combinations resulted in a MASH-compliant system at a level never before attained. TxDOT is developing the design standards for the short-radius guardrail. Once those are finalized, they’ll be put out to manufacturers.”

Recently, TxDOT also successfully tested a portable, free-standing low-profile concrete barrier. The 26-inch tall barrier has an innovative T-shaped profile. Not only can it withstand high speeds, but motorists can see more of the roadway in work zones and can more easily maneuver around them.

Additionally, TTI tested a precast concrete barrier system to shield workers from vehicles in work zones. The barrier protects motorists from hazards in a work zone and passed MASH test level four requirements. These requirements involve a 22,000 pound, single-unit truck hitting the barrier at 56 mph at a 15 degree angle. It is the first and only portable concrete barrier system to achieve satisfactory impact performance with single-unit trucks. Barriers that can contain and redirect single-unit trucks will particularly benefit work zones that have to separate traffic in opposite directions.

As all of these successes are implemented on roadways in Texas, hopefully fatalities from roadway departure crashes will begin to decrease and our roads will be safer for Texas drivers.
When flooding hit the Gulf Coast in June, TxDOT heroes worked to help Texans get moving again. In the Corpus Christi District, Refugio crews worked to clean a drain to get water off of U.S. 77. Pictured: Roy Cisneros Jr. (left) and Robert Allan (right).

Can you guess what all these people have in common? They all have been with TxDOT for 30 years or more and they all have worked in the Fort Worth District at some point in their careers! From left: Fort Worth District Engineer Loyl Bussell, Director of Project Planning & Development Brian Barth, Executive Director James Bass and Northwest Public Information Section Director Jodi Hodges.

TxDOT photo

TxDOT photo
TxDOT's iconic Don't mess with Texas® program recently launched a new “Litter-Free State of Mind” campaign. You may have seen television, online and radio commercials already, and there's more to come throughout the year.

The new television spots portray Texans from all walks of life throwing away litter into the recognizable red, white and blue Don’t mess with Texas trash barrels. Keeping with the tradition of featuring musicians in its commercials, country music group Randy Rogers Band and all-female Tejano band Las Fenix have been tapped to make celebrity appearances in the campaign’s ads.

The “Don’t mess with Texas Band Search” launched in late August to challenge up-and-coming musical talent in Texas to come up with a catchy new jingle to represent the campaign. The winner will receive their very own Don’t mess with Texas commercial and some Don’t mess with Texas-branded musical equipment.

A travelling virtual reality game at high-profile events, a social media influencer campaign, gamified online ads, streaming radio ads and a limited edition poster will also be part of the new campaign aimed at young adults. Plus, a new face will also be introduced this year to educate the youngest Texans that Don't mess with Texas actually means don't litter. Expect to see the new mascot “Darrel the Barrel” at events across the state.

New officially licensed merchandise is available for purchase on the Don't mess with Texas section of the Texas Highways Magazine online store. A refreshed campaign website is also up and running.

After 32 years, the classic Don’t mess with Texas campaign continues to find new ways to reach new audiences. You can see more at dontmesswithtexas.org.

Robert Bagwell, Fort Worth District office manager for the Hood Somervell County Maintenance Office, was selected for the Adopt-a-Highway Maintenance Section Employee Award.

Bagwell is always willing to speak to Adopt-a-Highway groups and encourages new teams to sign up. He helped streamline the system for tracking volunteer groups and helps organize annual events in the area.

“Robert is also a member of the Texas Game Wardens Association. They strive to promote safe boating and keep our rivers free of trash,” said Rebecca Booher, Adopt-a-Highway Fort Worth District coordinator.

The Adopt-a-Highway program began in the Tyler District in 1985 and now has more than 3,800 participating groups across the state. It's a nationally and internationally recognized litter-prevention effort, saving taxpayers’ dollars and keeping our roadsides clean.
Chris Pruitt, a transportation engineering supervisor in the Waco District, joined TxDOT in 2016, but he’s been in the traffic engineering field since 2001. He received his bachelor’s degree from Southern Polytechnic in Atlanta, Georgia. He then received a master’s degree from the University of Tennessee and did some work in the Los Angeles area where he met his wife.

