

## October 2017 Director's Report

Hi, everyone! Sadly, I don't have any great family adventures to share this month – we've fully entered that part of the year where everyone is engaged and occupied with work and school and we have to catch pieces of each other. But the pieces are good – cross country meets for Erin, marching band performances with Mary and Matt and now symphony orchestra and jazz orchestra performances with Matt (unfortunately the best we can do with Dan in Utah is call and Skype).

I had my own adventure with the Quad Cities Marathon at the end of September. One of the cool parts of that marathon is that you get to run across the I-74 bridge (they actually close the right lane on the Iowa-bound side) so you get to run where few people ever stand and get an incredible view of the Mississippi as you cross. People around me were talking about the bridge and speculating on what we were doing with the construction for the new bridge, so I started answering and explaining, and it eventually came out that I'm director of the Iowa DOT. That's when I told them I wasn't really running the marathon, I just happened to be out looking things over and got caught in the crowd.

That adventure notwithstanding, I thought the best day I had since my last report was my visit to District 2 in Mason City. I believe strongly in being in and knowing our workplaces, which can be a challenge since we are so big and spread so far across the state, but I have started by scheduling visits to all of the districts, and District 2 happened to be the first. I got a chance to learn a lot more about all of the diverse, interesting and important things we do and to meet many of the people that do them, and I really enjoyed and appreciated that. A special thanks to District Engineer Jon Ranney, who put a lot of thought into organizing the day and things to see and learn about, including lining up a typical road crew operation so I could see how an attenuator functions and get a better feel for the safety challenges we are tackling. And an extra special thanks to April Concepcion, secretary in the District 2 office, who gave me this bag of dates. April saw the "Save the Date" video we made for the October Leadership Conference (which featured me eating a ton of dates before someone smacked the last one out of my hand to "save the date"), and playfully left a bag of dates on the front table of the meeting room for me. I really appreciated her sense of humor, which is so important to share at work, but I admit that after eating almost three bags of dates to make the video, I'm not quite ready to open them up. Maybe by December. In the meantime, here's this month's report!



*April Concepcion's (as yet) unopened bag of dates.*

## Why do I do these reports?

One of the really great (and humbling) part of my conversation with the District 2 staff was about my monthly reports. They very kindly told me how much they appreciated the reports, and said appreciated hearing more about what was going on and other parts of the Iowa DOT, and also appreciated that I made it personal and funny at times. One person also commented that it was leadership. Truly humbling comments, and I can't express how much I appreciate them.

I bring them up not to give myself a pat on the back, but as an opportunity to share with you all my comments in response. I write these reports because I think it's so important for us to all feel connected and to know more



*The tenets of "CORE" communication. Don't leave out the "why"!*

about who we are and what we are doing. I've always maintained that it's part of our job to know about the place that we work, even when it's about things we're not directly responsible for. It helps us understand our mission, where we fit, and how we can contribute and collaborate, and as an aside it also helps us with those "Hey, you work at the DOT, do you know anything about . . ." questions we all get in our personal lives. I also talked about the importance of talking about good news and bad news, easy topics and hard topics, and always explaining the "why" – the commitment to living up to the Face2Face communication training we all had to fill in the CORE and commit to dialogue. And I talked about the importance of having fun, bringing humor, and being personal in our work, recounting that Google spent years researching what made the most effective teams, and found that the only common denominator among their most effective teams was the willingness to be personal with each other.

But the most important thing I talked about was that communication was not the work of one person or one group of people. It's the work of many, many people, and it needs to happen every day and in many ways, written and (more often) personal. As I told the folks at District 2, I hope you all see it as an important part of your job to communicate in the same ways and with the same mindset, whether as a leader to a group or as an individual asking those questions that spark dialogue and bring out needed communication. And I hope you all know that you have permission and are encouraged to be personal, to have good humor, and to make work an enjoyable place. As Melissa Spiegel, director of the Motor Vehicle Division aptly said at the statewide Driver & Identification Communication this past week, "BE YOU."

As I said at District 2, my most common reaction when someone compliments me on one of these reports is to feel guilty. From my perspective they are such a small effort compared to the amount of communication we need, and I constantly worry that I'm missing important things that you need to hear about, and that would be better conveyed personally. I hope you will all help me, not just by letting me know about things that you would like to hear about or think should be shared or addressed, but by communicating to frequent, open, and honest communication in you sphere of influence. It will be the most important thing we do together!

