

Crossroads

The Quarterly Journal of the County Road Association of Michigan

Volume 5 | Issue 1

Fall 2019

PRESQUE ISLE'S 'HIGH WIRE' ACT

*33-mile 'high wire corridor' allows local manufacture
of big things (like kayak boats)*

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Mumble strips coming to Macomb
Chippewa's bank slicer still working
after all these years



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Crossroads

Crossroads is the quarterly publication of the County Road Association (CRA) of Michigan. The 83 county members of CRA represent the unified, credible and effective voice for a safe and efficient county road system in Michigan.

The Association, headquartered three blocks north of the State Capitol, is dedicated to helping members promote and maintain a safe, efficient county road system including stewardship of the county road right-of-way in rural and urban Michigan.

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ON THE COVER:

Presque Isle County Road Commission goes the extra mile to accommodate industry in northeast Michigan, as evidenced by its work on the 33-mile "high wire corridor" that allows transport of a kayak boat (shown) for Pictured Rocks Kayaking. *(Photo courtesy of the Presque Isle County Road Commission)*

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Next Publication

The Winter 2019 issue of *Crossroads* will look at advances made during the 2019 summer construction season.

Crossroads' editorial team wants to hear from you. Call CRA at 517.482.1189 and share ideas for future issues!

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



When it comes to winter maintenance, it's very hard to imagine an industry more innovative than our very own county road agencies!

It seems like innovation has been the lifeblood of our industry, whether due to limited funding sources or the creativity of our employees. In either case, innovation is who we are.

Walk into any of our 83 county road agency equipment buildings, and you will see innovation refined over decades of hard use. And behind every fresh idea is a proud employee with the determination to do something better, faster and cheaper than anything that can be bought.

LED light configurations, wingplow blades, plow techniques, salter/brine distribution systems, the list goes on and on. These innovations allow us to perform a better service for a lower cost, as safely as possible in some of the worst conditions possible.

Whenever I find a great innovation in our industry, however, I realize truly the best part of our association. That is: The willingness and ability to share newfound knowledge.

Every road agency wants to innovate to the best of its ability, and when the chance arises, share the knowledge and improve the agencies around them.

I don't believe there is another organization in this country that collaborates, helps and encourages neighboring organizations the way the members of CRA do on a daily basis.

To all members of the 83 county road agencies across this great state of Michigan, I wish your organization a safe upcoming winter season.

I know no matter what this winter decides to throw at us, you will be ready. And, as always, ready to innovate should the occasion arise.

It's who you are, and it's what we do.

David Pettersch
CRA President
Managing Director
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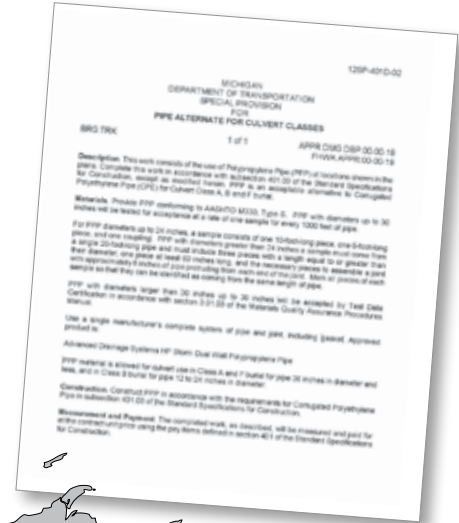
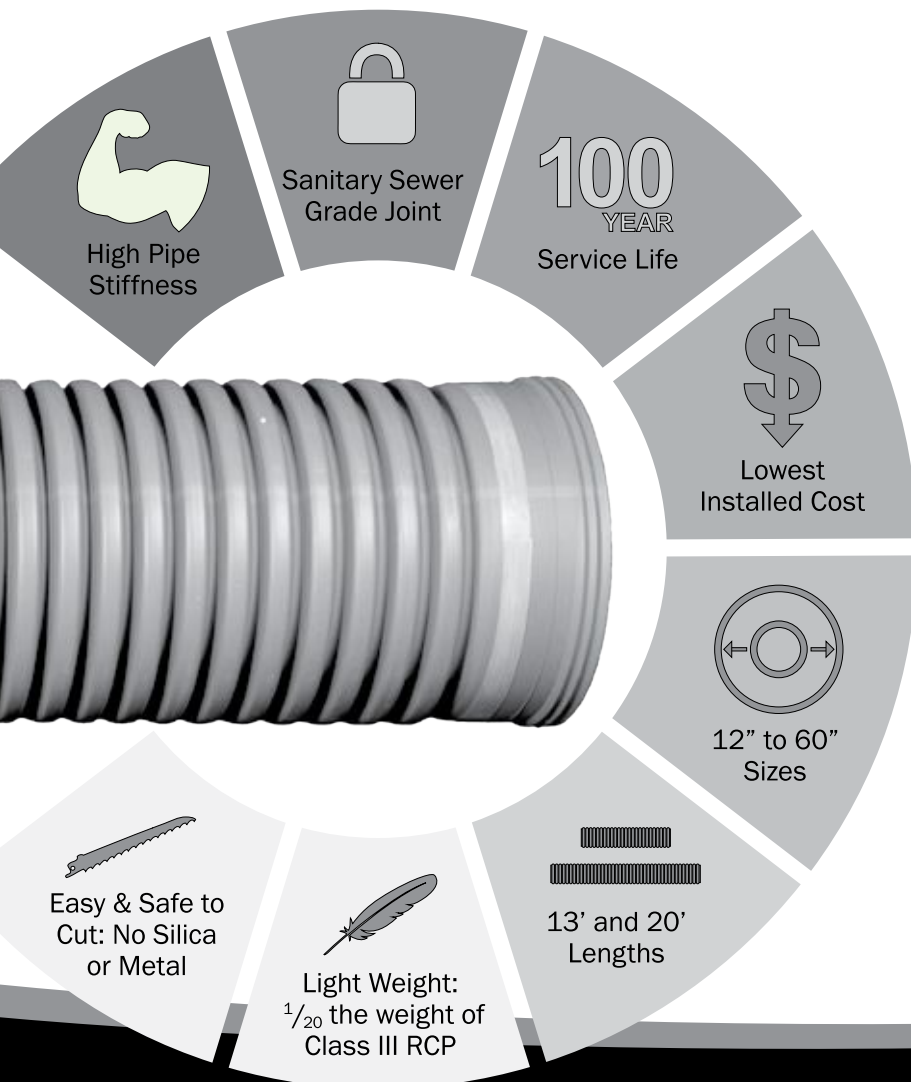
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+ PICRC staff celebrate the 100th anniversary of the road commission in 2016.



