

Building Arkansas

Official Magazine of the American Council of Engineering Companies of Arkansas & the Arkansas Society of Professional Engineers

Lots to smile about

How was your 2020? For Lorie Tudor, P.E., it's been eventful. She became ARDOT's first female director, responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, and educated voters about the half-cent sales tax for highways. Because it passed, ARDOT will have the kind of guaranteed funding her predecessors could only dream about. On Nov. 19, she and her Mississippi counterpart, Melinda McGrath, P.E., swapped stories, discussed issues facing females in transportation, and reminisced about their journeys.



Time for a victory lap. Now, back to work!

It's not often in politics that you can actually solve a problem, put it in your rearview mirror, and then move on to something completely different. That's what happened this election cycle when 55% of Arkansas' voters said yes to Issue 1.

The constitutional amendment will make permanent a half-cent sales tax that will provide \$205 million annually to the Arkansas Department of Transportation and another \$87 million that will be shared by cities and counties.

Add that to diesel, gas and other tax increases passed by the Legislature in 2019, and ARDOT's chronic funding shortfalls have gone away. The money will enable the department to make much-needed investments that will make our roads safer, relieve congestion, and boost our economy.

It won't cover all of the state's highway needs. I-49 down the state's western edge and I-69 across south Arkansas are still years from being completed. But this is enough to maintain and improve the system. Unless there's a collapse in federal funding, ARDOT and highway advocates won't have to ask voters or state lawmakers for more funding for a long time. That's great news.

This is a victory for the entire state and for engineers, who will be assigned the



Angie W. Cooper
Executive Director

important task of designing these roads and bridges.

And it didn't just happen accidentally. ACEC/A was part of a coalition that included some of the state's most important business groups that started working on this proposal before the 2019 legislative session. Polls back then showed that voters would support a permanent tax increase for highways, which made it politically easier for legislators to refer the amendment to the ballot.

Don't get comfortable

Now is the time to take a victory lap, pat ourselves on the back, and enjoy the fruits of our labor. Ready? Go!

Now stop. Because there's no such thing as a victory lap in politics. A mere two months after the election, lawmakers

will gather in Little Rock for another legislative session, where laws will be passed that affect our industry.

This will be a session like none other. Lawmakers will be meeting in chambers that have been separated by plexiglass dividers in a Capitol where crowds will be controlled. Industry groups and lobbyists will spend less time in the building, we'll be keeping more of our distance, and we'll be wearing masks.

It seems likely that in this environment, there will be less of an opportunity for anyone to push for transformative change. There just won't be enough meetings or enough patience with lawmakers who try to stretch this out.

Still, issues could arise that affect engineers. We'll be making sure qualifications-based selection isn't threatened. We don't want highways and bridges being designed by the lowest bidder. As always, we'll be watching for any efforts that could weaken the state's licensure laws that pertain to public safety. And we'll be looking for opportunities to support positive changes such as tax cuts, regulatory reform, and civil justice reform.

In the meantime, stay safe and have a happy new year. I look forward to seeing you soon – in person, without masks, after driving on safer roads that you'll be designing.

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ENGINEERING ARKANSAS

THE COVES FAYETTEVILLE, AR

Building Arkansas

Official Magazine of the American Council of Engineering Companies of Arkansas & the Arkansas Society of Professional Engineers



14 Lorie Tudor, P.E., ARDOT's first female director, sat down for a discussion alongside her Mississippi counterpart, Melinda McGrath, at an event sponsored by Women in Transportation Nov. 19. Tudor's career at ARDOT began when she left college and became a clerk typist. She later returned to college and became an engineer. This year, she was named the department's director.

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It's not been a normal year for Lorie Tudor, P.E. In March, she became the first female director of the Arkansas Department of Transportation. In November, voters passed a constitutional amendment that made permanent a half-cent sales tax for her department. Meanwhile, she's had to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tudor discussed all of those matters alongside her counterpart, Melinda McGrath, P.E., executive director of the Mississippi Department of Transportation, during an online seminar hosted by Women in Transportation Nov. 19.

18 **More infrastructure money coming?**

At the ACEC/A Industry Update, ACEC's chief lobbyist, Steve Hall, was hopeful the Biden administration and a divided Congress will invest in something they can agree on: infrastructure.

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Issue 1 breathes new life into transportation infrastructure

Arkansas voters were recently asked to make a choice to support a stronger, safer, more connected community. By passing Issue 1 on Nov. 3, they chose to invest in those values.

Approved by 55.3% of voters, Issue 1 makes permanent the 0.5% sales tax put in place across Arkansas in 2012 for the Connecting Arkansas Program. Moving forward, the funds accrued through this continued tax will be dedicated to helping develop transportation infrastructure projects throughout the state.

According to the language in the proposed measure, Issue 1 distributes 70% of its funding, or \$205 million, to the Arkansas Department of Transportation for state highways, then splits the remaining 30%, or \$87 million, between county and city transportation initiatives. This offers a huge opportunity to cities and counties across the state for enhancing safety and convenience for travelers.

What's more, the passing of Issue 1 demonstrates that key stakeholders can stand together to continue to support transportation funding in Arkansas. Last year, the first part of the governor's long-term plan was passed by lawmakers, providing \$95 million for highways and \$13 million for cities and counties. Issue 1 continues this trend, bringing more funds to the table. It's this sense of support for transportation investment and the trust the taxpayers can reliably place in public officials to deliver on infrastructure



Steven Beam, P.E.
ACEC/A President

needs that make the difference.

So, what does the passing of this measure mean? As engineers, we play a critical role in maintaining public health and safety. It's taken for granted by the public that the projects we work on are safe and reliable, and our credibility relies on deliver-

ing projects that function as expected and, in fact, keep people safe. To retain the public trust, we must do our part to see that the delivery of the projects this tax will create is done effectively, on time and on budget while keeping all stakeholders in mind.

The 2011 and 2012 transportation infrastructure funding initiatives originally brought my firm, Burns & McDonnell, to Arkansas, and have enabled us to grow and invest in the state. This newly approved initiative will allow all engineers to further enhance safety, community features and transportation improvements, and likely create more jobs across Arkansas.

As we look to the future and begin to plan for the increase in projects that Issue 1 will bring, it's important we remember that it's the people of Arkansas who approved this tax. It's these citizens and their communities that will be directly and positively impacted by these projects. Delivering on our role as stewards of health and safety will be paramount in the coming years.



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Building Arkansas is published quarterly by the Arkansas Society of Professional Engineers and the American Council of Engineering Companies of Arkansas. Copyright 2020 by those organizations and by Steve Brawner Communications. All rights reserved.