He was certified as a professional engineer in 2009 and has worked on large and small traffic projects since then. The majority of his career has been in public service with a few years in consulting. Pruitt and his wife have two sons and a daughter. His family is always busy with school-related activities, music and sports. When they get free time, boating is always a favorite activity.

Describe what you do on a day-to-day basis as a transportation engineering supervisor and why the work interests you.

At any given time, we have a number of traffic-related projects ongoing. The day-to-day is a balance of keeping up with construction projects, meetings, developing design plans and assisting with any number of internal and external inquiries. As needed, I also provide traffic engineering support to the area offices.

What skills, knowledge and abilities are crucial for success in this role?

In addition to the technical aspects which serve as the foundation, I believe the most important ability is being able to complete multiple tasks and initiatives within a team environment. We don’t just address the current hot topic, but try to identify and take action on items before they become a stopping point.

Why did you choose to have a career in transportation and more specifically join TxDOT’s Waco District?

I have always enjoyed being part of improving the transportation infrastructure. These changes affect almost everyone, as the transportation field touches so many parts of our lives. I was interested in TxDOT because of the wide variety of traffic projects that could be worked on. Our projects range from a typical signal layout to innovative technologies to smart work zones to evolving technologies. To me, the Waco District is a good fit because it offers a mix of both urban and rural engineering challenges.

How would you describe your leadership style?

I do not believe leadership styles can always be the same because I must adapt to what the team needs for any given situation. Team members can change over time. Leadership may mean taking the lead on technical support, setting goals, providing positive feedback or just listening to a new idea. I do think all leadership styles should promote a team atmosphere while still encouraging individuals to pursue individual goals.

What opportunities and challenges come with being a transportation engineering supervisor?

The biggest opportunity right now within the industry is the development of autonomous vehicles and the infrastructure to support it. While the course of the technology may be unknown, I think it will certainly affect the industry and ultimately improve safety. The biggest challenge is balancing time requirements of the day-to-day duties while planning and setting goals for future improvements. I believe it’s important to always care for the routine issues, but never lose track of the bigger agency goals.
What was your favorite band ten years ago?
My two favorite bands 10 years ago were, and still are, Journey and Van Halen (some with David Lee Roth and the best with Sammy Haggar).

Describe your typical work day.
My typical work day at TxDOT includes sending emails, visiting project sites, addressing project issues and providing first class customer service to my co-workers and the public.

What five words best describe you and why.
• Ambitious – Working hard to move forward.
• Respectful – Treat others the way you want to be treated.
• Friendly – A simple “good morning” will go a long way.
• Big-hearted – I believe we have been blessed and we need to help others in need.
• Helpful – I am always ready to lend a helping hand regardless of the situation.

What makes a perfect weekend for you?
A perfect weekend for me consists of spending time with my family. This may be going to the movies with my wife or hosting BBQs at my house so that all our family can spend time together. In addition, I look forward to attending Sunday mass followed by breakfast with my family. I truly enjoy volunteering at events at Christ the King Church, so my Sunday afternoons usually include working at the church’s Sunday bingo.

What one memory do you most treasure?
I have many memories that I treasure, but one of them in particular was when my older brother, Raul, bought tickets to see Journey in Houston. My other brother, Leonel, and I had to do well in school in order to be able to go. My parents received our report cards and told Raul that we would not be attending the concert because of Leonel’s grades. The concert experience was rubbed in by my older brother who told us “next time, you do better.”

Omar Peña
Construction Inspector • Laredo District
Omar Peña was born and raised in Laredo. He graduated from Texas A & M University – Kingsville. Omar started at TxDOT as a summer intern in 2006 and began as a fulltime employee in January 2007. He works at the Laredo Area Office as a construction inspector/project manager. He is married to Raquel Aleman.

What is your favorite quote?
My favorite quote is “I would love to stick around and chit chat, but I’ve got places to go, people to see, things to do.”

What’s something you want to do in the next year that you’ve never done before?
I would like to travel to Europe with my wife, Raquel, to experience the traditional authentic dishes of Italy.

How do you like your eggs?
I like my eggs scrambled with a topping of cheese, either mozzarella or cheddar, and ketchup. No ketchup, no good!

Who inspires you?
The person who inspires me is my late father, who passed away in February of this year. I had to fill in to take care of what he used to do. I told my siblings that if they tried to do his daily chores, they would not be able to keep up with him. We still do not know how he did it.

