

Building Arkansas

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



Highway man

Arkansas Department of Transportation Director Jared Wiley, P.E., is finishing his first year as the agency's 16th director. The year has been marked by improved internal communications, three new highway safety laws, and the dedication of a memorial to fallen workers. That memorial was spearheaded by his predecessor, Lorie Tudor, P.E. One highlight for this coming year is the first ACEC/A-ARDOT Joint Conference in April. As for the long term, funding shortfalls for an aging infrastructure system will be an increasing challenge. He says the industry, including engineers, must educate the public about the need for investment.

In the News



Garver's Smith receives ACEC service award

Garver Director of Federal Services Wallace Smith, P.E., received the National ACEC Community Service Award, recognizing more than two decades of volunteer leadership and nonprofit support across Central Arkansas.

Smith was honored at the 2025 Fall ACEC Conference in San Diego for his

wide-reaching impact on organizations that support families in crisis, veterans, and underserved youth.

Over 26 years, Smith has contributed engineering expertise, fundraising leadership, and hands-on volunteer service to groups such as Women and Children First, Goodness Village, Methodist Family Health Foundation, Mount St. Mary Academy, and Junior Achievement. He played a pivotal role in the capital campaign and planning efforts for the new Women and Children First Peace Center, a 60,000-square-foot facility that will provide shelter, medical care, and legal support to women and children in need.



Smith

Smith's service extends to longtime volunteer work with Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9095, holiday programs for children in crisis shelters, and mentorship for high school students exploring engineering careers. His recognition reflects a sustained commitment to strengthening Arkansas communities through both professional knowledge and personal dedication.

Garver's largest Summit highlights firm's culture

Garver hosted its largest company-wide Summit to date, bringing more than 1,200 employees from 61 offices to Houston for three days of collaboration, professional development, and celebration.

In the News continues on [page 8](#)

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Building Arkansas

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18 “I’m not a guy that seeks glory and accolades,” said Jared Wiley, P.E., whom the Arkansas Highway Commission appointed as ARDOT’s 16th director in January 2025. “I’m really not, so it was a little overwhelming to think that I would be the one. But really I’m comfortable with most all the things we do here. I can’t do it all, but we’ve got a great crew to help.”

Departments

- 2 [In the News](#)
- 6 [ACEC/A President’s Column](#)
- 7 [ASPE President’s Column](#)
- 8 [Calendar](#)
- 13 [Advertiser Index](#)

News and Features

16 [Member Spotlight / Big things on tap for Crist Engineers](#)

The growing firm won a National Recognition Award at the ACEC’s Engineering Excellence Awards Gala this year for its work on a tunnel bore project in Hot Springs. Crist is working on a \$150 million project that will almost double Hot Springs’ water treatment capacity. And it’s helping Wynne rebuild its wastewater treatment facility that was destroyed in a tornado in March 2023.

18 [Cover / Head of the highways](#)

From his 10th-story office, Arkansas Department of Transportation Director Jared Wiley, P.E., can see the new Fallen Worker Memorial that honors the 92 ARDOT employees who have died in the line of duty. He finds inspiration from that memorial, which was dedicated Oct. 9.

Wiley, 43, manages Arkansas’ third largest state agency with 4,000 employees. It’s also the state’s largest employer of engineers with 300 on staff.

22 [ACEC/A Central Arkansas Trap Shoot](#)

The ACEC/A held its annual Central Arkansas Trap Shoot at the Jacksonville Shooting Sports Complex Nov. 9.

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The importance of soft skills

When considering a topic for this edition's article, I had the good fortune to run into Dr. Abhijit Bhattacharyya, dean of engineering and computer science at Arkansas State University, at an event. I asked him what graduates struggled with the most during school and after graduation. Without hesitation, he said soft skills. Engineering graduates today enter the workforce armed with technical expertise, software proficiency, and problem-solving skills. Yet, many employers note they often fall short in the essential soft skills like communication, teamwork, and adaptability.

While this has always been an issue, why is it more prevalent today? Several factors are contributing. As engineering programs expand to include rapidly changing technologies, the curriculum leaves less room for interpersonal skill development. Communication, leadership, and teamwork courses are often treated as optional, not essential. Meanwhile, the rise of digital communication and hybrid learning gives many students fewer opportunities to practice face-to-face collaboration. When people communicate from behind screens, nuance, tone, and body language are lost. The result is a generation of engineers who are technically prepared but socially underdeveloped. This gap often manifests in small but significant ways – unclear emails, difficulty presenting design concepts to non-technical audiences, reluctance to ask for feedback, or trouble navigating interpersonal conflicts within project teams. These shortcomings can affect productivity, project outcomes, and, ultimately, client satisfaction.

Soft skills are integral to success in modern engineering. Today's projects are increasingly multidisciplinary, requiring engineers to work closely with architects, contractors, clients, and regulatory agencies. The ability to communicate effectively across technical and non-technical boundaries is essential. Moreover, engineers are often expected to lead teams, manage client relationships, and make presentations to stakeholders.

Improving soft skills among new graduates requires effort from academia,



Mike Foster, P.E.
ACEC/A President

our industry, and young graduates. Universities can integrate communication and teamwork training into technical coursework, helping students see the relevance of these skills in real-world engineering contexts. Engineering programs can partner with industry professionals to deliver

mentorship opportunities focused on topics such as leadership and time management. Mock interviews, networking events, and public speaking exercises can prepare students for the interpersonal demands of the workplace.