2020: The positives

This was a year no one saw coming. History lessons will remember 2020 for the COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest, and a bitter presidential election. Although 2020 has been a difficult year for so many, we can certainly find some positives as we look forward to 2021.

Engineers are essential! We all understand the importance of our profession.

Sometimes those outside the profession may not see or understand all we do for society. COVID-19 highlighted engineering as an essential service which kept our industry from facing the extreme woes of professions deemed non-essential. Following the thought of engineering's importance to society, engineers can play an essential (there is that word again!) role in the post COVID-19 world. Improved ventilation, increased spacing requirements for occupancy, contactless facilities, and improved broadband access are just a few areas engineers' problem-solving capabilities may be put to use.

Working remotely can be effective. Grab your computer, monitors, phone, etc. and head to the house. When the year began, remote work was not new, but it was not widely utilized in our profession. Many of us worked remotely for several months and some may still be doing so, never missing a beat. We already had much of the necessary software, like Teams and Zoom, on our computers; however, we may not have realized their capabilities and maximized their potential. Video con-



Daniel George, P.E.
ASPE President

ferences and screen sharing are now tools we fully understand and will influence how we connect in the future. Connecting with our co-workers, peers, clients, etc. in person will resume at some point and should never be eliminated, but our profession is likely forever changed and working remotely will

be a recruiting tool in the future.

Issue 1, amending the Arkansas Constitution to make the half-cent sales tax currently funding the Connecting Arkansas Program permanent, was approved by voters November 3rd. The engineering and construction industry in Arkansas benefits from the work directly associated with the roadway improvements funded by this tax as well as new developments and spin-off work due to new and improved roads. Who doesn't want to drive on smooth and safe roadways? The passage of Issue 1 moves Arkansas forward in many ways.

ASPE went virtual in October/November with three one-hour PDH sessions. We had good attendance with no major technical difficulties. Our success can be attributed to the hard work of our executive director, Angie Cooper. We would also like to thank our gracious presenters for their time: Rick Geraci, P.E.; Michaela Kendall, Esq., AXA XL, courtesy of Ken Estes, BXS Insurance; and Nathan Young, P.E., with Tensar.

Let's finish 2020 strong and look forward to 2021!

In the News

Garver named a top Trenchless Engineering Firm

Garver's ongoing commitment to implementing trenchless pipeline construction and rehabilitation methods across a variety of service lines was recognized recently when it was named to Trenchless Technology magazine's annual Top 50 Trenchless Engineering Firms list.

Garver came in at No. 32 on the annual list that tracks revenue earned over the previous year from projects using trenchless technologies. Because of the substantial cost savings that are often realized and the reduced disturbance to nearby businesses or residents, trenchless technologies have become popular methods for efficient inspection and delivery of critical infrastructure projects.

"This ranking is a testament to the company's continued strong growth, depth, and diversity as a firm," said Garver Infrastructure Practice Leader Jeff Maier, P.E. "I view this as a company-wide win that can be celebrated across multiple service lines."

Garver honored for philanthropy by state chapter

Garver was honored with the 2020 National Philanthropy Day award for Outstanding Corporation by the Arkansas chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

GarverGives, the firm's corporate giving arm, supported more than 320 organizations, contributed more than \$323,000 in funding, and devoted more than 800 employee community service hours in 2019.

"I'm grateful for the multitude of opportunities that GarverGives has opened up to give back to central Arkansas – anything from school drive donations to spending a weekend connecting with children in the community," Garver Wellness Team Manager Sarah Palmiero said. "Getting to uplift the communities that I love so deeply is what it's all about for me."

Garver Centennial Campaign wins national PR award

Garver's Communications Team was recently awarded a national Silver Anvil Award of Excellence for the firm's Centennial Campaign and the Garver Chain Reaction Challenge, both of which helped mark the company's centennial year in 2019.

The Silver Anvil Awards, presented by the Public Relations Society of America, honor outstanding strategic public relations programs and are regarded as one of the most iconic and prestigious awards in the communications industry.

For the Chain Reaction Challenge, Garver donated funds and STEM kits to 100 schools across the country, encouraging students to build imaginative, Rube Goldberg-style chain reaction machines



STUDENTS try to knock down dominoes through the Garver Chain Reaction Challenge at the Clinton Presidential Center.

for the chance to win additional funds for their STEM programs. The firm also held local events in which students could build alongside engineers from Garver.

Over the course of the year, an estimated 14,000 students were impacted through the firm's outreach.



B&F designs ballpark where legends played

An official groundbreaking ceremony was held August 14 for Majestic Park, a new youth baseball complex in Hot Springs on the same site as baseball fields where Babe Ruth and Jackie Robinson once played.

B&F Engineering, Inc. was selected by Visit Hot Springs as the design professional for the development.

The original Majestic Park, at the same location, hosted baseball legends such as Ruth and Robinson during the first part of the 20th century. Hot Springs is considered the birthplace of Major League Baseball Spring Training. Major League teams would bring their players to Hot Springs to prepare for the upcoming season. This influx of baseball players began in the 1890s and continued through the 1940s.

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Hot Springs National Park

The groundbreaking was held as a kickoff for Hot Springs Baseball Week. The site had most recently been home to fields for the Hot Springs Boys and Girls Club.

The design team is led by B&F and includes HALFF Associates, Inc. of Little Rock. Construction, which is being led by construction manager Hill & Cox Corporation of Hot Springs, is progressing well with a dry fall. Construction is expected to be completed in late summer 2021.

The park features five synthetic turf baseball fields with amenities including fencing, lights, dugouts, scoreboards, and covered grandstand seating. In addition to the fields, the park includes concessions, restrooms, batting cages, and new parking.

Hot Springs voters approved an \$8.5 million bond issue to fund construction of the park in September 2019. The bonds will be repaid using revenues from the existing 3-cent advertising and promotion tax on prepared food and lodging within the city limits.

McCurdy to lead Crafton Tull's environmental team

Karen McCurdy has joined Crafton Tull as senior vice president of the environmental division. She oversees the firm's growing portfolio of environmental services projects including environmental assessments, studies, documentation, and permitting for clients throughout the region.

McCurdy is an environmental professional with specialized experience in industrial air pollution permitting and regulatory compliance. She has strong agency coordination and stakeholder engagement experience and a depth of



McCurdy

experience with non-regulatory environmental projects.

She earned a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from the University of Arkansas and an MBA from the Sam M. Walton College of Business at the University of Arkansas.

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ACEC/A AFFILIATES

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*We Wish You
a Merry Christmas
& a Happy New Year!*

In the News (Cont'd)

Dodroe leading Crafton Tull's Fort Smith office

Michelle Dodroe, P.E., has joined Crafton Tull as vice president and leads the firm's new Fort Smith office.



