West Virginia Department of Transportation employees have a lot to be thankful for this year. It’s the year we worked through a pandemic, when some state DOT’s were laying off employees by the thousands. It’s the year we made progress toward catching up on roadwork long underfunded, got innovative with airport revenues in a time when ridership was down, moved forward with public transportation on projects like the Bluefield Area Transit, kept those trains a rolling, adapted the DMV to keep customers safe, kept our rest areas so clean travelers noticed, and so much else in a time when we had to do Every. Single. Thing. Differently.

Around the state, employees like transportation worker Darlene Parker, pictured, share their gratitude openly and easily — they are at no loss of words because along with masks, caution, and balancing West Virginia’s economy at a time when we see hope on the horizon for making it what it should be — the spirit of Thanksgiving has also been on their minds. Our WVDOT family has grown stronger, closer and better this year; like families everywhere. We’re grateful for the simplest of things. Here are our “thanks givings,” in our own words.

These words are truly their own; typed up by an Office Assistant named Jesse Ward for whom your editors Randy and Jennifer are grateful. As such, they don’t legally represent an official opinion held by the WVDOT. They are edited only in the put-them-in-the-newsletter sense of the word, and they are not intended to convince anyone of anything. It’s just a way to share the heart and soul of our organization; and that is — our people.

“My name is Darlene Parker, and I’m a Transportation Worker 1 in Lewis County. I’m thankful for my job.”

“My name is Dean Harris. I’m a Transportation Worker 1. I’m thankful for my family and friends and everything God has blessed us with this year.”

“My name is Cindy Butler. I am the Director of the State Rail Authority. On a personal note, I am most thankful for my wonderful friends who are like family and my family! Professionally, I am thankful for my job and the support I received from the Secretary’s Office and my board of Directors. I am also thankful for the employees we have! We are a small agency but we have big responsibilities and my team comes together when they need to!”

“My name’s Alissa Butcher and I work in the Design Department and I am thankful to have a job since I was laid off in January and I’m thankful for my beautiful daughter and my husband.” (Continued on page 3.)

Also in This Issue:
Honoring Our Veterans
Beckley Widening Project
Beckley Widening Project Update

The Beckley Widening Project, a collaborative effort between the Parkways Authority and Division of Highways, which widens the West Virginia Turnpike from mile marker 40 to 48 in Raleigh County, is now 60% complete. This important project was one of the first Roads to Prosperity projects to begin work. It has an anticipated completion date of November of 2022.

With the switching of the travel lanes from the outside lanes to the inside lanes on November 19, motorists saw a smoother ride and improved surfaces. Jeff Miller, Director of the Parkways Authority, is quick to point out that although the ride is much more smooth, the surface is not the final surface. Motorists should “Just. Slow. Down.” And keep their “Heads up; phones down!” as they travel through this and other work zones.

“It’s a 120 million dollar project, through the DOH, a partnership,” said Jeff Miller, Director, Parkways Authority.

“The economic driver that the Turnpike is and always has been, the future is very bright in regards to the fact that that will widen the road through the Beckley area,” said Miller. This stretch of interstate is one of the most congested on the West Virginia Turnpike, so completion of the project will also improve safety for travelers.

“This is a wonderful organization,” said Miller. “Every single person that I’ve met, truly from top to bottom in this organization, they love their job, they’ve been here for a long time, so they all know what they’re doing. They’re wonderful to work with. As soon as I walked in the door, everyone was very helpful. For me, coming in as a new Executive Director, you want to make sure that your people have a certain buy-in on the ground and in the field, and they do. They love what they do, and I love being here. It’s really been a great experience so far.”

WVDOT Today! is a monthly newsletter published by the West Virginia Department of Transportation and distributed statewide via email to a strong network of the best employees on earth. All content is developed by the editors, unless otherwise credited. The purpose of this publication is to facilitate connection across the diverse worksites and professions represented among WVDOT employees to empower us to function as one West Virginia Department of Transportation. Working together, we can give West Virginia the transportation systems it deserves and be a driving force in building the economy West Virginia should have. It’s all connected. WVDOT Today! welcomes you to write in and share your thoughts.