Employers also play a critical role. Firms can create onboarding programs for new engineers that include communication training, mentorship pairings, and feedback loops. Encouraging young engineers to shadow experienced project managers or attend client meetings can accelerate their learning. Supervisors should model strong interpersonal behavior and provide constructive feedback on communication and teamwork – not just technical output. Investing in these areas early can reduce costly miscommunications and strengthen firm culture.

New graduates themselves must recognize that technical knowledge alone will not sustain a long-term career. Actively seeking opportunities to improve soft skills through professional societies, volunteer projects, or continuing education can set them apart. The most successful young engineers approach communication as an extension of their technical work. They understand that explaining a design clearly to a nontechnical client is just as valuable as producing the design itself.

As automation, artificial intelligence, and remote collaboration reshape engineering, human-centered skills will only grow in importance. The engineers who can communicate complex ideas clearly, adapt to change, and build strong working relationships will lead the next generation of innovation. Technical expertise may open the door, but it is the ability to collaborate, communicate, and connect that ensures lasting success in the engineering profession.

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Engineering resilience: Building teams that thrive

Engineers are celebrated for their problem-solving and technical rigor, yet the profession's mental health challenges are rarely discussed with the same candor. Demanding workloads, high-pressure environments, tight deadlines, and office culture can take its toll on the very organ we rely on most – our brains. Mental health may not seem engineering-specific, but its impact on performance, safety, and career longevity is profound and underrecognized.

Leadership roles in engineering and construction are arriving earlier in careers than in the past. One legacy of the 2008 recession is a noticeable experience gap: Many senior managers have 25-plus years of experience, while a large cohort of engineers sits in the 0-15-year range, leaving fewer professionals in the 15-25-year bracket. The resulting boom has pushed capable, younger engineers into management roles quickly, often before they've had time to develop the coping skills and support networks those roles require.

I speak from experience. Fresh out of school, I chased advancement with single-minded focus – working long hours, powering through warning signs of burnout, and masking internal struggles with imposter syndrome. Externally, success and positive feedback suggested everything was on track. Internally, I wrestled with inadequacy and a relentless pressure to be perfect. That conflict is common: competence on paper does not shield anyone from stress, doubt, or exhaustion.

In my current role building a roadway practice, the job demands a blend of technical, managerial, and interpersonal skills. Some days I feel perfectly suited to the work; other days I feel like an accountant, lawyer, politician, marketer, or writer – roles I never trained for. The root of much of my strain was trying to do everything



Landon Miller, P.E.
ASPE President

myself. I feared delegating would slow progress or produce inferior results, so I shouldered too much. Over time I learned that leaning on partners and mentoring capable colleagues not only lightens the load but strengthens the team.

So how do we address this? Start by normalizing conversations about mental health

across all levels of the profession. Talk to peers and managers and be transparent with each other. Set clear boundaries between work and home. Rely on partners and colleagues to share responsibilities. Embrace each other's strengths and be willing to pass on tasks that expose your weaknesses. Perfection is an unrealistic standard; owning mistakes and discussing them openly accelerates learning and reduces isolation.

Be mindful of coping mechanisms and prioritize mental, physical, and spiritual health. Build a supportive community inside and outside the office. While healthy competition can drive excellence, persistent rivalry and isolation undermine our shared mission: to protect public welfare and advance the profession's social and economic interests. Cultivating collegial relationships – even with competitors – improves outcomes for everyone.

If I could recommend a book, I would recommend "Think Yourself Resilient" by James Elliott. It offers practical strategies for building mental resilience that are especially relevant for professionals navigating high-pressure careers.

As leaders and members of professional organizations, we have a responsibility to support one another. The more we foster empathy, mentorship, and collaboration, the better we will perform as engineers and the more sustainable our careers will become. Mental health is not a sidebar; it is central to the work we do and the lives we lead.

In the News (Cont'd)



The annual gathering reinforces Garver's emphasis on investing in its people and strengthening cross-office connections — a hallmark of the firm's rapid growth across 21 states.

This year's Summit featured technical and market-focused sessions, team meetings, wellness events, and GarverGives service activities, including a meal-packing initiative supporting Kids' Meals, a Houston nonprofit. The Midway event — complete with carnival games, fair food, horse-drawn wagons, and a zipline — underscored the company's commitment to creating memorable experiences that build community across its workforce.



Thomas

A highlight of the event was the presentation of the Spirit of Garver



Calendar of events

March 5
ACEC/A Engineering Excellence Awards
Chenal Country Club

April 7-8, 2026
ACEC/A-ARDOT Joint Conference
Northwest Arkansas Convention Center
Springdale

April 29, 2026
NWA Trap Shoot
Legacy Ranch
Gravette

Awards, the firm's highest employee honor. Among the national recipients was Aviation Project Manager Greg Thomas, P.E., of Garver's Fayetteville Aviation Design Center. Thomas was recognized for his leadership in mentoring young engineers, supporting project teams across the firm's aviation footprint, and fostering a collaborative, people-first work environment.

Fair honored by pub for role in aviation infrastructure

Garver's Arkansas Aviation Leader Mary Fair, P.E., was named one of Arkansas Money & Politics' 2025 Women in AEC, highlighting her role in shaping aviation infrastructure across the state.



Fair

Fair, the ACEC/A's past president, has played a key part in projects at Conway Municipal Airport, Clinton National Airport, and general aviation airports statewide, helping modernize critical facilities while maintaining a focus on safety and long-term planning.

In addition to her project leadership, Fair is a champion for women in engineering. She serves as a mentor through Garver Connect, supports STEM programs, and is active in WTS Arkansas. Her recognition reflects both her technical expertise and her commitment to expanding opportunities within the AEC industry.