MEMBER PROFILE

PRESQUE ISLE COUNTY

PICRC working to spread new funding dollars around

Browsing through promotional materials on Presque Isle (pronounced "eel") portrays a vacationland "where you can get it ALL" including the "ideal climate for hay fever sufferers"! Presque Isle County is certainly a haven for those who love nature and the great outdoors.

The county boasts two state parks, several large lakes including Grand Lake, renowned fishing and the largest waterfall in the Lower Peninsula: Ocqueoc Falls. Local industry includes tourism, potato and dry bean production, metal fabrication, and two of Michigan's largest limestone quarries and processing plants.

Jutting out nearly an hour's travel time east of I-75, PI County (as locals call it) has a 69-mile-long Lake Huron coastline. Its name is French for "almost an island," although its modern shape is more triangle than peninsula.

Working with local government

There are plenty of places to put new road dollars to work in Presque Isle County.

One of **Presque Isle County Road Commission's** (PICRC) first priorities with new funding, was to amend its cost share policy to increase its match by 10% for township road projects. The match is now 35% road commission funds: 65% township funds. Still, many of PI's 14 townships are challenged to find the matching dollars as there is little industry and lots of state land.

"Five of our townships have millages, including a new one in Rogers Township. Two of those millages split the tax between roads and first responders," said Jerry Smigelski, a 28-year employee of the Presque Isle County Road Commission (PICRC), and manager for the last 11 years.

"We're trying to spread the new money around, and not just the sections that can afford it. Unfortunately, there are sections of our county where the townships cannot afford the match," Smigelski said. "We work with our locals, and have allowed a one-to-three-year repayment window for our less affluent townships to help them afford projects."

About 15 years ago, PICRC adopted asset management and has been doing Pavement Assessment Surface Evaluation

While the French considered Presque Isle County "almost an island," the PICRC recognizes that no road commission is an island. Working well with others provides a better, more efficient use of resources to restore Michigan county transportation system.

JUST THE

Facts:

Presque Isle County Road Commission

Office headquarters: Rogers City

Staff: 26 full time

No. of commissioners: 3 (appointed)

Miles of paved roads: Total: 288 Primary: 168 Local: 120

Miles of unpaved roads: Total: 525 Primary: 34 Local: 491

MDOT contract: Yes (216 lane miles)

No. of bridges: 29

Annual budget: \$6,137,007 (FY 2019)

Local revenue: \$410,000 (FY 2019)

Annual snowfall: 104 inches

BCRC established: 1916

No. of garages: 3

Office built: 1970

FUN FACT:

Presque Isle County is home to the Mystery Valley Karst Preserve and Nature Sanctuary, a 76-acre site with mysterious natural phenomena. The preserve includes one of the largest Karst "collapse valleys" and a lake that rises, falls and sometimes disappears completely!

Ratings on both its primary and local roads since that time. PICRC and Rogers City co-hosted Michigan Technological University's Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) to educate local officials on PASER ratings and asset management so the community had a common understanding.

To maintain the common ground, Smigelski sends PASER ratings to each township annually, to help them make informed decisions on managing and budgeting for their road assets. Each election cycle PICRC has an orientation for newly-elected township officials.

What keeps PI awake at night

"The new money has been very helpful," Smigelski said, "but we have a long way to go on the roads. Like other counties we have cut back on personnel, services and equipment over the years. This year I was



+ A PICRC work crew installs a culvert.

finally able to add an additional employee in one of my garages."

"Last year we started sealcoating again after an absence of several years," he said. "And there are areas impacting our efficiency that we haven't addressed yet, and they are significant."

Two of them are PICRC's aging vehicle fleet and an aging asphalt system.

Regarding asphalt, "we're still pulverizing deteriorated asphalt roads," Smigelski said. "We returned three miles of roads to gravel in the last seven years, and we anticipate having to pulverize two miles of local roads in the next couple of years."

"The residents don't like it, but we don't have the money to reconstruct them," he said.

PICRC's five-year asset management plan calls for sealcoat on the entire primary road system, and lays out a two-year crush-and-shape road improvement plan for 3 to 4 miles of its primary roads.

The fleet of plow trucks and service vehicles have an average age of 15-17 years old, Smigelski said, and require two certified mechanics.

PICRC is in the process of purchasing new trucks. The increased demand statewide has delayed getting a fitted-out truck by more than a year.

Other PICRC efficiency measures include maintaining roads for the village of Posen; and making group material purchases with Alpena and Cheboygan counties plus the cities of Onaway and Rogers City.

"We've been cooperative with our adjoining counties for a long time," Smigelski said, citing equipment sharing practices with Montmorency and Alpena counties and PI's two city DPWs, plus participating in a recent Cheboygan County's surplus auction.

While its main focus with funding has been on the roads, PICRC has begun working on its three 50-year-old facility buildings in Rogers City, Onaway and Posen. "All three of our buildings were former MDOT properties," Smigelski said. "We have updated the heat and lighting, but they are still very old, and we need to either upgrade or replace them."

Further consolidation of PI's three sites is unlikely, given that trucks are dispatched and loaded with salt and sand at these spread-out garage locations.

Grant us more progress

Smigelski, who holds a business management degree from Central Michigan University, says grants have been a big focus for the road commission throughout the 2010s.

- **Grant for Economic Development.** In 2012, PICRC worked with its consulting road engineer **Mark Straley**, PE, to secure a \$1.4 million competitive MDOT Transportation Economic Development Fund (TEDF) grant to improve the “high wire” corridor that accommodates Moran Iron Works, an international metal fabricator located in Onaway.

Moran, one of the area's largest employers, fabricates many extra-large metal items that must be shipped via the Great Lakes. Most recently Moran built a kayak hauling ferry to be used at Pictured Rocks. The 33-mile “high wire corridor” requires an all-season road and extra-tall utility poles to reach Port of Calcite where products are shipped.

The TEDF grant allowed complete reconstruction of 3.24 miles of county roads in the corridor.