Dodroe

Dodroe has more than 16 years of experience in civil engineering. She previously served Fort Smith as the deputy director of utility engineering, delivering many of the responsibilities of the 2015 consent decree. Her project experience includes sanitary sewer assessment, remediation, mainline water extensions, and water and wastewater asset mapping and modeling. In addition to her water and wastewater experience, Dodroe has worked on roadway design improvements and drainage design projects.

Dodroe earned a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from the University of Arizona.

Olsson's Herrick wins award for contributions

Rick Herrick, Olsson's Fayetteville Transportation team leader, was named the Melvin B. Meyer Transportation Professional of the Year by the Missouri Valley section of the Institute of Transportation Engineers (MOVITE).



Herrick

The award is given to a MOVITE member who has made outstanding contributions to the advancement of transportation/traffic engineering, to the organization and to the profession.

Herrick has spent more than 50 years engineering public infrastructure and



Calendar of events

Engineering Excellence Awards
deadline for entries
Jan. 29

Engineering Excellence Awards
Banquet
March 11
Governor's Mansion

transportation projects. He joined Olsson in 1992 and helped build the firm's Transportation practice from the ground up. His talent for creating and maintaining relationships and coming up with efficient solutions to transportation challenges were keys in the growth of Olsson's practice and for MOVITE.

Two major projects Herrick worked on for Olsson were the Antelope Valley Revitalization, the largest public works project in Lincoln, Nebraska's history, and North 33rd Street and Cornhusker Highway, a Railroad Transportation Safety District project that will enhance the highway's corridor.

"Rick's passion for transportation and public infrastructure engineering comes through in every project he touches," said Cory Clark, Transportation practice leader at Olsson. "Rick has devoted his life to delivering cost-effective solutions that keep people moving. He's well deserving of this award."

Herrick moved to Arkansas in January to head up Olsson's new Transportation team in Fayetteville.

Olsson is a nationally recognized engineering firm that offers design and consulting services in planning and design, engineering, field services, environmental and technology.



CROW GROUP'S Morrilton headquarters.

Crow Group wins three ABC excellence awards

The Crow Group's work earned the company first place for three different projects in the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) of Arkansas' Excellence in Construction awards competition.

Pinecrest Lumber Mill Dry Kiln #3 design-build project won in the Industrial Over \$5 million category; Central Arkansas Water Pump Station No. 1A Rehabilitation won in the Public Works/Environment \$1-\$5 million category; and the Crow Corporate Headquarters Renovation project won in the Historical Restoration/Renovation: Under \$5 million category. Crow Group was recognized during a virtual 'Excellence in Construction' celebration October 22.

Crow Group was the design-builder for the \$5.5 million construction of Dry Kiln #3 at the Green Bay Packaging Pinecrest Lumber Mill in Menifee. The project was delivered early and under budget. Work took place in the heart of an operating lumber mill.

Crow Group was the general contractor for the \$3.5 million rehabilitation of pump station 1A at the Central Arkansas Water Jack H. Wilson Water Treatment Plant in Little Rock. The primary purpose of the project was the rehabilitation of three Pulaski Water System pumps and two intermediate pumps. The scope included placing one new pump on a variable frequency drive to provide better control over pump flowrate and replacing all electrical systems for the new pumps.

Crow Group consulted with the National Park Service Historic Preserva-

tion Department to preserve the historic architecture of the firm's 23,000-square-foot downtown Morrilton building, while modernizing it to serve as Crow's construction and engineering services home office.

As a general contractor, the firm self-performed the management of the project and worked with many local subcontractors to complete the renovation.

Crow President Brian Rohlman, P.E. said, "We are extremely honored to be recognized by ABC Arkansas for our work on these projects, particularly considering the diversity of the projects selected. It really shines a light on our capability to work across multiple divisions, and that is further reinforced by this recognition from the Excellence in Construction award committee."

Crow Group is a full-service design-build, construction management, general contracting, and engineering firm. It provides a diverse range of services including commercial, industrial, water/waste-

water, and heavy civil construction and engineering.

Jack Tyler's Davis completes training academy

Andy Davis, P.E., with Jack Tyler Engineering recently graduated from the Delta Leadership Institute's Executive Academy.

Davis was one of 31 individuals from eight states, including five Arkansans, who completed the yearlong course offered by the Delta Regional Authority. According to the Authority's website, the course equips leaders to "improve the economic competitiveness and social viability of the



Davis

Mississippi River Delta and Alabama Black Belt."

Graduates participated in six training sessions over the past year to learn about the economic and community development best practices used across the Delta. Subjects included infrastructure and transportation, small business and entrepreneurship, workforce development, public health and other areas.

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ACEC/A Member Spotlight

Gaunt brought water to rural areas

Not so long ago, many people in south Arkansas were still carrying water to their homes

Bill Gaunt, P.E., helped bring water to rural south Arkansas in the 1980s and '90s, and now he's helping replace rural water systems today.

Gaunt began operating El Dorado-based Gaunt Engineers in 1984 at age 34 after working for Mehlburger Engineers out of college. His specialty became planning those rural water systems at a time when they were spreading into new areas. It was rewarding work that made a real difference in people's lives. At the time, many people were carrying water from their neighbors' sources.

"The interesting thing that would happen is you'd put in a rural water system, and a lot of these old people out there, all they'd want is a fire hydrant in their front yard because they didn't have plumbing on the inside," he said. "So they'd carry water and they were just glad to get water in the front yard."

Gaunt has worked mostly for systems in south and south-central Arkansas. Clients have included the cities of El Dorado, Camden, Magnolia, Hamburg and Dermott, as well as smaller towns. When he started operating his company, he would try to stay within 60 miles of El Dorado, though in recent years he has ventured farther. This year, for example, he's done replacement work for the city of Hickory Ridge in eastern Arkansas.

In the early days, he often would expand an existing system associated with a larger city into rural areas, but now those areas often want their own systems.

The last five years he's been doing more projects for cities like Arkansas City, where he's helping replace a system that was installed 30 years ago.

While Gaunt's focus has been rural water, he has been involved in a variety of projects, including sewer, roads, drainage, land development, parks, landfills, airports, recycling centers and some industrial clients. He did the site and civil work at the El Dorado High School.



SOUTH ARKANSAS INSTITUTION. Bill Gaunt of Gaunt Engineers performed all the site and civil work at the El Dorado High School, top. At left, is the Village Water Association system east of Magnolia. It is the first system Gaunt designed and managed when he moved to south Arkansas.