In the News continues on page 10

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Tiner named a Spark! Star by Discovery Museum

The Museum of Discovery named Garver Transportation Quality Control Lead Nicci Tiner, P.E., PTOE, a 2025 Spark! Star in recognition of her long-standing service to STEM education in Ar-



Tiner

kansas. Tiner has been a key supporter of the museum's outreach initiatives and is a familiar face to students across the region who participate in hands-on learning programs.

Tiner became Garver's first female partner in 1998, Arkansas' first professional traffic operations engineer in 2009, and the first woman to serve as president of the Arkansas Academy of Civil Engineering. Through mentorship and advocacy, she continues to influence the next generation of engineers and expand visibility for women in transportation fields.

Garver's Shaw gets magazine's nod for leadership



Shaw

Garver Chief Human Resources Officer John Shaw was named to the Northwest Arkansas Business Journal's 2025 C-Suite Awards class, highlighting his leadership in supporting one of the region's fastest-growing engineering firms.

Based in Rogers, Shaw oversees HR operations that support more than 1,400 employees in 21 states, spanning recruitment, benefits, professional development, and workplace wellness.

Shaw's nearly 30-year career reflects a focus on organizational health and employee experience, including transformational HR initiatives in multiple industries. His community involvement includes service to mental health and youth-focused nonprofits across north-west Arkansas, where he has led training, fundraising, and advocacy efforts.



Crafton Tull holds open house for new Plano location

Crafton Tull celebrated the official launch of its Plano, Texas location on Oct. 28 with an open house attended by clients, employees, and family. It is the company's first permanent office in Texas.

"Growth in the Plano area was key in our decision to expand to north Texas. We are continuing to expand Crafton Tull into growing regions that need our services," said Matt Crafton, P.E., president and CEO of Crafton Tull.

Crafton Tull established Texas operations earlier in the year. Vice President Vince Stanko, P.E. was hired to lead the Plano location. Stanko is active in land developer circles with nearly 10 years in the north Dallas region after working for two years in the Crafton Tull Little Rock office. He brings experience managing and designing land development projects across various market sectors, including master-planned communities, residential developments, commercial, industrial, and municipal projects.

Crafton Tull's Texas offices are housed in the west Plano area at 8400 Bellevue Drive, Suite 240. Additionally, Crafton Tull has an Oklahoma City office and Arkansas locations in Conway, Fayetteville, Fort Smith, Hot Springs, Jonesboro, Little Rock, Rogers, and Russellville.



Crafton Tull reopens redone downtown Fayetteville office

Crafton Tull recently reopened its renovated downtown Fayetteville office on College Avenue, commemorating the event with a celebration with colleagues, friends, and family.

The 300-plus-person firm offers multidisciplinary services that include civil engineering, land surveying, environmental permitting, planning, and landscape architecture, among others.

To meet the needs of the growing company, the office received a top-to-bottom renovation with a reimagined floor plan that added individual offices, a glass-walled conference room, a break room, and additional desk space for personnel. The open-concept layout makes the suite more spacious and offers modernized upgrades to the existing building, which was originally built in 1985.

The location, one of two in Fayetteville, frequently employs students and graduates from the University of Arkansas' civil engineering program. The office is located within walking distance to the campus and downtown Fayetteville. The new conference room and offices also overlook Old Main and the university.

Crafton Tull projects win ARPA awards

Two Crafton Tull projects, the inclusive Two Rivers Park Playground and the Conway Community Center, received awards at the Arkansas Recreation and Parks Association annual conference in October.

Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde was on hand to receive the award for the Two Rivers Park Playground that was

In the News continues on page 12

ENGINEERING ARKANSAS

**PINNACLE HILLS PARKWAY
IMPROVEMENTS**
ROGERS, AR



Crafton Tull

In the News (Cont'd)



CRAFTON TULL AWARDS. Top photo, Crafton Tull's Dave Roberts, PLA, ASLA, left, is pictured with Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde with the Two Rivers Park Playground award. Above photo, Roberts is pictured with, from left, Michael Washington, Jamie Brice, and Skylor Swope with the Conway Community Center.

the winner of the Outdoor Facility Over \$500,000 category. Jamie Brice, Conway Community Center director, accepted the award on behalf of the center, which was selected as the winner of the Indoor Facility Over \$5 Million category.

"It is an honor to be recognized by parks and recreation professionals who manage projects and facilities like these across the state," said Dave Roberts, PLA, ASLA, Crafton Tull senior vice president of planning. "Crafton Tull is excited to know that generations of families will enjoy the playground in Pulaski County and the community center in Conway for decades to come."

Crafton Tull provided professional services from master planning through construction documents and inspection for the Two Rivers Park Playground, which at 64,000 square feet is one of the largest inclusive playgrounds in Arkansas. The team also assisted the county with securing a grant from the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism's

Outdoor Recreation Grants Program for \$250,000 toward the construction of the playground.

The Conway Community Center was designed by Crafton Tull in collaboration with Hastings+Chivetta and Councilman Hunsaker. The 112,000-square-foot renovated facility includes both indoor and outdoor amenities, including indoor pickleball and volleyball courts, an eight-lane indoor competition pool with dedicated spectator seating, and a 1,134-square-foot leisure pool in addition to the outdoor aquatic center that includes two tower slides, one of which is more than 260 feet long, a lazy river, and a variety of other family-friendly amenities.



MATT CRAFTON, P.E., Crafton Tull's CEO, signs the check replica that he would present to the University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton.