- **FEMA Pre-emptive Grant.** In 2017, PICRC secured a \$560,000 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant that Smigelski calls unusual.

“This FEMA grant allowed us to avoid a disaster and potentially long detour around Grand Lake in Presque Isle County,” Smigelski said. “We replaced three 60-year-old rusting, side-by-side steel culverts 7 feet in diameter, with a single 32-foot bridge. The road commission had to come up with 25% of the money, but we avoided a likely disaster if any of these decrepit culverts failed in this densely populated area just a stone's throw from Lake Huron and its big storms.”

- **P-3 Grants.** As with other counties in the Northeastern Lower Peninsula, PI has benefitted from public-private partnership (P-3) grants to improve stream crossings. They have worked with the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), sometimes the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), and Huron Pines, a local environmental conservation group that brings donated and grant funds to the table.

PICRC has improved over a dozen road/stream crossings in the last 15 years, including one this summer. USFWS and Huron Pines have contributed over \$270,000 to replace culverts and materials used to reduce road runoff into trout streams. ---

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+ A sinusoidal rumble strip – or mumble strip – is shown on a two-lane roadway in central Minnesota.
(Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Transportation)

LET'S GET READY TO MUMBLE!

Macomb County preparing to employ technology that's quieter than rumble strips

Get back in your lane! But quietly.

This is the quiet safety revolution just getting underway in Macomb County. Drivers might not notice the difference, but residents will hear them less.

Rumble strips have been around for years – now come *mumble* strips.

To reduce the incidence of head-on crashes *and* limit noise pollution, the **Macomb County Department of Roads (MCDR)** will use sinusoidal rumble strips – aka mumble strips – on almost 100 miles of two-lane roads in its northern, more rural areas.

"With sinusoidal, your tires still bump down and up, but less abruptly," said **Mia Silver**, MCDR project engineer. "It's quieter outside the vehicle and it's also quieter inside the vehicle, but it is still loud enough inside the vehicle to provide effective feedback to the driver."

Typical rumble strips are rough, square grooves cut into the pavement, said **John Abraham**, PE, PTOE, director of traffic and operations for MCDR. Sinusoidal strips have a tapered cut from the surface.

Special equipment carves the strip into the pavement, while paving and marking crews follow, painting the centerline over them, Abraham said.



+ Special equipment is used to carve mumble strips into the road surface.



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State Safety grants fund this quiet innovation

MCDR is paying for the mumble strip conversion with Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) grant dollars.

In 2014, Macomb County had 24,471 crashes and 41 fatalities, rising to 25,784 crashes and 52 fatalities in 2018. Centerline rumble strips reduce relevant crash types – including head-on crashes – by over 50%, according to published studies.

“Macomb was looking for applications, technologies that can help with run-off-road or head-on crashes on two-lane roadways,” Abraham said. “We watched a lot of YouTube videos on sinusoidal, looked at the design elements, talked to our partners at MDOT who were also looking at this application. We came to a consensus that this could work for us.”

“The target is to reduce the number and severity of these crashes, and we hope to achieve that with this type of technology,” Abraham said.

A “side benefit” of the mumble strips is the centerline is more visible, especially in wet conditions, because of the different surface within the strips.

“You can see how there’s a waved pattern on the surface,” Abraham said. “If it was flat and water were on it, you wouldn’t be able to see the pattern as well. When headlights hit it, you can see it even though there’s rainwater on it.” 🚗

This thing really sucks

Jackson's SuperMag gobbles up metal items that have flattened tires

The Jackson County Department of Transportation (JC-DOT) was dealing with lots of flat tires on its own fleet – including that *one day* when three tires on the same truck went flat. JCDOT decided enough was enough.

Before long, the county road department bought and introduced SuperMag, which brought an almost-magical reduction in flat tires.

How it works

SuperMag is a ceramic magnet mounted on the front of a plow truck that is pivoted so as to magnetize a bottom plate. The plate is then lowered to about 8 inches off the ground and attracts anything metallic to it.

Once the magnet is pivoted back up, the plate loses its magnetism and drops all the metallic objects – including those pesky nails – for crews to sweep up for recycling.

Brian Zimmerman, assistant superintendent for state trunkline at JCDOT, said when its smaller trucks were on the shoulders during patch work, they would get “constant flat tires.” The SuperMag, purchased in 2017, has helped reduce flat tires – and the resulting downtime – from a rate of nearly 90% of its small-truck fleet to only a handful.

Bob Griffis, JCDOT director of operations and deputy managing director, said if the SuperMag was taken down and back a 10-mile stretch of I-94, the amount of scrap it would attract could fill a 55-gallon drum. It’ll last generations, as the magnet loses only about 1% of its strength every 100 years, Griffis said.

The magnet weighs over 2 tons – heavier than a snow-plow. Michigan-based Storch Magnetics, the manufacturer of the SuperMag, is developing a unit that can be attached to a wing.





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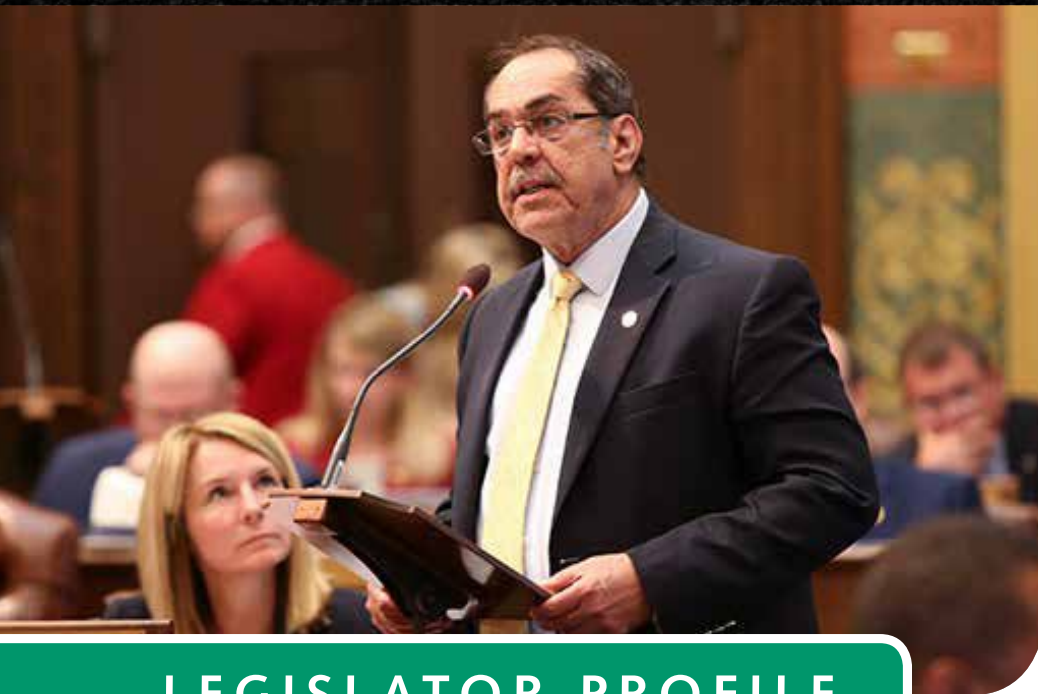
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LEGISLATOR PROFILE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE TIM SNELLER