What about TxDOT made you go to work here?
After spending the summer of 2006 as an intern, I knew that I wanted to work for the largest engineering firm in Texas. It offers many opportunities for growth in many different fields.
Where Am I?

Here is a photo depicting an identifiable landmark you may have seen in your travels around Texas. If you think you know what this is a photo of or know where it was taken, send an email to TNideas@txdot.gov. Deadline for submissions is October 5.

Identified:

Last edition’s photo featured a sculpture from the Museum of the Southwest complex in Midland. The museum includes an art collection, the Fredda Turner Durham Children’s Museum and Marian Blakemore Planetarium. Unfortunately, no one was able to correctly identify the photo for this issue.

UPCOMING TxDOT EVENTS

Sept. 3
Labor Day
(Agency Closed)

Sept. 10-11
Rosh Hashanah
(Optional Holiday)

Sept. 19
Yom Kippur
(Optional Holiday)

Sept. 27
Texas Transportation Commission Meeting
(Austin)

Oct. 25
Texas Transportation Commission Meeting
(Austin)
### MILESTONES

#### JULY SERVICE AWARDS

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AUGUST SERVICE AWARDS

DISTRICTS

ABILENE
25 Rickey L. Gonzales
20 Stuart H. Jeffrey
 5 Gerald D. Lewis
 5 Ronnie D. Moore
 5 Rudy Sanchez
 5 Ronnie D. Wright

AMARILLO
25 Harrel E. Hardy
20 Harold B. Cave
10 Billy J. Hollowell

ATLANTA
20 Kevin P. Camp
15 James A. Walton
 5 Christopher W. Adams
 5 Anthony L. Henderson
 5 Anthony D. Henson
 5 Sean A. Rundles
 5 Jacob R. Veazey

AUSTIN
30 Doyle D. Moeller
20 James E. Bailey
15 John B. Taylor
 5 Mark A. Baumann
 5 Karen M. Lorenzini
 5 Christopher B. Martinez

BEAUMONT
25 Garry R. LeBlanc
15 Kevin M. Grissom
 5 Adam J. Jack

BROWNWOOD
25 Shelley L. Schuman
 5 Aurelio Deleon Jr.

BRYAN
25 Chad M. Clossin
 5 James H. Gibson
 5 Jared P. Johnson
 5 Charles D. Smith
 5 Wyvel T. Williams III

CHILDRESS
 5 Terry N. Messer

CORPUS CHRISTI
25 Antonio S. Cortez
 5 David N. Askew
 5 Juan E. DeJesus
 5 Austin A. Flores
 5 Ernesto J. Longoria
 5 Timothy M. Snyder

DALLAS
 5 Lawrence M. Kelly
 5 Tommy J. Neely
 5 Joseph N. Okeke

EL PASO
 5 Carlos Mendez
 5 Heriberto Molina
 5 Richard Zambrano

FORT WORTH
 5 Melese W. Norcha
 5 Alem Y. Teketele

HOUSTON
25 Henry E. Kellumen
 5 Roy Sanchez
 10 William R. Flores
 5 Juan O. Trejo
 5 Joshua J. Fields
 5 Todd Hannah
 5 Timothy J. Wilson

LAREDO
20 John R. Aguilar
 5 Pedro Garza

LUBBOCK
25 Barry D. Teafatiller

LUKFIN
25 Emilio Delva Jr.
 5 Clint A. Smith
 5 Koby B. Youngblood
 5 Billy M. Cornelius

LUFKIN
 5 Tad E. Eudy
 5 Andrea G. Dailey
 5 Paula L. Orr
 5 Bradley W. Smith
 5 Colby L. Walker

PHARR
20 Dagoberto Salinas
 5 Oliverio D. Cantu
 5 Robert Guerrero
 5 Jesus A. Tobar

SAN ANGELO
25 Bentley D. Mittel
 5 James W. Whitlock Jr.
 5 Thomas R. Johnston
 5 Jeffrey C. Yeaman

SAN ANTONIO
40 Dennis W. Goodall
 5 Brian S. Compton
 5 Tammy L. Felux
 5 Daniel Gonzales
 5 Michael J. Musick
 5 Dora A. Quiroga
 5 Ricardo J. Rodriguez
 5 Jason W. Wells