Crafton Tull creates survey scholarship at UACC-Morrilton

Crafton Tull is now helping students plot their path into the field of surveying at the University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton (UACCM) through a newly established student scholarship.

UACCM is a leader in producing qualified surveyors, including a total of 26 UACCM graduates at Crafton Tull. With that in mind, Crafton Tull recently established a \$2,000 scholarship to be given annually to students studying surveying at the school.

"Our company has a long-standing relationship with UACCM," said CEO Matt Crafton, P.E. "We know the survey teachers at UACCM offer great instruction to the students there, so it was an easy deci-

sion for Crafton Tull to support the program."

Several of Crafton Tull's UACCM alumni were on hand for the ceremonial signing of the scholarship check in early August. Although they all had different paths to UACCM, they share the same sense of pride to be a part of this new opportunity for students interested in surveying.

The scholarship is split into \$1,000 scholarships in the fall and spring semesters. The scholarship is exclusive to UACCM surveying students who meet a GPA of at least 3.0 and is based on financial need as well as faculty and staff recommendations.

UACCM Development Officer Lauren Bryan said the scholarship will help to shape the surveying profession well into the future.

"UACCM is so thankful to Matt Crafton and Crafton Tull for establishing this scholarship that will impact UACCM surveying students for many years to come," Bryan said.

Four MCE projects win Fayetteville Chamber awards

Four McClelland Consulting Engineers projects received awards at the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce Construction Developers Awards Oct. 28.

MCE accepted the Healing Horizon Award for the completion of the Alice Walton School of Medicine (AWSOM) in Bentonville. The AWSOM began construction in March 2023 and opened its doors for classes by August 2025. Constructed over 13 acres, it includes a three-



AWSOM. MCE's work helped the Alice Walton School of Medicine (AWSOM) win the Healing Horizon Award.



MCE served as the civil engineer for the redevelopment of Opera in the Ozarks.

story medical facility and a parking deck to accommodate the future doctors and teachers. MCE provided civil and site design services, geotechnical engineering services, construction materials testing, and special inspections.

MCE served as the civil engineer for the redevelopment of Opera in the Ozarks, which received the Cultural Legacy Award. The 300-seat theater and arts campus was funded by a Walton Family Foundation grant. Set atop a remote 20-acre site overlooking the White River, the project required extensive civil engineering to address rugged terrain and limited

existing utilities. MCE's scope included large-scale development services, permitting, off-site utility main extensions, roadway upgrades, grading, drainage, water and sewer system design, and comprehensive geotechnical engineering, along with construction materials testing and special inspections. Featuring state-of-the-art rehearsal halls, expanded production shops, on-site housing, and architectural and acoustic design by Polk Stanley Wilcox Architects, the new facility strengthens the organization's 70-year legacy as a national training ground for emerging opera singers.



THE WILSON PARK HUB in Fayetteville, won the Connecting Parks and People Award.

MCE was a subcontractor with the Wilson Park Hub in Fayetteville, which won the Connecting Parks and People Award. The project elevated a routine infrastructure upgrade into a vibrant community gathering space within the city's historic park. Designed as a social anchor between the northern parking

In the News continues on page 14

Advertiser Index

Garver	Cover
Nixon Power Services	2
CEI	3
Benchmark Group	5
Gallagher	8
Olsson	9
Crafton Tull	11
McClelland Consulting Engineers	13
Pickering	15
Crist Engineers	17
CEI	18
Burns & McDonnell	19
Half	21
ETEC/Poly Processing	23

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scan ME!

In the News (Cont'd)

area and the tennis and pickleball courts, the Hub enhances connectivity through a series of ramps, stairs, terraced seating, and shaded overlooks that link visitors to the courts, the adjacent creek, and key east-west park routes. The project features a steel frame with a stained pine soffit, brick and stone clad restroom facilities, and thoughtfully detailed retaining walls, planters, and guardrails that maintain clear sightlines across the landscape. MCE provided construction materials testing, special inspections for the project, site grading, drainage, utility design, and foundation recommendations. These ensure a modern, durable focal point that enriches recreation, accessibility, and community life.

Finally, MCE worked with the Springdale School District to reconstruct the Southwest Junior High School, which won the Education Transformation Award.

The project, completed for the 2024 school year, provided the district with a modern, state-of-the-art learning environment while maintaining operations of the existing school throughout construction. The new 88,000-square-foot facility was built adjacent to the existing gymnasium – originally constructed in 1982 – which was preserved as part of the redevelopment. MCE provided comprehensive civil and site design services including site planning, grading, utility layout, and coordination with jurisdictional permitting authorities.



SPRINGDALE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S Southwest Junior High School won the Education Transformation Award.

Olsson number seven on list of data center engineer firms

Olsson has been ranked No. 7 on Building Design+Construction's 2025 list of top U.S. data center engineering firms.

This is the third consecutive year Olsson has been in the top 10 after its annual data center revenue grew more than 65% to \$103 million. The Building Design + Construction rankings are based on revenue from data center design services performed during the previous calendar year.

"This top 10 ranking is a testament to our dedicated employees, amazing partners, and solid strategy," said Market Leader Patrick McFarlin. "We've been at the forefront of shifts in technology, and our consistent spot among the nation's top firms is a reflection of that commitment to excellence. Simply put, we're built to be a lasting partner."

Olsson partners with clients to design and evolve their hyperscale, colocation, and enterprise data centers.

Olsson welcomes Mike Bender to Fayetteville office

Mike Bender, P.E., recently joined Olsson as a business development senior specialist in the firm's Fayetteville office.