Now serving his second term in the Michigan House of Representatives, Rep. Tim Sneller (D-Genesee) has over 30 years of political experience working with the Michigan House and Senate. Representing the 50th House District covering parts of Genesee County, Rep. Sneller has a lifelong passion for teaching and is no stranger to transportation and infrastructure issues.

He currently serves as the Democratic Vice Chair for the House Transportation Committee and previously served on the House Transportation Committee in his first term.

CRA's deputy director **Ed Noyola** and *Crossroads* sat down with Rep. Sneller to find out how his time on Michigan's political scene has influenced his views on transportation over the years.

CRA: Tell us a bit about your background and how you've accumulated 30 years of political experience.

REP. SNELLER: I grew up in the Flint area; Burton to be exact. I worked for Flint Truck and Bus while getting my degree in political science from University of Michigan-Flint where I met former Lieutenant Governor John Cherry. I did an internship with John while we had a short break at the shop, and then went back to General Motors where I served as a Committeeman before graduating and becoming a staffer for Senator Bob Emerson.

I took a break from politics for a little while and finished a secondary teaching degree. I ended up teaching social studies at my high school: Burton's Bentley High School.

CRA: Have you seen transportation change in that time?

REP. SNELLER: Let me tell you; A lot. I've been coming to Lansing since 1983, back when I-69 ended at Perry, and M-24 in Lapeer. Since then, we've watched these highways grow and expand with population increases, while funding has not kept up. Simultaneously, the importance of local roads has not diminished.

CRA: How did you come to serve on the House Transportation Committee?

REP. SNELLER: After 36 years of traveling on highways coming from Flint to Lansing, I was very interested in serving on the Transportation Committee. It was my first choice. I have always thought it was very interesting, and the technical aspects of engineering and construction are some of the coolest things I've ever learned!

CRA: With 2019 more than half over, transportation funding remains one of the top priorities for Michigan legislators and

constituents alike. Can you speak to us on how it got to this point and where you think it will end up?

REP. SNELLER: I think we all recognize we need more road funding or transportation infrastructure funding. For too long we have not funded and sustained our roads adequately. We've "kicked the can" down the road multiple times. That must stop. I think we're at the point right now where we have the support to develop a funding mechanism that will be sufficient to fund roads well into the future.

I also want to say, for four months we doubled up on our meetings with the House Transportation Committee where we learned a lot of interesting things. We were impressed with county road agencies' partnerships and how they work on the roads. We see those road commission trucks on the road all year, working on the roads, salting and plowing. But we want to help refine those partnerships so everything is working as well as it can.

CRA: Once funding begins to move out of the spotlight, plenty of transportation-related issues will remain. What are some that have your attention or that you see gaining attention in the future?

REP. SNELLER: Once the amount is secured, the distribution mechanism needs to be examined. County roads are the backbone of our local road system. The major highway systems have been talked about for years, but all those trips start by taking a local road, and end with a local road taking you home. We need to make sure we are funding our local units of government.

CRA: Can you tell us about your relationship with the road agency in your district, the Genesee County Road Commission?

REP. SNELLER: I have a great relationship with my road commission. I worked very closely with [former Genesee County Road Commission managing director] John Daly on transportation issues and whenever we needed expert information. Fred Peivandi [managing director and CRA board member] has come to my coffee hours and proven how dedicated he is to the roads in Genesee. The road commission is coming to my Transportation Town Hall in September to be a part of a panel discussion.

I also work closely with all the road commissioners. It's one of my primary goals to make sure from a state level they have the resources they need locally or they're not going to succeed. Then neither are we. ---



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Innovation doesn't always have to be the latest and greatest.

It could also actually come from something so old no one even knows when it was built.

Take **Chippewa County Road Commission's** (CCRC) "bank slicer," an apparatus both ingenious and simple in its design that helps the road commission battle "tall"-ish snowdrifts.

CCRC's bank slicer is a wing for the grader that has been inverted from a normal wing and installed behind the drive wheels, rather than ahead like most wings. It hovers above the ground with the leading edge toward the front of the grader and carves through snowbanks to bring the snow onto the roadway.

A blower following then collects the snow and blows it away from the roadway.

"It serves two functions," said **Rob Laitinen, PS**, CCRC superintendent-manager. "One, it keeps the blower machine on good footing. It also leaves a nice sloped snowbank instead of a vertical

face that a snowblower cut would make, and allows the wind to follow the slope of that snowbank. That helps prevent drifting. If you left a vertical wall, it would drift back immediately."

Especially during this past winter, which saw some areas in the county double the average snowfall. Laitinen said he doesn't like to send the expensive and slow blowers out very often, but the slicer helps them do their job more efficiently.

During a typical winter, the bank slicer makes its debut in February and is a mainstay during clear, windy days for much of the month. This past winter it was out from mid-January to mid-March.

"Our staff [size] is at a point that when there is a snow event, everybody's in a truck," Laitinen said. "We can count on running (the bank slicer) any clear day that's a workday in February. There has been a handful of years where we haven't even fired it up."

Laitinen said he's never seen an apparatus like the bank slicer anywhere else and it's

not commercially available. It's so old, he said, no one currently working at CCRC knows when it was built.

When Laitinen started at the road commission in 2004, it was attached to a 1970s Galion grader and he suspects it was on an older grader prior to that. When the Galion grader stopped working, the staff outfitted the bank slicer to a 1990s Champion grader that wasn't being used day-to-day, and that's where it remains.