Gaunt remembers wanting to build a dam and a bridge at age 12. He spent his first 20 years living in Africa, where his parents were missionaries with Africa Inland Mission. He was born in the Congo about six miles from the Sudan border and about 10 miles from the Uganda border.

He said it was a challenge coming to the United States, which to him was a foreign country. His brother still operates a flying service in Africa.

Gaunt's firm has had up to 20 employees at one time, but it usually employs less than five, and he's currently the only en-

gineer. He also operates a pressure sewer system around the city of El Dorado. He and his wife, Carolyn, have a son and two grandkids in Mississippi.

He's getting close to retirement but isn't planning to stop working. He and Carolyn are developing a senior gated community, Mayhaw Haven, a half mile west of El Dorado on U.S. Highway 82 in front of his farm that will eventually include about 30 homes.

Constructing four homes a year will keep him busy.

"I can't sit around," he said. "My wife calls me a workaholic."

EEAs planned at Governor's Mansion

Entries are being sought by Jan. 29 for this year's ACEC/A Engineering Excellence Awards banquet, which is planned for March 11 at the Governor's Mansion.

Last year's event occurred March 5, shortly before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the last major ACEC/A public event of 2020. Organizers are hoping this year's event also occurs in person, bookending the pandemic.

EEA entries will be accepted in one of 12 project categories:

- Studies, Research, and Consulting Engineering Services
- Building/Technology Systems
- Structural Systems
- Surveying and Mapping Technology
- Environmental
- Water and Wastewater
- Water Resources
- Transportation
- Special Projects
- Small Projects
- Industrial and Manufacturing Processes and Facilities
- Energy

One outstanding project will be honored with the Grand Conceptor Award. Banquet attendees will select the winner of the People's Choice Award.

Awards are given for large projects with construction costs greater than or equal to \$500,000 and for small projects with construction costs of less than



GRAND CONCEPTOR. Garver's Cantrell Field Access project for the City of Conway was last year's top winner.

\$500,000 for each of the categories except Category A: Studies, Research and Consulting. Project entries must be designed by engineers located in Arkansas.

All submitted projects are rated on the basis of original or innovative application of new or existing techniques (25%); future value to the engineering profession and perception by the public (20%); social, economic, and sustainable design (15%); complexity (20%); and successful fulfillment of the client/owner's needs, including schedule and budget (20%).

Entries must be submitted by Jan. 15 to qualify for the state awards or by Jan. 8 to qualify for nationals. The state entry

form is available on the ACEC/A-ASPE website, arkansasengineers.com. Print and digital submissions are required for each entry. Entries must certify that submitted projects were substantially completed and ready for use between Nov. 1, 2018 and Oct. 31, 2020. Entries must include an official entry, executive summary, project description, a 200-word summary and a list of key participants. A 30-inch-by-30-inch photographic display panel is also required. The entry fee for large projects is \$300 for ACEC/A members and \$600 for non-members. Small project entries are \$200 for members and \$500 for non-members.

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SWAPPING STORIES. Lorie Tudor, P.E., left, director of the Arkansas Department of Transportation, and Melinda McGrath, P.E., executive director of the Mississippi Department of Transportation, describe the challenges they have faced with funding, the pandemic, and as female engineers. Garver's Jerry Holder, P.E., moderated the discussion.



DOT heads describe journeys

ARDOT director Lorie Tudor, P.E., and her Mississippi counterpart, Melinda McGrath, P.E., shared how they rose to the top of their no-longer-so-male-dominated profession

By Steve Brawner
Editor

It's not been a normal year for any of us, and certainly it hasn't been for Lorie Tudor, P.E.

Tudor in March became the first female director of the Arkansas Department of Transportation, an agency where she started working in 1981 at age 20 as a clerk typist. In November, voters passed Issue 1, a constitutional amendment that made permanent a half-cent sales tax that will provide a permanent funding source for her department. Meanwhile, she's had to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic that left ARDOT officials at first fearing a \$300 million shortfall because of declining traffic counts.

Tudor discussed all of those matters alongside her counterpart, Melinda McGrath, P.E., executive director of the Mississippi Department of Transportation,

during an online seminar hosted by Women in Transportation Nov. 19.

The event was broadcast from the Women's City Club in Little Rock and moderated by Jerry Holder, P.E., Garver director of transportation.

Tudor's appearance came a little more than two weeks after 55% of Arkansas voters approved Issue 1. That constitutional amendment made permanent the 10-year half-cent sales tax that had been approved by voters in 2012 to fund the Connecting Arkansas Program. It will provide ARDOT \$205 million in much-needed revenues annually. It also will provide \$87 million annually that will be split between cities and counties for roads. Her and her department's role was to plan for the future and educate the voters. To do that, the department created the Renew Arkansas Highways Program showing how the money would be spent the next 10 years.

Tudor noted that Issue 1 passed in 72 of 75 counties "even in the light of the pandemic, in light of the economy, in light of the uncertainty at the national level." She said the widespread approval was a vote of confidence for ARDOT and was a testimony to the collaboration of

the governor, the Legislature, the highway industry, consultants and contractors in passing the program.

McGrath noted that legislators in Mississippi passed a lottery program in 2018 where the first \$80 million will go to MDOT. However, that program sunsets in 2028, so funding will remain a challenge. McGrath said she was inspired and encouraged by Tudor's comments about the need to explain to citizens how their money will be used and that every region of the state will be served by additional revenues.

Tudor's first day as director on March 23 came three days after Gov. Asa Hutchinson declared a state of emergency in the COVID-19 pandemic. She estimated that traffic volumes dropped about 40% in April because of the pandemic, which left ARDOT officials fearing a possible \$300 million shortfall because of reduced fuel consumption. But then traffic volumes began increasing and have returned to pre-COVID levels. As a result, the department expects to lose only about \$10 million in funding.

ARDOT changed many of its operations in response to the pandemic, such as holding virtual meetings and

communicating electronically. Tudor expects a hybrid system to exist when the pandemic ends.

“We didn’t change that much as far as the services we provide to the public, but internally there’s been a lot of changes, and I don’t see those going away,” she said.

McGrath said her state saw a \$20-\$30 million dip for two months, and then traffic returned in July. She said the department has had to be more flexible and has “learned to not draw a line in the sand.” It was already faced with a manager shortage, and then the pandemic added additional stressors for employees. The department adapted to accommodate staff members, letting them work when it’s best for them rather than eight hours in one sitting. A system that had already been developed showed that many designers were more productive at home than they are at the office.

“And when we asked them why, they said, ‘Well because people like you don’t come by and bother me,’” she said.