TAYLOR
25 Karen S. Gardner
 5 Jeffrey W. Williams
 20 Daryl J. Daigle

WACO
35 Nathan S. Whitley
 25 Shawn M. Uschan
 15 Stephen M. Kasberg
 5 Rodney W. Frye
 5 Tristan N. Jenkins

WICHITA FALLS
25 David S. Duck

YOAKUM
20 Steven C. Gartman Sr
 5 Benjamin R. Leopold

DIVISIONS

AVIATION
15 Carol A. Basey
 5 Randy W. Zumbahlen

CIVIL RIGHTS
 5 Teresita Alvarado
 5 Bich Ngoc K. Ngo

COMMUNICATIONS
 5 Teresita Alvarado
 5 Bich Ngoc K. Ngo

CONSTRUCTION
25 Vijayan Pillai
 5 Joseph M. Roche
 5 Melissa S. Benavides
 5 Jennifer Warnick

CONTRACT SERVICES
20 Monica Y. Scott
 5 Dana L. Mays

DESIGN
30 Peter B. Krause
 5 Kenneth Mora
 5 Charles T. Mansfield

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS
 5 Samantha S. Serino

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
20 Mary L. Amaya
 5 Edwin L. Whiteside

FLEET OPERATIONS
 5 Shannon W. Armstrong
 5 Joshua A. Cornelison
 5 William W. Kennedy

GENERAL COUNSEL
 5 David L. Smith

HUMAN RESOURCES
25 Debra D. Key

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
10 Claudio Nunez
 5 Bethany D. Wyatt

MAINTENANCE
30 Dennis K. Markwardt
 15 Brandye P. Munn

MARITIME
 5 Daniel P. Harmon

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY
20 Beatriz M. Alvarado

PEPS
20 Kathy Walton

PROCUREMENT
10 Catherine A. Corsillo
 5 Steven W. Hendricks

RAIL
10 Don R. Traylor

RIGHT OF WAY
 5 Tyler V. Kosmak

SUPPORT SERVICES
 5 Evan A. Castillo
 5 Randall M. Tod

TOLL OPERATIONS
 5 Jacob M. Willis

TRAFFIC OPERATIONS
25 Garry B. Rand
 5 Maria B. Hanke

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING & PROGRAMMING
20 Bertha Arellano
 5 Colt I. Amberg
 5 Maria E. Salazar
 5 Ingrid N. Weaver
DISTRICTS

AMARILLO
  9  Heath A. Henderson
AUSTIN
  24  Christopher G. Vaughn
BEAUMONT
  11  John E. Simon
BRYAN
  29  William J. Eisman
CHILDRESS
  33  James E. Langford
CORPUS CHRISTI
  24  Jimmy J. Castro

DALLAS
  34  Darwin J. Myers
  33  Amir H. Aramoon
  32  James K. Selman
  29  Virginia Balderas
  28  Paul S. Smith
  26  S D Prather
  18  Maher Karam

EL PASO
  30  Arlene Fresquez

FORT WORTH
  40  Grover A. Schretter
  26  Michele M. Martinez
  16  William B. Palm III
  12  Brenda Lee Richards

HOUSTON
  30  Wanda L. Johnson

JUNE RETIREE REPORT

DISTRICTS

ABILENE
  30  William T. Parrott
AMARILLO
  31  Billy R. Hester
AUSTIN
  28  Clint J. Dube
  20  Ronald L. Schulze
  13  Fred B. Wilson
BEAUMONT
  22  Robert A. Phelps
  20  James W. Glover
  19  Preston Cesar
BROWNWOOD
  22  Lonnie R. Williams
CHILDRESS
  21  Michael F. Williams

DALLAS
  26  James P. Kern
  24  William R. Laird
EL PASO
  32  Ernesto S. Nigro Jr
  24  Debra A. Martinez
  14  James L. Pilant
HOUSTON
  25  James H. Counts
  23  Thomas W. Moss
  21  Elston H. Boyd
  15  Eusebio M. Tovar
LUFKIN
  31  Coy D. Ditsworth
PHARR
  31  Hector P. Gonzalez Jr.
SAN ANTONIO
  20  Daryl M. Mahula
  13  William W. Gooch

TYLER
  26  Joseph M. Word
WACO
  25  Samuel T. Nowaski
  21  Francisca Chavez
  16  Robert E. Spratt
WICHITA FALLS
  31  Billy D. Taylor
YOAKUM
  31  Michael J. Kostelnik
  28  Michael A. Perez
  10  James Q. Joines