"The whole apparatus is homemade, entirely built from scrap parts laying around the shop by our people God knows when," Laitinen said. "It's pretty simple. It's got cables and chains that attach it to the grader, and it's kind of foolproof. Now and again you might break a chain or you might do this or that, but they're easy repairs you can make in the field."

"You make it up as you go. You break it, you dig around in the scrap bin, find what you need to fix it and you weld it back together," he said. ---



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Rise and brine

Two road commissions invest in winter brine operations

With road salt prices creeping higher, county road agencies are investing in brine operations to stretch their winter operations dollars, and to treat roads more effectively.

Here are the latest brine stories of two road commissions:

Flexible brining

Genesee County Road Commission (GCRC) just invested over \$225,000 in its brine operations that include four 10,000-gallon fiberglass storage tanks and a Cargill AccuBrine NXT-GEN System with the capability of blending additives. That replaced an aging brine maker with no blending or storage capability.

"We can blend three different additives with brine simultaneously and provide a better quality liquid on the road surface," said **Randall Dellaposta**, GCRC Director of Operations. "We now have the opportunity to run an 80/20 blend using brine and calcium chloride with Boost™, which allows us to combat a storm at lower temperatures than salt. We can also switch over to another tank and blend agricultural byproducts with brine if needed to combat the storm."

GCRC's flexible brine system will gear up this winter, and Dellaposta is optimistic it reduces their \$1.3 million (2018-19) to \$1.8 million (2017-18) in salt costs. In addition to adding the brine system, GCRC plans to enhance their winter operations by performing anti-icing and de-icing on roads, which will also assist in reducing salt cost.



+ This Monroe 2,350-gallon, three-boom anti-icing unit is part of Genesee County Road Commission's arsenal



+ Emmet County Road Commission has four 6,000-gallon tanks in its new brine facility.

"The ability to utilize various operational tools within the tool bag helps provide and maintain a safe, cost-efficient and quality county road system for the motorists in Genesee County," Dellaposta said. "Our objective is to reduce salt usage. You can't eliminate it, but the corrosive nature of salt is a significant factor, as well as the cost."

"If we can reduce salt usage by 20-30% by implementing brine blend and other operations, that's a considerable savings: We're melting the snow off roads a lot faster and being environmentally safe," he said. "It's a huge investment, but in the long run it'll pay off."

Pre-wetting and anti-icing

At 128 inches of snow annually, **Emmet County Road Commission (ECRC)** is already seeing the dividends of its 2018 brining addition. Last year, ECRC built a 125-by-60-foot brine facility to blend different liquid materials for both pre-wetting and anti-icing through its computerized system.

"We're dedicating more equipment to pre-wetting and anti-icing before storms come out," said **Brian Gutowski**, PE, ECRC engineer-manager. "We have four 6,000-gallon tanks, three with a mineral well brine of 28% concentration of chlorides and a fourth tank that's an organic compound option to blend. All four are tied together by a computerized system to dial up different blends."

"This is the practice that should be done by all," said Gutowski, a founding chair of CRA's Pre-wet/Anti-ice Committee in 1998. "You should never put dry salt or sand down; always apply some kind of brine. It works immediately, melts snow and ice, or the sand will stick to the road if icy." ---



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CRA'S Legal Issues Corner

Michigan Supreme Court Overturns Strict Application of Notice Requirements in Governmental Immunity Cases

On July 16, 2019, the State of Michigan Supreme Court overturned two Michigan Court of Appeals decisions involving notice requirements for the highway exception to governmental immunity: *Wigfall v City of Detroit*; *West v City of Detroit*, 501 Mich 1089 (2018). Both cases were featured in a previous *Crossroads* edition.

The Court of Appeal's requirement for strict compliance with statutory notice procedures was softened by the Supreme Court decision, which allows the doctrine of agency to be considered when determining if a plaintiff has properly served notice of his or her injuries on a governmental agency. **This change in the law has the potential to make it easier for plaintiffs to sue road commissions by lowering some of the procedural hurdles required to file a case.**

The first case, *Wigfall v City of Detroit*, 322 Mich App 36 (2017), involved a suit against the city of Detroit

over injuries Dwayne Wigfall received from a motorcycle accident allegedly caused by striking a pothole on a city street.

The city sought to dismiss the case on the grounds the claim was barred by governmental immunity, because Wigfall had failed to comply with statutory notice requirements. Specifically, the city asserted the relevant statute required service on the Detroit city clerk, mayor or city attorney, and Wigfall had mailed the notice to the Detroit "City Law Department-Claims" and not to an individual named in the statute.

In the second case, *West v City of Detroit*, 914 NW2d 917 (2017), West filed suit against the city of Detroit claiming injuries suffered as a result of a trip and fall on a city sidewalk. West attempted to serve notice on the city in essentially the same manner as Wigfall, by mailing it to the "City of Detroit Law Department."

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The Michigan Court of Appeals held that Wigfall's and West's service of notice was inadequate, reasoning the law is clear, and a clear statute must be enforced as written. Service was not made individually on the mayor, city attorney or city clerk as required by the plain language of the statute, therefore there was no notice or substantial compliance, and the plaintiffs' claims were dismissed.

In deciding both cases, the Michigan Supreme Court looked beyond the language of the statute to principles of agency law, holding that the Detroit Law Department is the agent of the city attorney for Detroit, known as the Corporation Counsel.

Therefore, the Supreme Court determined that both Wigfall and West had met the statutory requirements by serving notices of their injuries on the Detroit Law Department. The Supreme Court thereby reversed the Court of Appeals judgements in both cases and remanded them back to the Wayne County Circuit Court for further proceedings not inconsistent with its opinion. ---

-- Matthew R. Willson is the Deputy General Counsel for the Road Commission for Oakland County



Key transitions at...

...Road Commissions and Departments

Mike Boersma has been appointed road commissioner for the **Road Commission of Kalamazoo County**.

Thom Brennan has been appointed road commissioner for the **Road Commission of Kalamazoo County**.

Randall Dellaposta is now director of operations at the **Genesee County Road Commission**.

Scott Hanson has been elected road commissioner for the **Crawford County Road Commission**.

Chris Jones has been elected road commissioner for the **Crawford County Road Commission**.

Tracy Khan has been hired as director of finance for the **Genesee County Road Commission**.