Tudor said the department’s most pressing need is recruiting and retaining employees, especially engineers. She had thought the problem was caused by its lower government pay structures but realized after conversations with others that this is a systemic problem across all areas of transportation, including consulting and contracting. One solution is to inspire students to enter the transportation field. She related a comment by Amanda Furr, P.E., a vice president and office executive at the Little Rock branch of Michael Baker International, where Furr said she decided to become an engineer when she was a high school junior after a visit by a University of Arkansas representative.

“It’s not for everybody, but it’s for more people than are choosing it right now,” Tudor said of the transportation sector. “I just think we need to get the word out, and they just need to know a lot of us are baby boomers, and we’re about to be gone, and the opportunities are limitless. We need you on board, and we need you

to get ready because you’re the future of our country, and we need you.”

A nontraditional path

Tudor started working at what is now ARDOT at age 20 as a clerk typist after quitting college while seeking a nursing degree. She worked at ARDOT for 13 years and climbed as far up the ladder as she could. When a second chance to attend college arose when she was about 33 years old, she considered completing her nursing degree. But she had worked with engineers, learned about engineering, and knew it was a great profession.

When Tudor told her supervisor, Steve Teague, that she would have to quit her job, he said he couldn’t promise a position would be waiting for her, but she shouldn’t worry about it.

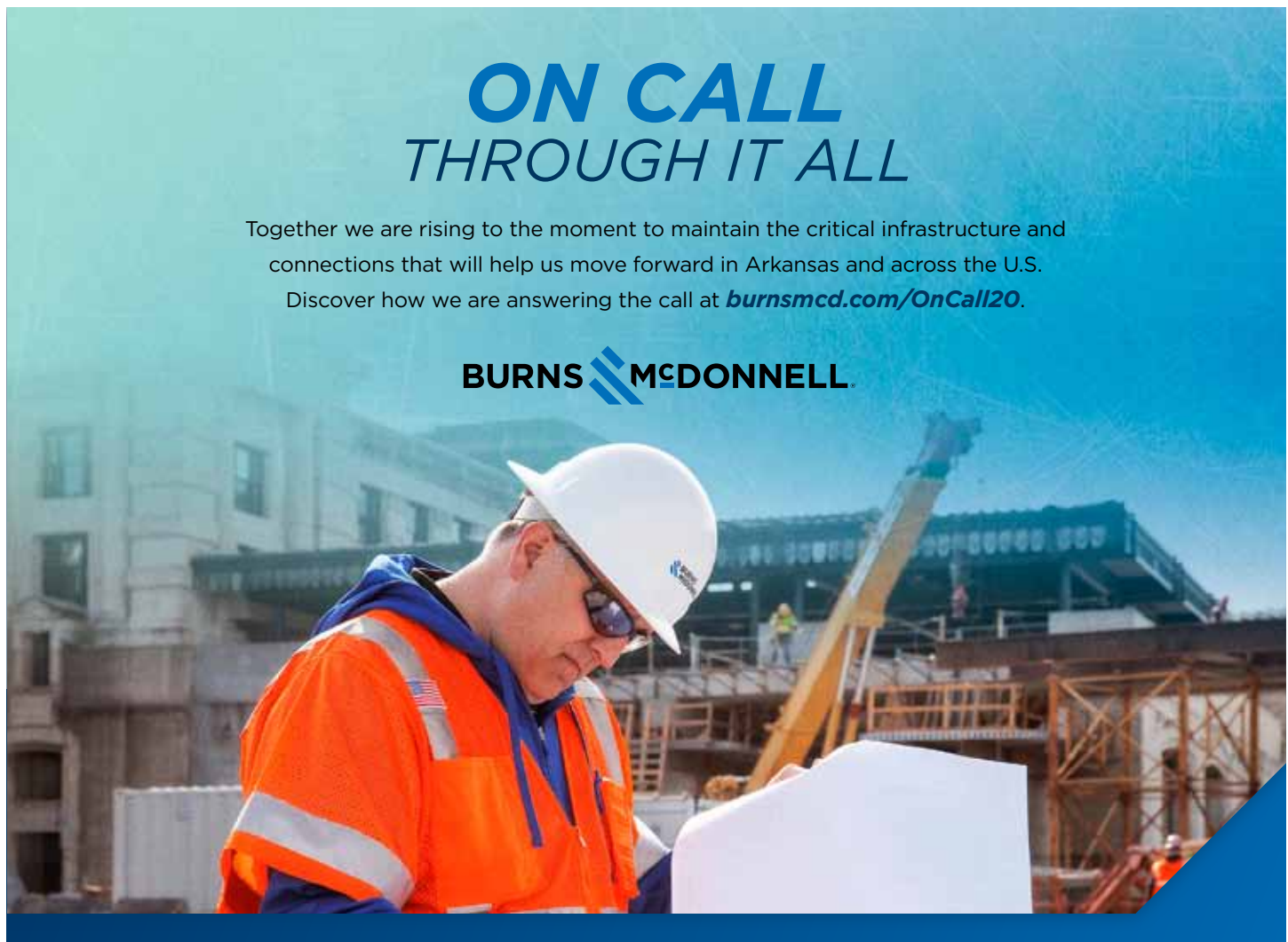
The day she walked out, she knew she would be “the master of my future. I felt like the whole world had lifted off my shoulders,” she said.

Continues on next page

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“ I moved up, and I passed my P.E., and then I stalled out, and I was in one position for nine years in a little bitty office with no windows with bad ventilation. I got all the air-conditioning, and everyone was burning up outside. I was in there freezing to death for nine years. It was hard work, but that’s when I paid my dues. ”

She earned her degree and returned to the department as a Planning and Research Division civil engineer, a job that paid less than the one she had quit. Scott Bennett, P.E., who later would serve as ARDOT director, was on the team that hired her back.

“I moved up, and I passed my P.E., and then I stalled out, and I was in one position for nine years in a little bitty office with no windows with bad ventilation,” she said. “I got all the air-conditioning, and everyone was burning up outside. I was in there freezing to death for nine

years. It was hard work, but that’s when I paid my dues.”

Tudor credited mentors like Bennett for helping her advance. Frank Vozel, another supervisor, was an old school engineer who forced her to develop a thick skin and made her a better engineer. Teague had told her when she was deciding whether or not to leave the department that he thought she could succeed. That comment meant a lot to her.

“I’m not going to say I wouldn’t have done it without that encouragement, but it sure made the decision a lot easier,” she

said. “Sometimes you just need someone to believe in you.”

Tudor moved up the ranks to division head, then assistant chief engineer of planning, and then deputy director and chief operating officer. Bennett promoted her and, when he left the department this year, recommended the Arkansas Highway Commission select her as director.