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We are recognizing our people.
“Good Afternoon. My name is Joe Weiskircher (pictured.) I am the Assistant Division Director of the Progaming Division. I work in Charleston, at the State Capitol, Building Number 5. I’m reading my notes, so I don’t leave anything out. What I am thankful for is my faith, my big family, my wife Joyce, our two daughters, Jessica and Andrea, my Mother and Father, who have 8 offspring — 5 girls, 3 boys, 17 grandchildren, and 6 great grandchildren and my country. We live in the greatest country in the world and I am thankful for our flag which represents our freedom. I am also thankful for our military and our veterans. I’m also thankful for Dr. Joseph Africa and his staff at CAMC. Dr. Africa is the surgeon who performed a kidney transplant for me in January of this year. I am blessed and I am doing very well thanks to Dr. Africa and his staff. Today, we are excited and thankful for a brand-new baby girl born yesterday in Huntington to our daughters Jessica and our future son-in-law, Kevin. Our first grandchild for Joyce and I and her name is Zoe Lee. She is an absolute beautiful little girl. I am also thankful for my job at the West Virginia DOH. I’ve worked in the Programing Division for 35 years to provide for myself and my family. Thank you for that. And last but not least, I am also thankful that I am retirement eligible. So, possibly, I can retire before Jimmy or Byrd tries to fire me. Thank you very much and have a good Thanksgiving.”

“Hi. I’m Bill Robinson, Director of the West Virginia Division of Public Transit. I am thankful professionally for the generosity of the federal agencies and the WVDOT in allowing managers to be flexible with our employees in response to the COVID crisis. The federal government has provided funding, PPE, etc. that has allowed us to better serve the citizens during this troublesome time and the WVDOT has allowed us unparalleled freedom in dealing with our employees and meeting their needs. Several members of my family and myself have had the COVID disease; I am very thankful none of us were in danger during our illness and all of us have made a full recovery. I am also grateful for this season; this time of spirituality that all people, no matter what their beliefs, can focus on something higher and better than the pull and tug of everyday life. The Christian Bible says about this season “For unto us a child is born… and the government shall be upon his shoulder…” Until that day, we have been entrusted with the government and the fortunes of our fellow citizens and should take a measure of pride in the work we perform and who we do it for.”

“Hi. I’m Robert Polling. I work for the Department of Highways, West Virginia, Braxton and I’m thankful to have my health and everybody we work with out here has been healthy. I hope everyone has a good Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays.”

“Hi. I’m Kim Fernandes, Grant Administration Unit Leader in the Planning Division. This Thanksgiving, I am thankful for family, friends and good health.”

“Hi. I’m Kelly Hayhurst and I work out of the Reporting Unit in District 4. I am thankful for many things this year. I am very thankful for my family and my DOH family. We have been working through a pandemic and we have managed to stay healthy and safe and continued working through this. Every day I am thankful, but I am truly thankful for my DOH family.”

“Hi. My name’s Jennifer Greenawalt and I’m the Maintenance Secretary here at District 4 Headquarters in Clarksburg. I’m thankful for so many things this year. I’m thankful for my job, my family and our continued health, and my friends and co-workers here at the District. I want to wish everyone a happy and blessed holiday season.”

“Joseph Cottrill, Transportation Worker 3 Equipment Operator in Gilmer County and I’m thankful for God and family.” (Cont.)
“Hello. My name is Claire Pinder and I am the Reporting Unit Leader for District 4. Yes, I work a hectic, fast-paced, short deadline, but amazing organization. I am so thankful and blessed to be working for DOH. I am also thankful that after 2 years of surgery, 12 rounds of intense chemo treatment, I will be cooking Thanksgiving dinner for my parents once more. From my home to yours, have a beautiful and blessed Thanksgiving.”

“My name is Aaron Ballard and I am a Highway Engineer Trainee from Monongalia County. I am most thankful for my relationship that I have with my creator, Lord, and savior Jesus Christ who died on the cross for my sins which opened up the gates of heaven to me and guaranteed me the promise of eternal life through faith in him. I am also thankful for the earthly blessings he’s bestowed upon me including a loving family, good health and a stable career with the DOH and most recently, a new house. Which I am very thankful for among many other things.”

“I am Tressie Lopez and I am the Program Oversight Section Head in building 5 at the Capitol Complex and I am thankful for the patience and the love of this agency that many of our employees have and have had for over 10, 15, 20 years. I’m thankful for being a part of a dynamic and wonderful team. Other than that, I’m thankful for my two puppies and my wife. So, thank you.”

“My name is Howard King and I work out of District 3. I’m the Resurfacing Coordinator and I’m thankful that we haven’t had to shut down all this time and I’ve been working for the Department of Highways for 34 years.”