## Message Mondays rock! (Or sometimes pop)

When we started Message Mondays in August 2013, the idea was to use our dynamic message signs (when not needed for active safety messaging) to raise awareness of the number of traffic deaths on Iowa's highways and give safety tips to reduce fatalities. It was a risk, and some people questioned whether we should use the signs for that kind of messaging. But four years later we're still going strong, and the Monday messages have become one of the most well-known and talked about elements of our public-facing safety campaign, Zero Fatalities.

Just in case you're not familiar, each Monday we run the current fatality county and a safety message on more than 70 overhead message boards across Iowa. We use social media and blog posts to dig deeper into how the message ties to traffic safety. We all receive these messages in our email every week, and the social media posts often linger online long after the signs go black.

One reason our messages have been so well received is that we have been willing to have a sense of humor about them, make them socially relevant, and it times even be edgy. In conversation I often call on us to shed the bonds of "old government" and "bring the cool", and this is an area where I think we have really succeeded at that. Over the years there have been several home runs with messages that have gone viral, including "Get your head out of your apps" and "May the 4<sup>th</sup> be with you, text I will not" (which we ran when Message Monday fell on Star Wars Day, May the 4<sup>th</sup>).

The last few weeks we had two messages that were hits (both as messages and as songs) and got some great play (get the whole music pun thing going on here?). The first was a play on the 1976 KISS song "Beth." It read: "Beth, I hear you texting, but I can't reply right now." (Remember the original lyrics? "Beth, I hear you calling, but I can't come home right now . . . .") This fun, creative message was a suggestion from one of our own employees, and it caught so much attention that KISS itself tweeted an image of it.



*Twitter post of our September 25, 2017, "Message Monday" by rock band KISS.*



*Social media post with our October 1, 2017, T-Swift-inspired "Message Monday"*

resonate, and be successful. And as they say, "success breeds success." Like the two messages above, many of the ideas that are used come from suggestions from our own employees and the public. The team working on the program has been in contact with at least 30 other states that want to find out how we do what we do, many using similar elements and messages in their own message board programs.

Have an idea of your own? Go to <http://ia.zerofatalities.com/> and scroll down to the "Submit your Message Monday idea here" link. Let your imagination run wild! (But do it in 54 characters or less.)

### **We get by with a little help from our friends**

(Don't get this heading? Ask the nearest boomer. ☺) Like most organizations, we face two constant demands: one is how to maximize the capacity of our workforce to make sure we are meeting all of our work demands (without overburdening people) and another is how to sustain our workforce over time by making sure that young workers see as a place to start or grow their career. Our intern and coop program is a remarkable opportunity to serve both needs.

The second was inspired by the first. After seeing the KISS reference, one of our social media followers suggested we make a play on a line from pop icon Taylor Swift's recent hit, "Look What You Made Me Do," which includes the line "Old Taylor can't come to the phone right now. Why? Oh . . . cause she's dead." The result – "Old Taylor can't come to the phone... she's driving" – picked up not just national but international attention. It was covered by Britain's version of the Associated Press and several British publications; as well as a number of American media outlets and publications, including "Teen Vogue" and, perhaps most importantly, the all-powerful "fansoftaylor.com." ("Teen Vogue" and "fansoftaylor.com" may sound frivolous, but remember the groups we're trying to influence!)

The point of this is not to brag about success or brush with celebrity, but to point out that when we're willing to take a chance and be creative, fun, and unconventional, our messages can connect,



*T-Swift appearing live on the interstate.*

For the past three years, we've been fortunate to use a federal program to fund the expenses related to employing college students as interns and coops. For the student it's a chance to gain practical experience and skills as they learn more about their career interests, and for us it's a chance to get some help and build our work capacity (without adding to our payroll or taking up any of the permanent positions we are allocated in our budget) and make us known as a potential full-time employer.

This summer we employed the highest number of students ever – 120 extremely bright and talented young men and women doing everything from illustrating endangered mussels for an I-74 mitigation project to conducting experiments in the materials lab to working with engineers and inspectors on construction projects and working with investigators on identity theft and fraud cases. This year's intern workforce is a 27% increase over last year and a 17% increase over the previous high year for intern employment, which was fiscal year 2015.