“I will say that my philosophy has always been, give it all I’ve got,” she said. “Just give it all you’ve got. Don’t worry about what someone’s doing next to you. Are they pulling their load? I don’t care. Don’t really care. I’m just going to pull my load, and if they don’t pull theirs, I’ll grab it and pull it as well. Because I’m determined that I’m going to make it and do the best job I can.”

Across the Mississippi River, McGrath was taking a somewhat more traditional path. The daughter of a vertical contractor, she was unsure about her major before starting classes at Mississippi State University. Her dad told her she had two weeks to decide on a major, but it couldn’t be in liberal arts.

That weekend, she and three friends went to Six Flags Over Georgia, and when her friends asked her about her major, she told them she liked the bridges under which they had been driving.

“And they said, ‘Well, you need to go major in civil engineering,’” she said. “I promise you that’s how that happened. I had no clue what a civil engineer did other than roads and bridges.”

The economy was mired in a recession when she graduated in 1985, and she had only two job offers from the Mississippi Department of Transportation and from an employer in Los Angeles. She stayed home and went to work in the bridge division. As a female engineer at a time

when there were few like her in the profession, she said she “always kind of felt like you had to prove yourself. You had to work harder, do more.” She moved to the Starkville project office, then transferred to the Gulf Coast in the mid-1990s at the same time gambling operations were gaining a foothold, and a lot of roadways were being built. Like Tudor, she moved up the ranks until she became executive director, a job she hadn’t sought,

“I think the thing that always kept pushing me to go to the next level, the next level, is I saw things that needed to be changed,” she said. “I wanted to effect change, and you can’t do it until you get in the right place. ... We’re going to make it better for these women that are coming along now.”

Asked what advice they would give to their younger selves, they both agreed they shouldn’t have taken things and themselves so seriously.

“Give yourself the freedom to mess up and to know that it can be corrected,”

McGrath said. “And get your private life and your work life balanced right early.”

Tudor agreed, saying, “I’ve always been so driven. I should have lightened up a little bit early on.”

They agreed that they were scrutinized as female transportation professionals, but McGrath said she didn’t remember ever being discriminated against. She said she and Tudor as directors can stop inappropriate comments from being directed against women in their departments.

An online participant asked how female professionals can mentor other women. McGrath said they should make themselves available. Tudor said, “I think we need to be approachable, and we don’t need to be so hard on each other. I talked about there’s a different standard for women in the overall industry, but I think we’re hard on each other. We need to help each other and realize that we’re all just trying to do a good job, and just be there.”

Jessica Halbrook, P.E., a project manager with Garver, asked what was the best

career advice they had ever received from a mentor or supervisor. Tudor said it was to “ask questions,” a lesson she learned from Vogel.

Asked to share when she had the most fun in her career, Tudor described a ribbon cutting at a highway widening project in the Crossett-Hamburg area. A dangerous two-lane road that often carried log trucks had been widened into a four-lane with a turning lane. It was her first time to speak at such an event as director.

“They were so excited, and I just felt the excitement, and I felt like I’m part of something that’s helping people so much, and it was a great feeling. And I thought, ‘I am so fortunate to be up here taking credit for this. I didn’t even do it,’” she said with a laugh. “So many other people were involved in making it happen, but I got to stand up there and enjoy that feeling of, this is a great day in south Arkansas, a great day for these folks, they are so excited, and I’m excited for them, and I was part of this. So that was a great day.”

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ACEC/A Industry Update

More infrastructure money coming?

At the Industry Update, ACEC's chief lobbyist was hopeful the Biden administration and a divided Congress will invest in something they can agree on: infrastructure

By Steve Brawner
Editor

"We can work with this."

That's how Steve Hall, ACEC senior vice president of advocacy, described the results of this year's elections during the ACEC/A's Industry Update.

The annual event, which features speakers from government agencies and other fields relevant to engineers, was held online this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hall said President-elect Joe Biden's agenda aligns with ACEC's in some ways and doesn't in others. Biden has expressed support for major infrastructure spending, which ACEC strongly supports. On the other hand, ACEC will oppose some of his tax and regulatory priorities. To ensure those don't go too far, ACEC is supporting the Republicans in Senate runoffs in Georgia in January. Democrats would control the presidency and both houses of Congress if they win both.

Meanwhile, Democrats will have a narrower majority in the House of Representatives than before the election. The thin margins create what Hall called a "recipe for gridlock," but they could force lawmakers to focus on areas where they can achieve consensus, such as infrastructure.

In 2020, lawmakers failed to renew the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, or FAST Act, the government's highway funding law. Instead, they opted to extend it for a year. Democrats in the House passed a partisan highway bill in 2020 with no Republican votes as part of a broader bill, but in 2019 the lead Senate committee passed a bill with unanimous bipartisan support. Those bills will be the starting point for the coming legislation.

Hall said once a surface transportation bill gets traction, it could lead to invest-



CHIEF LOBBYIST. ACEC/A senior VP of advocacy Steve Hall hopes the highway FAST Act is a vehicle for infrastructure spending. ACEC has hired a Democratic lobbying firm to help it work with the Biden administration. *File photo.*

ments in water, energy, rural broadband and other infrastructure projects. The 2015 FAST Act allowed the ACEC to "check a number of boxes" regarding its agenda, he said.

"There's a lot of things that have bipartisan support that are just looking for the right vehicle, the right opportunity to become law, and that FAST Act bill really, like I said, becomes the engine to get that done," he said.

In 2021, Congress will lead off with a stimulus package. Biden has said he wants more assistance to be provided to states. ACEC would like to see more assistance provided to departments of transportation, transit and airport clients, and water systems.

ACEC is engaging the incoming administration and trying to find where agendas align and where disagreement could occur. It has hired Invariant, a Democratic lobbying firm, to help with its efforts. It is hoping the Biden administration will reverse some executive orders by the Trump administration. One of those orders prohibits firms from hav-

ing diversity and inclusion programs if they perform work for federal agencies. Another order shut down various visa categories, closing off a source of badly needed talent for engineering firms.

Also, ACEC would like to fix some issues with the Paycheck Protection Program, the stimulus program passed earlier this year that helped firms pay employees when parts of the economy were shut down. One issue is the Treasury Department's decision that expenses covered by PPP loans are not deductible. Hall said Congress didn't intend to tax those payments. He's "guardedly optimistic" that it will be fixed soon and said it could be included in a stimulus package.