William Smith is now foreman at the **Alcona County Road Commission**.

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... Mile Markers

Coetta Adams, director of finance, has retired from the **Genesee County Road Commission** after 26 years.

Norman Barth, heavy truck operator, has retired from the **Crawford County Road Commission** after 16 years.

Brian Berndt, PE, county highway engineer, has retired from the **Berrien County Road Department** after 35 years.

Nick Matiash, road commissioner, has retired from the **Mason County Road Commission** after 18 years.

Eric Moody, superintendent, has retired from the **Mason County Road Commission** after 34 years.

Robert Peterson, mechanic, has retired from the **Crawford County Road Commission** after 24 years.

Gregory Stepp, heavy truck operator, has retired from the **Crawford County Road Commission** after 22 years.

James Wanstead, heavy equipment operator/truck driver, has retired from the **Osceola County Road Commission** after 18 years.

... In Memoriam

On June 10, 2019, **Eric Scott**, maintenance superintendent for the **Muskegon County Road Commission** passed away in a tragic accident.

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National Association of Counties 2019 Achievement Award

Jackson County Department of Transportation (JCDOT) received a National Association of Counties Best in Category for Transportation Award.



JCDOT was honored for its Road Recycling & Improvement Program, a comprehensive, large-scale approach to improve condition and durability of the county's 1,600-mile road system. In 2018, the county invested \$6 million to purchase cold-in-place recycling equipment. Intended to make the road 30-40% stronger and costs about 30% less.

"We are representing the State of Michigan and all of its county road agencies in a very positive light - as innovators, strategists, and problem solvers," said **Christopher Bolt**, MPA, PE, managing director of JCDOT.



Michigan Transportation Asset Management Council Organization Awards

Several county road agencies were honored at the 2019 TAMC Spring Conference with TAMC Organization Awards for work implementing improvement plans using asset management tools and principles:

Berrien County Road Department for its work with The Kercher Group to gather data and develop an asset management plan for the county's 103 bridges.



Jason Latham
Berrien County Road Department

Barry County Road Commission for its "best first" road management strategy that has resulted in the county's high percentage of roads in good condition.



Brad Lamberg
Barry County Road Commission



Left to right, John Thompson, Michigan APWA; Scott Bershing and Christopher Gilbertson, Michigan Tech University; Charles Hart, Michigan APWA; Joanna Johnson, Road Commission of Kalamazoo County and TAMC chair

Road Commission of Kalamazoo County for its work with townships to develop local road asset management and improvement programs.

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The route to better roads

CRA's County Road Investment Plan sheds much-needed light on county road agencies' needs

For more than three decades, no concrete data existed to gauge the condition of Michigan's entire county road system.

County road agencies have long been documenting their federal aid-eligible system, but the status of nonfederal aid-eligible roads – a significant portion of the system – was largely anecdotal.

CRA's board decided the "old" state-run Needs Study wasn't coming back and set out to do a county-specific analysis: The landmark County Road Investment Plan released in May.

The plan – a collaborative effort led by a longtime professional engineer with 40 years experience in the road commission world along with a seven-member work group – included the first ratings of the nonfederal-aid eligible road system.

The Investment Plan establishes a credible foundation for an appropriate level of funding for the counties' entire 90,000-mile system.

"This Investment Plan establishes a clear picture of the need to restore the counties' transportation infrastructure," said **Denise Donohue**, CRA director. "This Investment Plan represents 83 county road agencies coming together to share apples-to-apples data to enable a more comprehensive discussion of funding for all roads in Michigan."

Authored by **Larry Brown**, PE, former **Allegan County Road Commission** (ACRC) managing director and current ACRC

commissioner, the investment plan provides a statewide "snapshot" of the current target investment for all county road agencies.

In addition to the maintenance and capital investment on all paved and unpaved county roads and bridges, it includes the financial needs of buildings, facilities and equipment needed to provide a safe and efficient road system.

The plan does not include funding for new construction or capacity improvements. ▶

A look at the results

Among the findings in the County Road Investment Plan:

- **\$3.6 billion** annual need for the 90,000-mile, 5,700-bridge county network.
- This requires a **\$2 billion additional annual investment** to reach county road goals.

County Road Goals – 2019:

- **90% good/fair on federal aid-eligible county roads by 2019.** (Currently 45%).
- **60% good/fair on local, nonfederal aid-eligible roads by 2019.** (Currently 36%).

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Nonfederal aid-eligible system

The first-of-its-kind look at the nonfederal aid-eligible system revealed that more than **64%** of about 31,000 miles of local and primary county roads are in poor condition, compared to **55%** of the federal aid-eligible system.

While the condition of counties' 36,500 miles of unpaved roads was not included, the Investment Plan includes the cost of maintaining those roads.

The plan's first detailed look at the county road agency nonfederal aid-eligible system helped define the condition of the entire system to allow a more complete look at funding needs on Michigan roads.

To review the County Road Investment Plan, visit micountyroads.org. 

Work Group members brought 139 years county road experience

The CRA County Road Investment Plan Work Group that guided creation of this report included:



Douglas J. Mills, PE, engineer-manager of Baraga County Road Commission (26 years with road commission, 17 years on statewide Local Bridge Advisory Board, 9 years on the Critical Bridge Committee, 29 years as PE)



Dennis G. Kolar, PE, managing director of the Road Commission for Oakland County (34 years with road commission, 30 years as PE)



Bradley S. Lamberg, PE, managing director of Barry County Road Commission (23 years with road commission, 21 years as PE)



Steven Puuri, PE, CRA engineering specialist and retired Managing Director of the Washtenaw County Road Commission (25 years with road commission, 36 years as PE)



Steven A. Warren, managing director of Kent County Road Commission (31 years with road commission, founding member and 10 years with TAMC)

CROSSROADS EVENT Calendar

SEPT. 9

Friends of Transportation Roads+™ Golf Outing

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REGISTRATION LIVE!

SEPT. 11-12

7th annual Northern/Southern Joint Conference

A two-day conference and gathering of county road agency staff across the Lower Peninsula, the "No. So." as it has become known, returns to Firekeepers Casino in Battle Creek.

REGISTRATION LIVE!

OCT. 22

2019 Public Relations Workshop

Facebook Live, YouTube primer and dealing with upset folks on social media await attendees of this year's PR Workshop. You can't afford to miss it!

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Road working: Both sides of the street ...