A key element of the program is that students must be employed in a position that offers substantive experience in their program – no “gophers”! (Unless they are from the University of Minnesota.) We pride ourselves on giving our interns hands-on experience that's equivalent to that of a permanent employee. (But note that we

only use interns to achieve extra capacity – we never use interns to avoid hiring permanent employee or to replace permanent employees.)



*Interns Connor Feldotto (left) and Kyle Mason (right) flank chemist Michelle Barger in the central materials lab in Ames. Righteous beard, Kyle!*

As I mentioned above, the program really is mutually beneficial. From our perspective, we get much more than an extra set of hands – our students often bring a fresh perspective that contributes new ideas and helps us explore creative solutions to old problems. A case in point – a couple of months ago [the Transportation Matters for Iowa blog](#) highlighted two coop students (that's them to the left) in the materials lab who were pioneering new technology and sharing their experiences at professional conferences. That's a great experience and career prep for the students, and great opportunity for us.

Interested in employing an intern in your area or learning more about the program? Contact Irina Bassis ([Irina.bassis@iowadot.us](mailto:Irina.bassis@iowadot.us), (515)239-1277) for more information.

### **Apps-olutely cool!**

(This is a bad play on words. I know it's a bad play on words. But sometimes I can't help myself. It did seem better than “App-ealing ideas” or “App-earing soon.” Definitely better than “App-etizing developments.” But as usual I digress.) For many of us, apps on smart phones and other mobile devices have become a daily tool for

us. I admit to finding great utility in apps – over the past couple weeks I've used apps to track my run, guide my yoga, tune my guitar, learn a song, check in at the Y, check in for a flight and carry my boarding pass, find a place to buy new running shoes when I forgot to bring my running shoes to the marathon, and pay at restaurants. So it's no surprise that apps can help us deliver services to our customers – recognizing the devices people use and the way they like to access information and services is another part of being customer driven. And it's really cool that we are in the process of adding to the family of apps we offer with two new applications that will help commercial drivers. Here's some information about each one.

**CDL test prep app.** Over the past year or so, we recognized that we needed to better prepare CDL (commercial driver's license) applicants for the knowledge and skills testing they have to complete to get their CDL. Currently, about 60% of applicants who take the CDL knowledge exam in Iowa fail on their first attempt and many fail on subsequent attempts. CDL drivers are an important part of our workforce and economy, and with a growing driver shortage we knew it was important to do something that would help applicants better prepare and more quickly develop competency, so we decided to step beyond the old-style paper manual and strive for something interactive that would really help applicants learn, retain information, and ultimately increase success rates. We also wanted something responsive to learning preferences and styles of customers, to better meet customer needs.

After a competitive bidding process, Higher Learning Technologies (HLT - <http://builtbyhlt.com/>) of Iowa City was awarded and signed a contract to work with us to develop an interactive CDL training manual mobile app. HLT has built interactive apps to help a variety of medical and other professionals prepare for professional licensure tests, and their experience and learning model made them a great fit for CDL, which is just another form of professional licensure.

The app (which will also be replicated in a web-based format for people that don't have a mobile device) effectively takes the content of the current CDL manual, breaks it down into smaller digestible sections, gives micro-quizzes to test the applicants' understanding and competency, and points out areas of strengths and weaknesses to help them focus their work – all to help them really learn the information rather than just memorize it to pass a test. (Once they've really learned the information, they're ready for the test the first time.) The app will also let us push information to applicants to give them information about testing locations or other alerts. It will be free for all licensed drivers, they'll just have to enter part of their driver's license number and their date of birth, and people outside Iowa can also purchase the app directly from HLT if they find value in it.

This project is being led by the Motor Vehicle Division and Driver & Identification Services, with Mindi Nguyen serving as project coordinator. We expect to release the app sometime next month, hopefully before Thanksgiving. (Hard to believe that is next month!) They report that were progressing on schedule and are hosting focus groups to test the mobile app right now. This app hasn't even been released and it's already generating interest – it was recently featured in the publication Transport Topics; you can read the article yourself here: <http://www.ttnews.com/articles/iowa-dot-builds-cdl-exam-app-improve-pass-rate>.