Bender brings nearly three decades of experience in civil engineering, with a strong background in local government, community development, drainage, transportation, water and electric utilities, and solid waste design and disposal management.

"With his extensive experience and passion for improving communities, we are thrilled to have Mike on board," said Brad Hammond, P.E., Olsson's local area



Bender

leader in Fayetteville. "He will play a key role in building relationships and working with our clients to deliver innovative, sustainable solutions."

Before joining Olsson, Bender served the City of Bentonville in multiple leadership roles, including water utilities director and public works director, where he managed large teams and oversaw critical infrastructure projects. His responsibilities spanned water and wastewater systems, public works maintenance, transportation, street engineering and airport operations.

Bender earned his bachelor of science in civil engineering from the University of Arkansas. He holds certifications as a Class III wastewater operator and D4 water operator.

Benchmark Group helps build Dallas entertainment venue

Benchmark Group recently partnered with architect The Ferro Collective on additions to the Toyota Music Factory near Dallas, a vibrant destination for live music, dining and entertainment. This 900,000-square-foot entertainment hub in Las Colinas is home to more than 19 restaurants, bars, and venues.

Benchmark Group helped bring new energy to the district by partnering to design three featured restaurants: Jaxon Texas Kitchen, Shoals Smokehouse, and Pistil Cocktail Lounge. The team provided full mechanical and electrical design services, including lighting redesigns and a new stand-alone smokehouse for Shoals.



PICTURED is one of the facilities at the Toyota Music Factory near Dallas.



Benchmark Group constructs office for CCF Brands in Rogers

Benchmark Group's engineering team partnered with Isaac Moran Architecture to deliver a beautiful, functional, two-story office to CCF Brands in the Rogers area.

Benchmark utilized a Matterport 3D scan of the building shell during the initial phase to streamline coordination and ensure accuracy throughout construction. The finished space provides CCF Brands with a modern, efficient environment that supports its operations and growth.



3D SCANNING. At the AIA Arkansas State Conference in Hot Springs in October, Jason Dodson, left, and Jordan Hernandez demonstrated Benchmark Group's 3D scanning services being offered as a standalone service to architectural and engineering firms, as well as construction companies. Three-dimensional scanning enables precise analysis, efficient planning, and informed decision making for projects of any size. Benchmark has invested in two different systems to accommodate all types of projects.

Benchmark Group's Kimbrough promoted to project manager



Kimbrough

Benchmark Group's Dustin Kimbrough, P.E., was recently promoted to project manager. Kimbrough will be coordinating cross-discipline teams for a variety of projects.

His experience includes big box retail and worship center remodels, pump design, and capital expenditures. He also has a background in designing, testing, and analyzing various mechanical and thermal systems.

Kimbrough earned his bachelor of science in mechanical engineering degree from the University of Arkansas. His experience providing value-engineered and code-compliant solutions makes him a valuable member of the Fire Protection Team.



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ACEC/A Member Spotlight

Big things on tap at Crist Engineers

Growing firm gets national ACEC recognition, designs new Wynne plant after tornado

Crist Engineers is getting bigger at the same time it's working on big projects.

The water and wastewater engineering firm, established in 1938, now has 43 employees, including 14 engineers, and an office for three construction observers in Hot Springs. The firm has added roughly 10 employees in the last three years.

Matt Dunn, P.E., Crist's president, said the company opened its Fayetteville office for several reasons. One of its largest clients, Benton/Washington Regional Public Water Authority, is located there. The firm also wanted to have an office in Fayetteville to attract young talent.

One of Crist's projects recently won a National Recognition Award at the ACEC's Engineering Excellence Awards Gala May 20. The award was given for a 60-inch tunnel bore half a mile through Blakely Mountain for a gravity-fed water intake from Lake Ouachita to a Hot Springs water treatment plant 17 miles away.

The tunnel is only part of Crist's work on a \$150 million project that will provide 15 million gallons a day, almost doubling the city's water treatment capacity. The city's water needs should be supplied for decades. The treatment plant, which was expected to be in service by the end of the year, is known as the "Water Barn" because of its unique farm structure design. Hot Springs City Manager Bill Burrow wanted a design in keeping with the surrounding rural landscape. Crist is also working with roughly \$50 million in wastewater treatment construction projects for Hot Springs.

Another major project of Crist's is a new \$22 million wastewater treatment plant for Wynne Water Utilities that will replace the previous plant that was destroyed by a tornado in March 2023.

Crist arrived soon after the tornado struck to help the utility continue to provide services. It designed a temporary facility that has continued to provide services while the new facility is being



BUILDING AND REBUILDING. Crist is doing the design work for a \$150 million water treatment project for Hot Springs. It will provide 15 million gallons a day, nearly doubling Hot Springs' current water capacity and ensuring an ample water supply for decades to come. The project includes the "Water Barn," above, whose design is meant to match the rural character of the surroundings. The project won a national Engineering Excellence Award for a 60-inch tunnel bore half a mile through Blakely Mountain. Left, Crist is the engineering consultant for a new \$22 million wastewater treatment plant in Wynne to replace the one destroyed by a tornado in March 2023.

constructed over the next couple of years. Crist worked with the city to obtain FEMA funding.

Dunn said the firm remained in communication with the Arkansas Division of Environmental Quality and obtained relaxed discharge permit conditions for the temporary facility.

"It was pretty impressive what our guys did to whip that up in a matter of weeks and keep them in service," he said. "They never lost any wastewater service in the city during that time, and we've been able to work with ADEQ to keep them under permit and keep the wastewater flowing throughout this entire time. That's pretty cool."