In Michigan road parlance, that means working both the county *and* the state road systems. Licensed professional engineers and road agency managers occasionally go back-and-forth between working on state roads for the Michigan Department of Transportation, and working for a county road agency.

The skills sets are very similar, and quite different at the same time.

How well does that work out? *Crossroads* talked to two recent MDOTers transplanted into a county road agency to see how road administration jobs differ in the two systems.



Jason Latham is former southwest region manager for MDOT, and current Managing Director of the Berrien County Road Department (BCRD). He accepted the BCRD director position in early 2018.



Stuart "Mike" McTiver, PE, is a former MDOT transportation engineer, who became engineer-manager of the Luce County Road Commission last summer.



Terry Palmer, PE, is a former manager of the MDOT Transportation Service Center in Mt. Pleasant, who joined the Midland County Road Commission as managing director in January 2015.

CRA: What are your biggest challenges of the county road agency job that you didn't expect?

JASON: It was surprising to see many similarities from large transportation agencies to smaller played out at the county level. The BCRD works to accomplish the same things that larger transportation agencies do, but with less staff, less resources, and less funding.

The most difficult thing that surprised me was how heavily politics at local levels drive decisions that should otherwise be data driven.

My goal is to take politics out of road improvement decisions and simply gather, track, evaluate and make the best informed decisions with data. There's a difference between using public input to help make an informed decision and making a decision to placate your critics.

Looking to data and an interdisciplinary approach with licensed professionals to help analyze information *including public input* is always the best way to reach a solution.

STUART: I find my biggest challenge is keeping focused despite the breadth of projects that come up on any given day.

I might start out the day scoping an upcoming federal aid project, and by the end of the day I've ordered materials for a pipe that needs replacing yesterday, reviewed a local road that needs upgrades with a township supervisor, reviewed upcoming legislation to see how the road commission may be affected and decide what the next step might be, met with a survey consultant to have gravel piles surveyed, called in a MISS DIG for a ditch cleanout project for the MDOT maintenance contract, reviewed applications for an open crew position.



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At the end of the day, I find I've hardly scratched the surface on that federal aid project I was trying to flesh out!

TERRY: The biggest challenge when I started was more of a perceived challenge than what it really turned out to be. At MDOT there are a lot of resources available to call upon. The office of Human Resources for staffing, Construction Field Services for construction and testing assistance, Planning and Finance for funding, Design for plan development assistance, and many more at both the regional level and Lansing.

The road commission has a very small staff, and I had few connections with neighboring counties when I started. After having some time in the position you realize there is a framework in place to help with this.

From great staff, to CRA Council meetings and CRA conferences and training, to Local Technical Assistance Program training, webinars and technical assistance, to managers group for local connections and listserv for quickly having questions answered.

CRA: What's the "sweet spot," your favorite part of working leading a county road agency?

JASON: My favorite part is having the privilege to work alongside the BCRD staff. Without each staff member we would be unable to accomplish all the things we do, and with each other's support and efforts we're able to accomplish great things for the public, primarily assuring safety.

From the front-line maintenance staff, mechanics behind-the-scenes, to the engineers, accountants and everyone in between, we all work together with the common goal of maintaining our county road system to be safe and convenient for public travel.

I can see that we are making a difference in improving the roadway network and I am encouraged that the economic development community will use our success (and data) to help attract and retain talent in the county.

STUART: I enjoy the opportunity to be able to put together a local project (no federal funds) and see the results in short order. It's very satisfying to make a difference responsively without a lot of paperwork and approvals that slow the process.

TERRY: I am fortunate we have a small, awesome staff with a great board. Coming to the road commission has been great with the things we are able to try with the goal of longer lasting roads and bridges on a tight budget and with limited resources. This has been working out well by allowing more staff creativity from building bridges, to design resources, to construction management.

Also listening more to vendors about their products and services, utilizing more consultant services, and innovative contracting. In my five years here we have tried a few different things in construction; most have been used somewhere else first but are new to Midland.

They include hot-in-place and cold-in-place recycling, fiber matt tile, "Sanford" underbody, paving fabrics, GRS bridges contracted and staff built, bridge load sensors, ultrathin, recycled plastic asphalt, Flexamat®, rubber tire subbase and asphalt. Hopefully soon a recycled bridge and Kevlar® fibers can be added to the list. We have also used two types of warranties and two types of innovative contracting methods.

CRA: At a large agency like MDOT, very few staff interact with the public. At the county road agency, the manager works with drivers, homeowners, local businesses and other community interests every day. How has this been an adjustment?

JASON: I had a unique position within MDOT and was able to work with most every area from real estate, planning and design, to finance, maintenance, the list goes on. I was also able to work with the office of communications to help describe MDOT's work efforts and products.

Public outreach and economic development were the two areas I spent most of my time working on, so the transition to the county road department has been exciting because I'm able to share those experiences with my team and the residents of the county.

I was encouraged to seek public input at MDOT, so at this point it's second nature. I can honestly say that I look forward to interacting with the public no matter how contentious the issue may happen to be. No matter how [the conflict] goes, I will have a better understanding of the issue and can use that to make an informed decision.

STUART: It has been quite an adjustment for sure. I definitely have more conversations with the public, both during work hours and outside of work, than when I worked at MDOT.

Among other duties, I held the position of MDOT Newberry Transportation Service Center permit engineer for several years, and worked with property owners adjacent to the highways, coordinated with county and city work, and facilitated utility projects - but it really wasn't the same.

Even though I felt an obligation at MDOT to do good work, [working for the county] feels more personal now. There's a much greater sense of ownership.

TERRY: At MDOT most public interaction is at the project level or public meetings. Here, the majority of the residents are within a 15-minute drive, making it easier to have a one-on-one discussion at their home or business. This has been very helpful to hear their concerns and make changes where possible.

One of the best parts of being close is working with local township officials. They are only a few minutes from their residents within the township and get input, hear concerns, and have a valuable perspective on all the roadways.

They are also awesome partners in funding the preservation and construction of the roadways in the county. --

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Bridging *the* Gaps

Could be a silver lining in this cloud

Cloud-based networks can keep you running when disasters hit

As recently as May, the **Road Commission of Kalamazoo County's** (RCKC) 2014 investment in a cloud-based network paid off.