**Truck Parking Information and Management System.** Safe and convenient parking areas for large commercial trucks is an important part of our transportation and freight network – drivers need rest to operate safely and to get rest they need appropriate places to stop. However, it can be hard for drivers to find good places to park and rest. In 2013, the national Jason's Law Truck Parking Survey showed that for 83 percent of drivers, it routinely took longer than 30 minutes to find parking. This difficulty (and a desire to not exceed their federal hours of service limits for operation) has encouraged drivers to park illegally or unsafely, often on the shoulders of highways, on off-ramps or at abandoned facilities. The routine delay causes a loss of productivity that's estimated to add six percent or more to labor costs associated with moving goods through the national freight network, and parking at inappropriate facilities and locations causes safety concerns and leaves drivers without adequate facilities. To help remedy this, we have partnered with our colleague agencies in the MAASTO (Mid America Association of State Transportation Officials) region – Kansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin – to develop a multi-state regional Truck Parking Information and Management System (TPIMS). The project is funded through a \$25 million TIGER grant and state funds.

In this case TPIMS is more than just a single app, it's a system of information that's intended to reach drivers through a variety of platforms, including smart phone applications. TPIMS is envisioned as a network of safe, convenient parking areas with the ability to collect and broadcast real-time parking availability to drivers through a variety of platforms including smart phone applications, in-cab information systems and traveler information websites. This will help drivers proactively plan their routes and make safer, smarter parking decisions with certainty, rather than hoping, guessing, and searching in vain. Overall we think it will improve safety and productivity.

Data for TPIMS will come from a variety of sources, including existing intelligent transportation systems (ITS) infrastructure and emerging vehicle detection, to provide real-time information to commercial vehicle operators for over 150 parking sites across the MAASTO region. This is the first regional truck parking project in the U.S., and it leverages efforts already underway in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. As a regional project, it not only improves safety and productivity, but promises to improve the country's global competitiveness while boosting the region's economic growth through improvements to freight movements to and from both coasts and significant corridors connecting with Canada and Mexico. I'm excited to see this go into production – it's a project and system that brings to life our vision of being customer driven and our mission of safe mobility – getting you there safely, efficiently, and conveniently. And it also reminds us that getting you there means more than just moving you down the road way – it's about connecting you to the places you need to be along the way.

### **Iowa Ideas Conference**

In late September, the Cedar Rapids Gazette hosted the first "Iowa Ideas Conference," a two-day event in Cedar Rapids billed as a nonpartisan, statewide learning experience designed to explore the key questions and big ideas that will shape the future of Iowa. The event brought together interested citizens, community and industry leaders, and state employees, officials and legislators to discuss topics that covered eight tracks – agriculture, energy and environment, health

care, higher education, K-12 education, regionalism/workforce, transportation, and, as they put it, work place “(r)evolution.” As you might suspect, we had several people participate as speakers and panelists in the transportation track.

- **Phil Meraz**, rail regulation and analysis project coordinator, was a panelist in the “Future of Rail and Freight in Iowa” session.
- **Scott Marler**, director of traffic operations, was a panelist in the “Future of Autonomous Driving” session.
- **Stu Anderson**, director of the Planning, Programming & Modal Division, was a panelist in the “Meeting Iowa’s Infrastructure Needs” session.
- **Milly Ortiz**, bicycle pedestrian coordinator, was a panelist in the “Trails and Biking” session.
- **Steve Gent**, director of traffic safety, was a panelist in the “How Can We Increase Safety” session.
- **Kristin Haar**, compliance and training officer in public transit, was a panelist in the “Public Transportation and Accessibility” session.

The breadth of topics we participated represents not just the breadth of things we influence, but the breadth of leadership and expertise we have among us. Thank you to everyone that participated, shared their talent and expertise, and represented us so well! If you want to learn more about the event and see a recap, you can do that at this link: <http://www.thegazette.com/iowaideas>.

### **Putting the brakes on human trafficking**

It can be hard to believe when we’re sitting in the safety of our own homes, but human trafficking is a significant problem, even in the smallest of communities in Iowa. As law enforcement officers, our Motor Vehicle Enforcement (MVE) officers sees the stark reality of human trafficking all too often.