“Hi. My name’s Scott Blosser. I work in District 4. I’m the Bridge Repair and Design Engineer and with Thanksgiving approaching, I’d just like to say I’m thankful for my faith, family, and friends and thankful for my job at the Division of Highways and that we’ve all been able to work through this COVID pandemic and I just want to wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.”

“Hi. My name is Julian Woods. I’m the Executive Director of Human Resources for DOT and DOH and a few things I’m thankful for? First of all, I’m thankful to be a part of such a dynamic and team-oriented agency. I’m thankful that we’ve been able to put forward new hiring guidelines and our new compensation career plan. I’m thankful for the patience and the love of this agency that many of our employees have and have had for over 10, 15, 20 years. I’m thankful for being a part of a dynamic and wonderful team. Other than that, I’m thankful for my two puppies and my wife. So, thank you.”

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“Hi. My name is Renee Kendell. I work as an Account Tech in District 3, Wood County and I am so thankful this year, first of all, for my health and the health of my family through these bad times. Everybody’s having a lot of sickness going around and I’m thankful for the health of my family. I’m thankful that I have a job. A lot people have not had very good financial luck this year and that is something I am very thankful for. So, Happy Thanksgiving.”

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“Hello. My name is Hunter Booth. I’m the District 3 Field Maintenance Engineer. I work in Parkersburg, WV and one of the things I’m thankful for is my Co-Workers. They’re always colorful and fun to work with and they make work go by a little bit quicker.”

“Hello. I’m Melissa Midkiff, Highway Office Assistant Coordinator at 1028 Mercer County and what I am thankful for is my family, friends, health, co-workers and my job. I am very thankful we have all stayed healthy and safe through this pandemic and I hope we continue to stay that way. Thank you and have a Happy Thanksgiving.”

“Hello. My name is Jeff Crislip. I’m a District 4 Maintenance Assistant and I am very thankful and grateful this year first and foremost for my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Secondly, my family, my children, grandchildren with a new set of twins on the way after Thanksgiving and Christmas, my siblings, some of my family and my extended family, which is the Department of Highways cause we’re together, sometimes, more than my regular family. So, I’m really grateful and thankful for them. I’m also thankful for my health and the ability to ride my motorcycle across the United States on back roads so I can compare those back roads to the roads we have here in West Virginia. So, everyone have a wonderful and blessed holiday season and many blessings to you and your family.”

“Hello Everyone. I am Jeanie Ward. I am a Highways Human Resource Specialist 2 for the Division of Highways here in District 10 and I’d like to say that I am thankful for my family, my friends, and my amazing Job here at the West Virginia Division of Highways in Human Resources. I hope you all have a fantastic holiday.”

That’s page after page of thank yous, just gathered word-of-mouth by District Engineers, Division Directors and Agency Heads. They’re different, like a gathering, but there are many blessings to count and anyone you ask would have more.

To share these thank yous with your friends and families, tune in to the November 24 episode of WV on the DOT podcast, available on SoundCloud and at transportation.wv.gov A handful are also featured on a video on WVDOT’s Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Reminder: there’s hope on the horizon, but we’re not out of the woods. Wear your mask to honor and protect those around you until we can get past this pandemic.

And while we’re speaking woods, safe and happy hunting to all our folks who’ve headed *into* the woods this season.
**The Leader in ... Us**

Secretary of Transportation, Byrd White’s, column “The Leader in You” has become a staple in WVDOT Today! For November “The Leader in You” column demonstrates yet another facet of leadership, what happens when Byrd doesn’t write a column?

“A good leader has a winning team, strong enough to step in and carry forward any time. That team itself is made of leaders. That team doesn’t differ or flip-flop; doesn’t backstab; doesn’t say one thing and do another; doesn’t turn to jello when leaders turn their heads. This month, “The Leader in You” column is carried by those leaders. Read on!”

“One of the facets that impresses me most about Secretary White’s leadership,” said Ryland Musick, P.E., Ph.D., Deputy State Highway Engineer, “is that he always insists on maximum quality and yield while maintaining proper integrity. He is always appreciative in each and every employee, and does not take them for granted.” When Musick says ‘maximum quality and yield,’ he would know. He has become a go-to guy for an ever increasing network of people, ready with information and numbers at the drop of a hat.

“Another thing that stands out is that you should tell the truth, no matter what,” said Musick. “Whatever it is, we can deal with it.”