DIVISIONS

ADMINISTRATION
  32  Lauren D. Garduno
BRIDGE
  31  Steven D. Smith
CONSTRUCTION
  22  Lawrence W. Ekdahl

FLEET OPERATIONS
  24  Steven C. Mitchell
  18  Oscar A. Pazo
MAINTENANCE
  25  Mark W. McDaniel
PROCUREMENT
  28  William M. Bradshaw
SUPPORT SERVICES
  15  Guadalupe Cruz
TRANSPORTATION PLANNING & PROGRAMMING
  14  Bruce Robert Uphaus
TRAVEL INFORMATION
  32  Lucia B. Cordova

IN MEMORIAM

DISTRICTS

AUSTIN
  Charles R. Muery
  Date of Death: 7/12/2017
  Retired: 1992
  Years of Service: 38

BRYAN DISTRICT
  Dave A. Cole
  Warehouse Coordinator
  Date of Death: 6/24/2018
  Years of Service: 22

PHARR DISTRICT
  Carlos N. Garza
  Maintenance Section Supervisor
  Date of Death: 6/29/2018
  Years of Service: 4

John Wiesner
  Engineering Technician
  Date of Death: 6/18/2018
  Years of Service: 4

BEAUMONT
  Warren Dudley
  Resident Engineer
  Date of Death: 5/29/2018
  Retired: 1981
  Years of Service: 4

EL PASO
  Alfonso Daly
  Engineering Technician
  Date of Death: 6/1/2018
  Years of Service: 6

DISTRICTS

PROCUREMENT
  Russell Tomlinson
  Purchasing Branch Manager
  Date of Death: 6/3/2018
  Years of Service: 5

IN MEMORIAM
In appreciation for assistance following Hurricane Harvey, the law enforcement agency, the Texas Rangers, presented employees from the Fleet Operations Division and the Beaumont District with a framed letter of gratitude.

Fleet employees who were stationed at the Beaumont District headquarters assisted in keeping vehicles in operation for the Department of Public Safety and the Texas Rangers.

The letter reads:

“I want to thank the Texas Department of Transportation for the substantial support provided to the Texas Department of Public Safety and the Texas Rangers by TxDOT employees during the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Your employees not only exhibited technical expertise but also a willingness to go the extra mile. Without the help of your agency and its employees, the Texas Rangers would not have been able to keep its high-water vehicles in operation and as a result, several hundred persons would not have been rescued from the flood waters nor would we have been able to sustain security operations well into the month of September. Once again, thank you for everything. God Bless.”

It was signed by Lt. Kip B. Westmoreland on behalf of the Texas Rangers of Company A.

“It was our pleasure to address the fleet needs of the Texas Rangers and Department of Public Safety during the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey,” said James Fischer, equipment supervisor for the Beaumont District.

Read more about the good work employees are doing in Bright Lights on Crossroads: [http://crossroads/brightlights/](http://crossroads/brightlights/).

Send information on any thank-you emails, letters or calls you or your co-workers receive to AskTxDOT so we can continue to shine Bright Lights on TxDOT employee achievements.
Live well. Work well. That’s the new title of the Employee Wellness Program and it reflects a new direction.

Wellness is more than “what you eat and do with your feet.” The new Live Well. Work Well. program recognizes that a healthy employee is a productive employee. In order for our employees to do their jobs to the best of their ability, we need a strong, healthy workforce.

Being well is holistic. According to the program, it encompasses being financially stable, physically fit, emotionally equipped, intellectually stimulated, socially engaged and environmentally responsible.

The wellness program will be expanding the resources available over the coming year. It will cover the many dimensions of wellness and more in the “Road to Wellness” tip sheets. If you’re interested in receiving up-to-date information on exercise, healthy eating, finances, resilience, strength training, gratitude, weight management, meditation, recipes, personal development, stress management and many other topics that affect your well-being, get on the distribution list. Visit Crossroads to sign up and you’ll receive a tip once or twice a month.

The program is also offering a monthly wellness webinar carefully selected for TxDOT employees. Past topics include cooking, getting organized and staying healthy with a busy schedule. The Human Resources homepage on Crossroads has more details on the next webinar.