Other big Crist projects include a \$175 million new water source for the Saline Regional Public Water Authority. The Ouachita River in Hot Spring County will serve eight entities in Saline County.

Crist also did the design work to rehabilitate the influent pump station for

the Little Rock Water Reclamation Authority's Adams Field Water Reclamation Facility. The project involves replacing four pumps and adding slide gates at the 94 million-gallon-per-day facility. Craig Johnson, P.E., vice president, said it's the largest municipal bypass operation he has helped design. Crist saved the client significant money using scale size hydraulic modeling in accordance with Hydraulic Institute requirements. A replicate scale model for the entire facility was created at the Verdantas Flow Labs in South Carolina to produce cavitations to mimic flow conditions to ensure the wet well and pumps functioned correctly. As a result of the modeling, the design incorporated floor hydrocones and straightening vanes in the pump's suction side to optimize pump performance and eliminate cavitation.

Another big Crist project is an 8 mgd expansion at Conway Corp.'s Roger Q Mills Jr. Water Treatment Plant.

In the News (Cont'd)



BENCHMARK GROUP is partnering with **WER Architects** to build a new city hall in Little Flock, Arkansas.

ACEC/A upgrading website; registration for events is feature

ACEC/A has purchased YourMembership association management system (AMS) upgrades and additions to its website, arkansasengineers.org, and will make the transition in January.

The AMS will offer a members-only portal with online certifications, member-directed additions to their accounts, and distribution list management, to name a few.

It also will offer personalized event registration and support.

Olsson team wins ACEC/A Pickleball Tournament at Matrix

The ACEC/Arkansas 2025 Pickleball Tournament at The Matrix Club Sept. 11 was a smashing success with an incredible turnout, great competition, and even better camaraderie.

Tournament winners pictured in the accompanying photo were:

- First place – Olsson’s Jeffrey Kutter, P.E., left on top of podium, and John Winter, EIT



- Second – Garver’s Samuel Delgado, E.I., left, and Andrew Thompson, E.I.

- Third – Bates and Associates’ Blaine Atchley, left, and Braden Wise, P.E.

Sponsors who made this event possible were Foundation Specialties Geotechnical Construction, Olsson, Garver, Michael Baker International, and Iconic Consulting Group.

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Head of the highways

ARDOT Director Jared Wiley is completing his first year leading the agency. Safety, communications and relationship have been his priorities so far.

By Steve Brawner
Editor

From his 10th-story office, Arkansas Department of Transportation Director Jared Wiley, P.E., can see the new Fallen Worker Memorial that honors the 92 ARDOT employees who have died in the line of duty.

He finds inspiration from that memorial, which was dedicated Oct. 9.

“In that spot back there, that’s where my coffee pot is, and every morning I try to take a look at it and just refocus and remind myself what is most important,” he said.

Wiley’s predecessor, Lorie Tudor, P.E., kicked the memorial construction into gear in 2023 after meeting with the mother of a fallen employee. Previously, the department honored its lost workers with a temporary setup of traffic cones with paper sleeves featuring the names of the fallen. Spearheaded by Tudor, staff on their private time raised nearly \$90,000 through bake sales and silent auctions. Industry partners donated roughly \$200,000 in labor, materials and cash.

Keeping his ARDOT employees safe – along with the motoring public – is Wi-



JARED WILEY, P.E., became the Arkansas Department of Transportation’s 16th director in January. Outside his window is ARDOT’s new Fallen Worker Memorial. He tries to look at it every morning.

ley’s most important responsibility, but it’s far from his only one.

Wiley, 43, manages Arkansas’ third largest state agency with 4,000 employees. It’s also the state’s largest employer of engineers with 300 of them on staff. Arkansas may be only the 29th largest state in the union by area, but Wiley manages the nation’s 12th largest system based on center line miles and the 16th largest

in lane miles. He’s also managing 7,400 bridges.

The Arkansas Highway Commission appointed Wiley as the agency’s 16th director in January 2025. He said the priorities in his first year have been communications, relationships and safety. ARDOT has improved its internal communications through a weekly internal telecast and an internal social media channel. It’s been strengthening its relationships with consultants, contractors and public officials. This past legislative session, it helped pass laws that authorized the use of green lights on official roadway construction and maintenance vehicles, added work zone safety to the Arkansas driver’s manual and test, and doubled fines for traffic violations in mobile work zones.

Wiley said ARDOT already was an efficient organization, and he hasn’t made major changes to the organizational chart. He did create a Transportation



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Systems Management and Operations Division that helps department leaders manage roadside cameras and keep up with technology. He also plans to create a group that will foster outreach with city and county leaders and other elected officials.

The department is also prepared to take advantage of artificial intelligence. ARDOT's policy is that AI is a tool, but it doesn't make decisions, and data security is of paramount importance. The department is using speed enforcement cameras in interstate work zones that record license plates and driver images and can even detect if a driver is using a cell phone. It then pings an officer who can make a decision about what to do next. Moving forward, ARDOT will be able to use data from cell phones about hard braking and fast turn-taking to guide its construction practices.

"We're going to be able to use that to be more predictive and help us hopefully attack safety problems before they

ACEC/ARDOT conference April 7-8

Plans are taking shape for the first ever ACEC/A-Arkansas Department of Transportation Joint Conference April 7-8 at the Northwest Arkansas Convention Center in Springdale.

The conference will feature dynamic speakers, breakout sessions and panels, networking opportunities and an exhibitor showcase. ARDOT Direc-

tor Jared Wiley, P.E., will be one of the speakers.