“Byrd has been very accessible,” said Bill Robinson, Director of the Public Transit Authority. “Access is important when making decisions, particularly in a fast-moving situation. He also listens. Listening is an important skill for a high-level executive; he must trust, and listen, to the people working with him. As well, he is easy and approachable. There is a time for formality and a time to close ranks and build relationships. Byrd understands this very well.” Like Musick, the qualities Robinson finds appealing in another are qualities he holds as well.

“Happy and always smiling, he brings a positive attitude to our workplace and encourages others to do the same,” says Rita Pauley, Assistant Commissioner, who — (you guessed it) holds those same traits. “An open door policy. The willingness to respond or have someone respond to questions quickly. Sincerely wanting every employee to enjoy working as a member of our team. The belief that we all have value and are important to DOT’s mission.”

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Virtual Conferences

It’s conference season, and here at WVDOT, conferences continue thanks to employees like Monica Kessell (pictured, assisting with Human Resources virtual conference.) While we don’t have endless coffee and cookies, we have dedication, spirit and the understanding that it’s really important to just keep going. We took so many things for granted, and that’s one way of life we may not go back to. Everything matters more when you’ve gone the extra mile to reach it.

Staying focused, session after session, gives us a brief glimpse into what the younger members of our family (family, not “families” — if this COVID thing doesn’t show us how much we’re all ONE then what could?) are going through as they struggle with virtual learning and try to keep up in school. Ours is just for a few days. Theirs is for one of the precious few years that have names; freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, 3rd grade, 2nd grade, 1st. None of those years are years they can afford to miss. Some of them are in places where they will really miss out, and some will fall behind. We cheer them on in their efforts to keep going. The year we’re in will change the way they see things, too.

Hopefully, when they get through, they’ll come join us. They will sign up (through streamlined, efficient hiring practices) for careers where they can call West Virginia “home” for a lifetime.
Congratulations to the following individuals being recognized this month by Secretary Byrd White and Deputy Secretary Jimmy Wriston, P.E., for their dedication to The Vision.

Angia Hughes—Human Resources
Deanna Simms—Contract Administration
Elizabeth Lilly—Programming
Kelli Clagg—Office Services
Charlie Reel—District 9
Tim Sedosky—Planning
Lee Thorne—District 5
Jacob Bumgarner—Operations
Dee Begley—Engineering
Alanna Keller—Special Projects

The Vision is simple; to be the best DOH in the country, for the purpose of giving our West Virginia the chance it should have — a place of prosperity and joy, where citizens have the best chance to build the lives they hope for. To be the best DOH in the country based on the quality of our work and motivation. To be the safest place for our employees to work. To be the best trained, and most educated.

To go Above and Beyond.
To take pride in all we do.
Stress Vs. Digestion

Carly Gandee – Wellness Coordinator

Here are a couple tips to help deal with stress and anxiety to manage healthy digestion:

• Take a time-out. Practice yoga, listen to music, meditate, get a massage, or learn relaxation techniques. Stepping back from the problem helps clear your head.
• Eat well-balanced meals. Do not skip any meals. Do keep healthful, energy-boosting snacks on hand.
• Limit alcohol and caffeine, which can aggravate anxiety and trigger panic attacks.
• Get enough sleep.
• Exercise daily to help you feel good and maintain your health.

• Take deep breaths. Inhale and exhale slowly.
• Count to 10 slowly. Repeat, and count to 20 if necessary.
• Do your best. Instead of aiming for perfection, which is not possible, be proud of however close you get.
• Accept that you cannot control everything. Put your stress in perspective: Is it as bad as you think?
• Welcome humor. A good laugh goes a long way.
• Maintain a positive attitude. Try to replace negative thoughts with positive.

Your Stress Matters More Than You Know

Ever wonder why you get “butterflies” in your stomach before doing something stressful at home or at work? Or why you feel like your stomach is “tied in knots” after an argument? Ever find yourself running to the restroom even if it was not caused by anything you ate? Stomach problems are one of the most common symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Interesting enough, there is a powerful connection between the gut and the brain. Outside of the brain, your digestive tract is the next largest area of nerves. The digestive tract and the brain both share many of the same nerve connections. Making the management of your stress and anxiety even more important to maintain.

“IN UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS OF DIGESTION, YOU’LL DISCOVER WHO’S IN CHARGE. HERE’S A HINT. IT’S NOT YOU.” - Nancy Mure