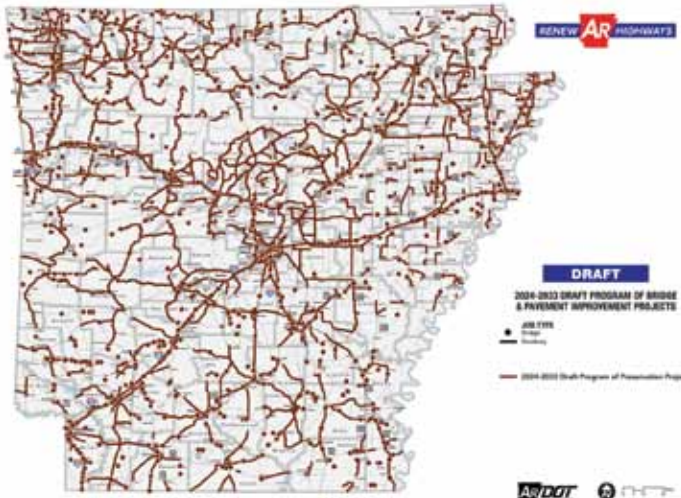
ACEC was involved in this year's elections and is now actively lobbying incoming members of Congress. Its political action committee raised about \$1 million, while another \$2 million was contributed from member firms that have their own federal PACs and by direct contributions from members. The previous night, ACEC had held an event at its townhouse with a few newly elected lawmakers. Many hope to land a spot on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Hall said.

Hall said ACEC has great relationships with all of the members of Arkansas' congressional delegation. He noted that Rep. Bruce Westerman, a professional engineer, was recently elected as the senior Republican on the Natural Resources Committee. If Republicans gain the House majority in 2022, Westerman would become chair of the committee.

Tudor: Tax passed in 72 counties

Arkansas Department of Transportation Director Lorie Tudor, P.E., addressed the Industry Update one month after her agency received a big vote of confidence from the public. In November, 55% of the state's voters approved Issue 1, a constitutional amendment that makes permanent the half-cent sales tax that is funding the Connecting Arkansas Program. That tax was set to expire in 2023.

The original tax passed in 2012 with 58% of the vote, a slightly higher margin



LOTS OF WORK FOR ENGINEERS. The graph above displays ARDOT's draft program of bridge and pavement improvement projects that would occur from 2024-33 under the Renew Arkansas Highways program. *Courtesy of ARDOT.*

than Issue 1's. But Tudor noted that Issue 1 passed with majority support in 72 of the state's 75 counties, while seven counties voted against the tax in 2012. And this year's proposal passed during uncertain times in the middle of a pandemic.

"All I can say is, I've never been so excited about an election in my whole life," she said. "And someone would say something about the president, and I'd say, 'What, is there a presidential election going on?' I didn't know. All I knew about was Issue 1."

Tudor said the tax annually will provide the department \$206 million starting in July 2023 along with \$44 million to cities and counties. Combined with other funds, it will enable ARDOT to create the Renew Arkansas Highways program. It will enable ARDOT to improve about 7,000 of the system's 16,400 miles and will touch every county more than once. It also will enable the department to replace or repair all the system's structurally deficient and posted bridges.

The \$7.4 billion, 10-year program will provide \$3 billion for pavement preservation, \$1.1 billion for bridges, \$1 billion for interstate maintenance, \$500 million for specific safety improvements, and \$1.8 billion for a second Connecting Arkansas Program to make capital improvements and relieve congestion. CAP 2 is actually a 20-year program totaling \$3.6 billion. It includes \$500 million over 20 years to be used to partner with cities and counties.

Tudor said the half-cent sales tax was necessary because of ARDOT's previous ongoing funding problems. Highways traditionally have been funded primarily by a flat motor fuels tax that is being levied at the same time the United States is trying to reduce fuel consumption. Meanwhile, Arkansans are driving more, increasing the need for highway construction and maintenance. In 1998, the department could resurface 200 lane-miles of highway for \$10 million. Twenty years later, that amount would resurface less than half that many miles.

She said Issue 1 will allow the department to engage in long-term planning. The fact that it's in the Constitution will ensure the money will be used for highways. While sales taxes are often considered to be regressive, this one would not be applied to fuel, motor fuels or prescription medications, alleviating the

burden it will place on lower-income taxpayers. Also, it will allow the state to collect taxes from out-of-state visitors.

Spann: Delta Heritage Trail nears challenging phase

Grady Spann, director of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism, presented a well-received presentation about the Delta Heritage Trail State Park. It's a linear park in east Arkansas consisting of a trail that, when completed, will stretch 84.6 miles from Lexa to Arkansas City.

The trail has been in the making for 26 years. Forty-four miles of trail and six trailheads have been constructed along its northern and southern parts, with the center yet to be completed. The cost so far has been \$20 million for the trails and an additional \$2.2 million for trailheads and supporting infrastructure. A trailhead and a restroom facility are being constructed every 10 miles. Currently, 3.7 miles is being constructed from Watson to Yancopin, where author Ernest Hemingway hunted ducks.

The next 36.3 miles will be challenging. Planners and constructors will need to cross the Arkansas River, the White River, and a major wildlife management area. Crossing the Arkansas River at the Yancopin bridge will cost \$13.9 million because a section will have to be raised over the river. Completion of the entire 36.3 miles will cost \$40 million, but the state has been given a \$20 million grant from the Walton Family Foundation on a one-to-one match with the stipulation that the trail must

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be completed by 2025. Spann said the department is hoping for grants from AR-DOT and other sources to help pay for the rest.

When it's done, the trail will have scenic overlooks and overnight camping opportunities. Planners hope to encourage local businesses to provide catering and restaurant services. Eventually the trail will connect to levy trails leading north to Memphis and perhaps as far south as Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

He hopes it could create 570 jobs, attract 84,000 visitors per year, and produce annual direct benefits of more than \$26 million.

Spann said that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, parks have become essential services. People who can't go to restaurants or other establishments have instead flocked to parks. The new Pinnacle Mountain State Park mountain bike trail is averaging 250 riders a day.

"It's almost like every single weekend is a Memorial Day weekend for us," he said.

Pakko: Economically, pandemic hasn't been so bad

State Economic Forecaster Dr. Michael Pakko said economists were expecting a downturn during the pandemic followed by an extended recovery. Instead, the second quarter saw a steep drop followed by a sharp increase in the third quarter.

Pakko said Arkansas has done surprisingly well economically during the pandemic. The pandemic's initial impact here was not as severe as in some other states, so political leaders did not impose as harsh a lockdown as occurred elsewhere. U.S. retail sales were down more than 20% in April. Arkansas saw a slight decline in March, but by April and May consumer spending was recovering sharply, and the downturn wasn't even clearly outside the normal range of monthly fluctuations. While monthly unemployment rates reached 15% in the United States, they reached 10.8% in Arkansas. Both rates are now 6-7%. The state is seeing 4,000 initial unemployment insurance claims monthly, which is double what would be expected but stable. Urban counties, which are more dependent on service sector jobs, have seen higher unemployment than rural ones.