ACEC/A Executive Director Angie W. Cooper said the two groups are looking for a big turnout. ACEC/A is seeking sponsors.

To register or be a sponsor, please go to ACEC/A's website, arkansasengineers.org.

become a problem, and then that's going to in turn refine and revise some of our designs," he said.

Working with ACEC/A

Wiley said the relationship between ARDOT and the consulting engineering community remains strong. The agency and the council have a liaison meeting at least twice yearly, and ARDOT's assistant chiefs meet periodically with ACEC/A in open forums. The inaugural ACEC/A-ARDOT Joint Conference is scheduled

for April 7-8 at the Northwest Arkansas Convention Center in Springdale.

When asked, he initially couldn't think of anything ACEC/A should be doing differently. He then said, "One thing we can all do better, together, all of us, is help educate the public and the elected officials about our challenges as an industry. That's something we all need to do a better job of together."

Funding will be the biggest challenge for the agency moving forward. The past

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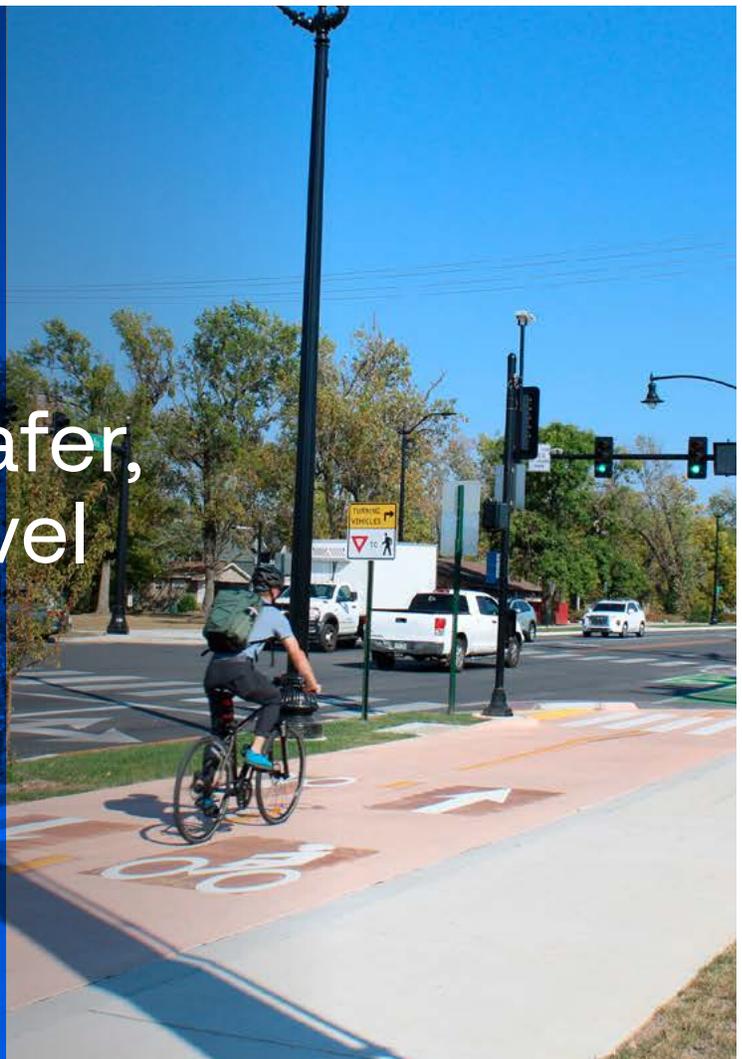
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decade-and-a-half has seen the agency enjoy big successes at the ballot box. Voters passed a temporary half-cent sales tax for roadways in 2012 and then made it permanent in 2020. The successes came after extensive voter education campaigns, and they greatly alleviated the department's funding challenges.

But they didn't fully fund the gap between funding and needs, and construction costs are increasing. The agency is updating its needs survey as it looks toward the future.

"My biggest challenge in my opinion during my tenure as director is going to be finding a stable and consistent source of revenue that grows with the economy, which the gas tax doesn't," he said. "The only thing we have now that grows with the economy is the half cent, and we're so thankful for that, but that's not going to keep up with the needs."

While the state of Arkansas and the voters have invested in the highway system, Wiley said there hasn't been adequate federal investment since the Eisenhower administration's interstate system push in the 1950s. Arkansas, in fact, was the first state to complete its system in 1975 – before Wiley was born.

"This infrastructure was built in the '50s, '60s and '70s, and because of that historic investment, it's coming of age," he said. "Our bridges are aging. They're deteriorating. We're working hard to keep them moving, to keep band-aids on them, if you will, but there is going to be a point in time when that's not going to be enough. We're going to need sufficient funding to tackle those needs."

Path to leadership

Wiley's path toward leading the department started early. When he was 10 years old, his parents, both school teachers in Malvern, built a house. The process fascinated him so much that he decided he wanted to be an architect. He loved math and took all the classes he could. One day, a conversation sparked his interest in engineering. On other occasion, Arkansas State University Dean of Engineering Dr. Albert Mink came to his class and talked about the profession. Wiley eventually visited the campus and decided he wanted to be an engineer. While a college student, he applied for a



summer internship with ARDOT in Hot Springs. Told no slots were available, he instead applied to work at a grocery store. The day before he was supposed to start working there, he was offered an internship. Over the next three summers, he gained hands-on experience working on roadways in the Hot Springs area.

