

Mn/DOT EXPRESS

AROUND Mn/DOT



"Raise your hand if you have a question," says Amy Purfeerst, management analyst, Communications and Media Services, to kindergartners at Chelsea Heights School in St. Paul. She spoke on transportation.



(Above) Administrative assistants meet in Willmar. From left are: Barb Smith, Rochester/District 6; Jean Anderson, Bemidji/District 2; Alvina Peterson, deputy commissioner's office; Ramona Mackenroth, commissioner's office, and Sheila Stanaway, Program Management assistant commissioner's office.

(Right) A grand reopening of the Information Services Center (Library) finds manager Pam Newsome showing the new online access computer to Ron Shriver, planning and research engineer, Federal Highway Administration in St. Paul.



Administrative assistants observe 10th anniversary

Administrative assistants, who are the right hand people to the deputy commissioner, assistant commissioners and district engineers, celebrated the group's 10th anniversary in Willmar in May. In a meeting facilitated by Marj Ebensteiner, employee development specialist, members mapped out goals and objectives.

They are: more education, training and growth opportunities; continuous team building; work on issues; better organizational structure,

and recognition.

The group meets every six months for information sharing and problem solving between Central Office and the districts.

Information Services Center expands

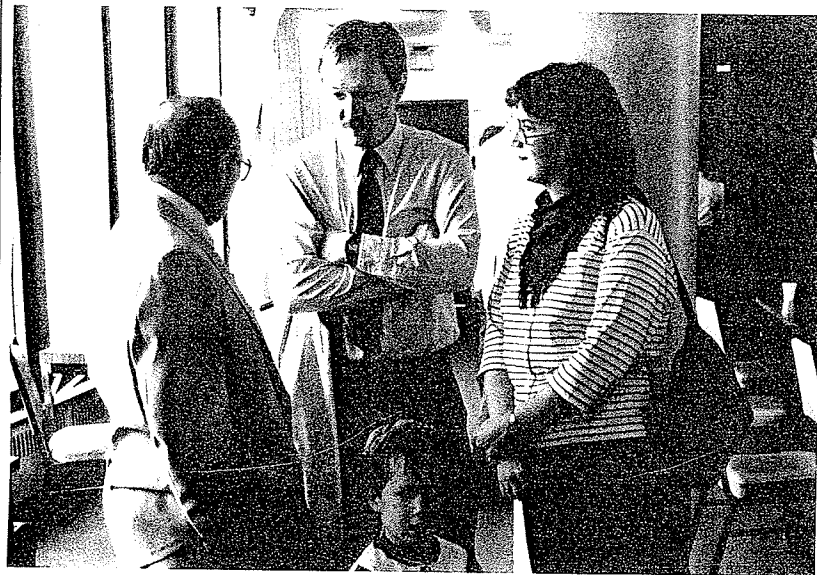
Information Services Center (Library) in Central Office celebrated expansion of services, additional space and remodeling with an open house.

Among the new or expanded services, according to Pam Newsome, manager, are: online computerized library catalog, access to searching libraries of other state agencies, leisure reading exchange and additional videocassettes to include presentations from the 1988 and 1989 transportation conferences.

Kindergartners learn about transportation

In an outreach program to school children, Amy Purfeerst, management analyst, Communications and Media Services, spoke to a kindergarten class at Chelsea Heights School in St. Paul.

Although most of the questions were more commentary as they shared their experiences riding in airplanes, one youngster had a stumper, "Who was the first person to fly a helicopter?" But another asked, "What kind of trucks do you have?"



Several Central Office employees were honored by Bemidji/ District 2 for special services to the district. Paul Walvatne (center), forester, Environmental Services, talks with Mike Nygaard, Bemidji area maintenance engineer. Listening are Carol Walvatne and Jacob, 3. Others were Micky Ruiz, Right of Way; Dave Sundberg and Tom Heinger, Video Services; Marie Kachelmyer, Systems and Administrative Services, and Bernie Vogel, formerly of Mn/DOT.

(Below) Fred Maurer, Pavement Management Unit (center), and Erland Lukanen, Braun Pavement Technologies, discuss operation of a mobile highway monitoring unit with its operator, Paul Reilly of Austin, Texas. The unit uses a 35mm movie camera to record cracking and other signs of stress on pavement surfaces. The filming is done at night with the aid of high-intensity lights which provide a constant light level for locating and recording surface defects. The unit filmed 21 sites in Minnesota as part of the Strategic Highway Research Program's efforts to determine the level of highway deterioration in the U.S.



Focusing transportation issues for 1995

Editor's note: In late December, Commissioner Denn sent a letter to Gov. Carlson's Chief of Staff Morrie Anderson requesting reappointment and outlining some of Mn/DOT's accomplishments over the past three years. Gov. Carlson reappointed Denn on Jan. 17. Here are excerpts from the commissioner's letter:

The last three-plus years have been both exciting and challenging. The state has benefitted from a positive response from Mn/DOT to the requirement that state government alter its way of doing business.

I feel privileged that Gov. Carlson provided me the opportunity to be part of the leadership forging this significant level of change. I am enclosing a brief summary listing of the primary focus issues I see for Mn/DOT in 1995—many of which have already been started to some degree.