ECONOMIST DR. MICHAEL PAKKO said government transfer payments have kept consumer spending strong, though the pandemic has distorted the market. *File photo.*

The state's relative success in weathering the downturn can be explained by the impact of government transfer payments. The federal government's temporary stimulus package introduced \$2 billion into the Arkansas economy through \$1,200 stimulus checks. Personal income has fallen sharply, down 6.5% in Arkansas and 6.4% nationally. But when transfer payments are included, personal incomes are up more than 7% in Arkansas and 7.6% in the United States. Those transfer payments boosted overall purchasing power, while Arkansas' cost of living is the country's lowest.

The pandemic has affected different parts of the economy differently. Consumer spending has been distorted but resilient. Business at bars and restaurants fell more than 50% in April and

23-24% in Arkansas. Fuel stations have seen lower sales as people are driving less and spending less on fuel. Motor vehicles and parts sales fell in Arkansas in March and April, but then automobile sales rose. Building materials, garden equipment and supplies have surged nationally and in Arkansas as many people were stuck at home and did home improvement projects. Food and beverage sales are up about 10% compared to pre-pandemic levels as consumers spend less at restaurants and more at grocery stores. Online sales surged.

In fact, Pakko said, if auto sales and gasoline are subtracted from the equation, total retail trade and food services numbers would show no evidence of a pandemic downturn at all.

The forecast is uncertain because it's not known if there will be a new round of shutdowns or what will happen with the pandemic. The economic growth is not sustainable without another stimulus package. Pakko said he expects the unemployment rate in Arkansas to fall below 6% in the fourth quarter and to 4-5% by the end of 2021, with full employment of about 4% by 2022. However, the labor force participation rate – those people who have a job or are seeking one – has fallen. He expects the overall economy to return to trend in 2023 as part of a gradual process.

Also speaking were Dr. Bob Blanz, associate director in the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality's Office of Water Quality, and Shelby Johnson, the state geographic information officer.

The Industry Update was sponsored by BXS Insurance and ACEC Life-Health Trust.



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To avoid a claim, don't be an ostrich

AXA XL underwriting manager reviews 10 behaviors that can lead to problems later

How can an engineering and design firm avoid a claim? Don't be an ostrich, don't blind date, and avoid eight other common behaviors.

That advice came from Michaela Kendall, an underwriting manager at AXA XL, a global company offering insurance and reinsurance services.

Kendall gave a presentation to ASPE members Oct. 27 regarding 10 behaviors that lead to claims. The professional development seminar was sponsored by BXS Insurance.

Kendall said claimants typically want three things. One is accountability, such as a change in behavior, an updated standard, and to be made whole. The second is an opportunity because they are under a financial strain, they are seeking publicity, or they are executing a power play in order to put the other entity on the defensive. The third is emotion-based: They want vindication or sometimes revenge.

"Sometimes people just want to be told, 'I'm sorry. You were right. I did the wrong thing, and this is why I did it,'" she said.

She said firms should be watching for these types of situations when working on a project where problems are occurring.

Different types of issues can lead to different claims. Her company's research has found that communication issues drive 30% of the professional claims it handles, but the average claim is a relatively small \$59,000. In those, the evidence can be less clear than in other types of claims. Disputes over negotiations and contracts happen less frequently but are twice as costly at \$118,000.

AXA XL has identified 10 behaviors that lead to claims. Firms should be considering what's happening in their companies, how people are responding to tense situations, and what the firm could be doing differently – and what the firm is doing right. Those 10 are the following.

• **Not fostering a culture of reporting.** No one likes delivering bad news, but delaying or avoiding reporting a problem



MICHAELA KENDALL says firms should avoid "blind dates" with new clients. Instead, they should do their due diligence and learn what they can beforehand. With longstanding clients, they shouldn't get lax regarding documentation. Documentation diffuses conflict and resolves issues that could arise later.

often makes it worse. Employees should know who to report to, how to do it, and when to do it. They also should feel safe knowing their report will lead to fixes and lessons learned. The focus should be on "leadership and mentoring and improving and being part of the same team," she said.

• **Rubber stamping.** Documents, including new contracts with previous clients, should be read before being approved. Ensure the terms haven't changed and that the work is clearly described. Make sure the right person is looking at the documents.

• **Ostriching.** Don't put your head in the sand and assume problems will go away. Address personality clashes early before they lead to a lawsuit or claim. Tackle issues as they arise and before they snowball. Document issues so a record exists for later. If someone isn't talking to you, that's often as big a concern as if someone is complaining. Take requests for information seriously. An unusual request could be a sign that something serious may be coming later. Consider the firm's obligations to respond, the extent of the response and what should be protected.

• **Only looking back.** Firms should not simply continue doing what they have done in the past. Instead, they should also try to forecast the future. They should consider how standards and expectations are changing, and how clients are evolv-

ing. Consider how the firm is adapting, whether people are doing what they're supposed to do and whether they are getting the support they need. Firms should correct but not overcorrect.

• **Forgetting the personal.** Firms must value relationships and create an environment of respect. "You can give people information, but are you connecting with them, especially when there's a dispute? Are you connecting on what the real issue is in the dispute?" she said.

• **Blind dating.** Firms should be careful about who they pick to be their clients. They should do their due diligence, research those companies, and investigate rumors.

"Make sure you know the project team, you know the type, what their experience is, what their reputation is, any history for them. ... People are and companies are who they are, so make sure you go into it with your eyes wide open," she said.

• **Hiding behind a relationship.** Firms can get lax when working with a longstanding client and even avoid standard documentation. She said firms may think they are protecting the relationship, but the opposite is actually true. Having documentation can diffuse conflict and resolve issues easier, cleaner and faster.

"Make sure you're clearly establishing expectations and that you're putting those into a contract no matter how many times you've worked with this other person or other company, or how long you've known them," she said.

• **Not asking, what if?** Firms should ask how they will respond if there is a life safety issue, a key absence, normal project difficulties or outside world events.

• **Undisciplined communications.** Emails should be treated like memos. In the event of a claim, they will be the first thing sought other than the contract. Don't admit liability in an email; instead just communicate the facts. Firms should have strong social media policies that discourage employees from posts that get the firm in trouble.

• **Not learning from mistakes.** Firms should be sure they are reviewing what went wrong, educating their employees and making needed changes.



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