"I swung a sledgehammer," he said. "I chopped lines for survey work. I held a rod. Did the survey gun. I did it all. Mapped cross-sections. They showed me how to do things by hand the old way, and I really appreciated it at the time."

By the time he graduated, he knew he wanted to work at ARDOT, and he wanted to stay in central Arkansas because his wife, Jessica, was attending pharmacy school at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. There were no jobs as he hoped in construction, but there was an opportunity in the Division of Planning and Research.

"They had a flier on the wall at my college, and I pulled it off and called about it," he said. "It said, 'Work inside on the hot and nasty days, and work outside on pretty days.' And I said, 'Well, might be interesting.' And so I interviewed, and I was fortunate to get that job. And I found out later I got it because of my performance as an intern."

Wiley moved up the ranks at ARDOT. In the Division of Planning and Research, he traveled the state and managed the traffic count program and the roadway inventory program. Among his duties was numbering the state's highways. He then worked in Programs and Contracts,

JARED WILEY, P.E., started working at ARDOT after graduating from Arkansas State University and most recently was chief engineer for preconstruction. He says engineers and the department need to educate the public about the need for adequate transportation funding.

now known as the Division of Program Management, which handles bid lettings and federal funding. Then ARDOT's chief engineer asked him to move to the Division of Consultant Contracts. There, he oversaw consulting engineering firms during the inception of the Connecting Arkansas Program, which was created following the passage of the temporary half-cent sales tax. He then worked as assistant division head in the Division of Planning and Research before leading the Division of Program Management for five years. In that position, he managed the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program. He then became assistant chief engineer for planning before moving into his final job, chief engineer for preconstruction – one of three assistant chief engineers with a direct answer to the director. In that position, he managed about 100 engineers and was responsible for projects from inception to bid-letting.

Wiley didn't realize it, but Tudor was grooming him for the top position. He had met her when he drove her to a presentation she was giving. Through the years, she tasked him with more assignments. She was exposing him to opportunities and putting him in positions where he was making the final decisions.

While Wiley's experience at ARDOT prepared him to lead the agency, he'd gained valuable leadership experience earlier while in college. By the time he graduated from Arkansas State University, he was the hall director of a nine-floor, all-male, 700-bed dormitory. It was a challenging experience, but he learned much about managing people.

"You're a peer to these guys in college," he said. "But when you go back to the dormitory, you're in charge of their well-being, making sure they have their needs met, their rooms are taken care of, make sure they're following the code of conduct and even assigning progressive discipline to your peers. It's kind of a challenging situation, so you have to learn to lead as a peer, as almost like a foreman in that world. And I learned right quick that

people don't take orders well. They always do better if you give them a choice, and I learned that back in those days in college."

Wiley's method involves giving people a choice between two options: one the leader wants them to make, and the other that's less advantageous to them. Generally, people make the right choice.

"I like to lead with compassion and love," he said. "And people that know you care about what they're doing and care about them as a person, they're usually going to come around and do what you want them to do because it's better for you and them."

Wiley had some concerns when he accepted the position of ARDOT director. He knew the job would require him to do a lot of public speaking, which he hadn't done previously. But that hasn't been a problem. This year, he's given many speeches around the state.

"I'm not a guy that seeks glory and accolades," he said. "I'm really not, so it

was a little overwhelming to think that I would be the one, but really I'm comfortable with most all the things we do here. I can't do it all, but we've got a great crew to help."

Another of Wiley's hesitations was the possibility that the job would upset the work-life balance he had cultivated. He and wife Jessica have been together since high school and have four children ages 16 to 9. The family likes to camp, fish and hike and spent a couple of years visiting all 52 Arkansas State Parks starting during COVID. When he discussed his concerns with Arkansas Highway Commissioner Keith Gibson, Gibson asked if he had a good work-balance at the time and then advised him to keep doing what he was doing.

As director, he tries to start wrapping up work around 5 or 5:30 p.m. He does not check emails at home.

"Most of the people that call me, they understand that if something's not urgent and pressing, tomorrow is OK for a call-

back and a follow-up," he said. "But I try to leave work here when I go home because I find that it's hard to have a foot in both worlds at the same time. So I really, when I'm up here, I'm laser focused on highway work, and when I go home, I try to be laser focused on my family. My kids are still at the age where they enjoy me being around, and I try to take advantage of that."

Wiley tries to treat his employees with the same consideration. He tries not to send emails or texts after hours and utilizes his phone's "Send later" feature.

"They've got to have some boundaries and some time of their own," he said. "Otherwise, we really face potential burnout. This stuff we do, the work we do, is intense; it's fast-paced. A lot of people have misconceptions about state government. The state government that I've known, it's nothing but fast-paced and important, and so with that comes the potential for burnout, and I don't want to see our staff burning out."



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ACEC/A Central Arkansas Trap Shoot



The ACEC/A held its annual Central Arkansas Trap Shoot at the Jacksonville Shooting Sports Complex Nov. 9. Robert Temple of Garver was the top shooter. Taking the prize as the top team was Garver Transportation Team #2, above left. From left are Hunter Lake, P.E., and Steve Frisbee, P.E., with the Arkansas Department of Transportation, and Bill McAbee, John Ruddell, P.E., and Shaun Robertson, P.E., with Garver. Top photo, Jacob Dvorak with Garver destroys a trap. Bottom right, Michael Baker International's Sheila Qirjaqi, P.E., blows up her target. Sponsors were Garver, Olsson, Michael Baker International, Volkert, McClelland Consulting Engineers, Iconic Consulting Group, HNTB, and Pickering Firm.

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