Internal programs

■ **Internal Fiscal Savings:** Mn/DOT has achieved internal savings of \$47 million which we have redirected to road construction projects. I anticipate this trend to continue, albeit at a slower rate, over the next four years.

■ **Transportation Worker:** This is an effort to build a more flexible and more efficient workforce. Successful completion of this endeavor is critical to our goal of

further efficiency gains because it will allow us to develop a workforce on a basis comparable to practices commonly followed in the private sector.

■ **Succession Planning:** This initiative will allow us to identify and plan for key position development. This is a first in the nation for state agencies. Mobility assignments with the private sector will be pursued to incorporate business thinking while strengthening our talent pool.

■ **Diversity Projects:** The "Seeds" (youth outreach), Highway Maintenance Trainee (equalized job entry process), Minority Graduate Engineer Recruitment, and Minority Contractor Participation programs have earned national and local recognition.

Better business practices

■ **Construction Program Development:** In the past, Mn/DOT's construction program was based on unrealistic funding expectations. This resulted in overstated programs and subsequent project deferrals. This delicate process has been corrected, and we now have confidence in actually building the projects we list in our program—on schedule and within budget. This is a dynamic and ongoing process.

■ **Reorganization:** A sweeping

effort is under way to operate a smaller but strategically focused Central Office. The state's highway system preservation responsibilities and resources have been delegated to district offices without double-checking from St. Paul.

■ **Right Of Way Acquisition:** In 1991, the purchase process of residential properties for road projects was disaster-bound—more than 30 percent of these acquisitions ended up in costly court disputes. We have since improved our image with the taxpayers, cut residential acquisition costs and lowered the disputed cases to less than 15 percent. In 1995, our goals include lowering disputed cases to under 10 percent and tackling the more difficult commercial/ industrial acquisition process.

■ **Intergovernmental Partnerships:** Mn/DOT is currently involved in numerous formal and informal partnerships with local governments. Our 1994 Partnership Inventory specifically identified 185 such agreements. The primary objective of all of these partnerships is to make better use of all available resources. The number of these partnerships continues to grow and is expected to increase markedly in 1995.

■ **Materials Management:** We have begun to reform our inventory and buying procedures to take

advantage of the best procurement practices and prices rather than be inappropriately confined by statewide contracts.

■ **Taxpayer Involvement:** Over the past three years, we have adopted a process that has afforded our constituencies unparalleled involvement in deciding how transportation resources should be invested.

■ **Public/Private Partnerships:** In the past year, Mn/DOT initiated a solicitation process aimed at attracting and involving private capital in major transportation projects as a way to:

- Leverage available state resources.
- Provide opportunities for private sector participation and job creation.
- Decrease congestion and improve overall performance of our existing system.
- Decrease the short-term pressure for increases in state transportation taxes.

Research and technology

■ **Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and the Minnesota Road Research Project (Mn/Road):** These activities are two prominent examples of Mn/DOT's leadership role in the national and international research arena. Mn/Road was officially opened in 1994, its first research results are expected within the next two years. Initial ITS demonstration projects are scheduled in the same period.

Faces of Mn/DOT

Anne Mackereth:

Fondness for dogs opens doors to deaf community



Waiting to greet customers from a display table at a pet food store are Anne Mackereth, Communications, a volunteer with the Minnesota Hearing Dog Society, holding Lucky, the society's mascot (at left), and Linda Moen, Department of Human Services, and her hearing dog, Biko.

Cruising the classifieds has its rewards.

Answering a call for volunteers listed along with the ads for dogs and cats opened new vistas for

Anne Mackereth, a librarian with Mn/DOT's Information Services.

The call came from the Hearing Dog Program of Minnesota; the agency matches specially trained dogs with people who have hearing impairments.

Mackereth, a lifelong dog fancier who has a sister-in-law who is deaf, wasted little time to join.

She volunteered to do whatever the society needed: stuffing envelopes, working on fundraising and staffing its booth at dog shows and kennel club events.

Most of the dogs in the program are rescued from pounds, she notes. The society's mascot, the aptly named Lucky, was taken from a pound just as his final hours approached.

Any breed or mixed breed of dog can do the work as long as it's "curious, has a steady temperament and is self-reliant," Mackereth adds.

The dogs and their new owners undergo about six months of rigorous training. Each learns to establish trust in the other. The dogs are taught to respond to sounds such as smoke alarms, telephones, alarm clocks or sounds possibly made by an intruder. Upon hearing a noise, the dogs bark and then nudge, push or literally jump on their companions and lead them to the source of the noise.

Training also includes teaching the dogs name recognition. Owners can specify the name of a person to the dog and the dog will bring the person to them.

"I feel good about helping the program," Mackereth adds, "because the dogs provide both security and companionship to deaf people, many of whom live alone."

Working in the program also created a new circle of friends and acquaintances. The circle now includes Linda Moen, who has a severe hearing loss, her daughter, Rachel, and their cockapoo hearing dog, Biko.

Moen, a licenser in the Development Disabilities Unit for the Department of Human Services, often takes Biko on personal and business trips. With his specially marked orange leash, Biko can accompany Moen to restaurants and hotels. Once in her room, Moen can remove her hearing aids, confident that Biko will tell her if the phone rings or a smoke alarm sounds.

"Getting involved in the program gets me outside of myself and into something bigger," Mackereth says. "Volunteering definitely enhances my sense of community."

—Craig Wilkins

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