Human traffickers often move their victims around and frequent areas used by commercial drivers, which means they have a great opportunity to detect and report potential cases of trafficking. That's why MVE has teamed up with Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT), a non-profit group that works to curb trafficking by creating awareness among commercial drivers, to educate drivers they meet on a daily basis. (You can learn more about TAT at <http://www.truckersagainstrafficking.org/>). These professional drivers, along with the employees at truck stops, form a network of eyes and that are spread across the country and have the power to help identify and stop cases of human trafficking.



*MVE officers with TAT's "Freedom Driver's Project" mobile exhibit. From left: Cpt. Scott Knudtson, Officer Ron Werner, Officer Loren Waterman, Sgt. Neil Suckow, Officer Bo Witowski, and Officer Paul Strecker*

The Iowa Attorney General's Office recently awarded MVE a grant to boost their efforts. Five officers are now specifically trained to provide outreach at travel plazas and through motor carriers. During the travel plaza visits, our officers talk to drivers and employees about warning signs and what to do if human trafficking is suspected. So far this year the team has been to 10 travel plazas.

Motor carrier training is more in depth. Our officers provide a more formal presentation so drivers know the warning signs to look for and what to do if they spot something that doesn't look right. In 2017, they trained six large carriers and staff at the Iowa Motor Truck Association, and also conducted a "train-the-trainer" session for the Iowa Attorney General's office. People that completed that training will carry it to local law enforcement, emergency medical services, social services and service groups around Iowa.

To get more information to the public, TAT has implemented "The Freedom Driver's Project," a mobile exhibit used to educate the public on human trafficking. MVE and TAT worked together to bring the exhibit to the Truckers Jamboree at the World's Largest Truck Stop on Interstate 80 in Walcott for several days in July and in August at the Iowa State Fair. More than 1,600 people visited the exhibit during its one-day stop at the Iowa State Fair.

I'm really proud of MVE for taking this cause up carrying it well. MVE Chief Dave Lorenzen took a personal interest in this and helped build a sense of mission among his staff to make this a priority in their work, and the model they built has become known as the "Iowa model" across the country as other states work to adopt it. It's a great example of understanding how are mission of "getting you there safely" will cross paths with other missions, and how being willing to share our intellect, training, and resources can make a big difference. We're

about much more than roads, bridges, licenses and vehicles – we're about what happens when you get there. That's the higher purpose, and it's a truly impactful role to play.

### Song of the month

In deference to all the Message Monday coverage, I felt like I should go with a Taylor Swift song but just couldn't do it. But I can go with a KISS song. I had this poster in my bedroom during junior high (just before I figured out the Beatles and moved on to better music – I beg everyone to forgive the Captain & Tennille and Barry Manilow "Copacabana" album purchases that marked my early forays into buying music) and admit that my last year of trick or treating I went as Gene Simmons/"The Demon." (He's the one on the upper right. Tracey Bramble asked for a picture but that was way before digital – it's on a Polaroid buried somewhere in one of those weirdly puffy albums we all used to put pictures in.) So, this month's song is KISS anthem "Rock and Roll All Nite," from their 1975 albums "Dressed to Kill" and "Alive." I picked this song because it includes the line "I wanna rock and roll all nite<sup>1</sup>, and party every day." I never did that, but it always stuck with me because when I was nine in 1975 (and for a long time after), I thought they were saying "I wanna rock and roll all nite, and *part* of every day." Made sense to me – you have to sleep sometime.



*KISS circa 1979.*

### Wellness tip

I added the tip on getting plenty of sleep in the last report, and it made me think that including a wellness tip each month wasn't a bad idea. As we enter the cold and flu season this year, here's one that surprised me – staying hydrated helps fend off colds and the flu. Staying properly hydrated has many health benefits, including boosting an immune system response that helps fight off viruses. Shoot for at least six to eight glasses of water per day (and more if it's hot or you are exerting yourself or exercising).

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Alright, my friends, I need to wrap this up. I have another marathon tomorrow (Des Moines) and I need to go to the packet pick-up and get my number. As always, stay safe in all that you do, and drink plenty of water. (I know I will be!)

*Mark*

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<sup>1</sup> When you're busy rocking, rolling and partying, you don't have the time or energy to spell "night" correctly.