That's when water poured over the electrical panel in the basement of RCKC, an event that would have hamstrung IT and operations if not for their provider's ability to maintain their network.

Ann Simmons, RCKC finance director, was at CRA's Finance & Human Resources Seminar, and even before she knew the issue, the provider had set up staff to log into the cloud-based network and answer phone calls – as if nothing had happened.

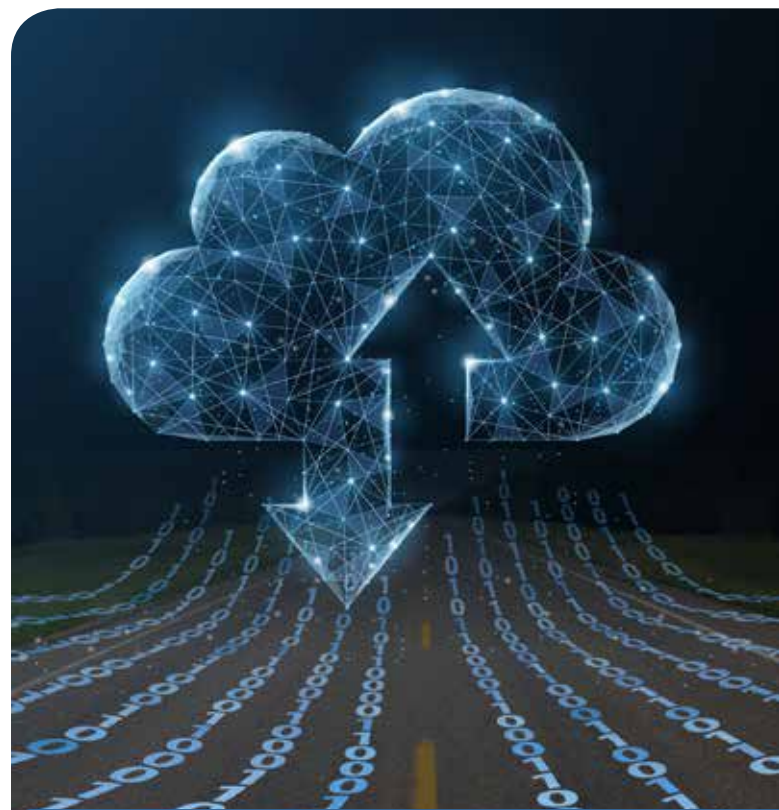
A few years prior, a transformer that serviced the RCKC administrative offices failed. Within a few hours, the road commission was set up remotely and logging into its network, including the telephone service.

Suffice it to say, RCKC is a believer in a cloud-based system that keeps them motoring ahead during disasters and power outages.

"Moving to a cloud network has been a major plus for us," Simmons said. "It has allowed us to continue to serve the public during times that we previously would have been down and unavailable."

A cloud-based system means the computer infrastructure is off-premises but in a highly secured facility and available through high-speed connectivity, said Steven Burdick, vice president of sales and marketing at Secant Technologies, which services RCKC.

Among the benefits of cloud-based technology for road agencies is it allows resources to be allocated elsewhere and



Three IT tips:

1. Know your system's back-up strategy.
2. Validate and test that strategy.
3. Consider third-party validation of your systems processes and validation of that test.

it's adaptable to agency needs that must be functional and responsive 24/7.

"The ability of the cloud infrastructure to scale up and down and pay by consumption is a perfect model compared to, we bought a server, then we bought another server, then we bought another server and five years later they tell us we have to replace them, but we don't have the budget," Burdick said.

Regarding security concerns, Burdick said most security risks are rooted in policy-based and employee controls such as passwords, than where the data sits.

"It's important that you understand when you put your data in the cloud it is in a space that if you've properly engineered your connectivity to that cloud your risks shouldn't be greater than when it was under someone's desk or down the hallway," he said. ☰

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'A FOUR-HOUR TOUR, A FOUR-HOUR TOUR ...'

Even Gilligan would learn something about the roads on Kalkaska's bus tours

+ A one-lane bridge in Kalkaska County was one of the stops along the tour.

When it comes to the local road system, showing beats telling.

And the **Kalkaska County Road Commission (KCRC)** has taken its show on the road.

In late June, KCRC hosted its third annual "Bus Tour of the Past, Present and Future," taking about two dozen township, county and state officials on a four-hour tour of the Kalkaska County road system to see the good, the bad and the ugly.

The bus tour initiative received an IMPRESS Award and a People's Choice Award in Communications at the 2019 CRA Highway Conference.

Bus tours were launched not long after passage of a five-year countywide millage in Kalkaska, which recently won renewal.

"Basically the road commission wanted to show elected officials their millage dollars are hard at work countywide, not just in *their* townships," said **John Rogers**, KCRC manager.

"This year, we focused more on the roads that we've done over the last five years and how we need to do preventative maintenance to keep them from deteriorating more, and we touched a little on the future needs," he said.



+ During a break, tour participants had an opportunity to talk to KCRC employees and enjoy lunch with them.

During the tour, Rogers informed attendees of the road they're on, what work has been done or is needed along with historical perspective of the roadway and its use.

The tour sheds light on KCRC's progress with its millage as well as new state funding, and the poor road conditions still remaining.

And the experience leaves an impression.

"It really does help make our jobs easier," Rogers said. "The townships field a lot of calls, and a lot of people on that bus have constituents who call them and say, 'How come they're not doing this road?' The official can say, 'I've been on a bus tour of the county, and they're doing the right things with the money they have.'"

Cooking up a road tour step-by-step

Once a date is selected, KCRC creates and mails a flyer to township, county and state officials about two months prior to the tour. Rogers partnered with Kalkaska Area Transit, which donate a bus and driver – "Bad roads tear up their equipment, too," he said. KCRC's only expense is the lunch with officials and employees, which shows appreciation for their work.

"We like to showcase our employees," Rogers said. "They're the ones out there doing all the work, and we also like to showcase our building and equipment. When the elected officials come in for lunch and meet the drivers, they can put faces to the names, meet the driver who plows their road, while also looking at the deterioration of our facility." ---



+ Kalkaska Area Transit donated a bus and driver for the tour.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Back-to-School – will you be better tomorrow than today?



It's that time again when fresh, young minds head back to the classroom. The buckling-down, summer's-over season of autumn also prompts many grown-ups to think about learning and self-improvement.

And that's a good thing.

Personally, I'm renewing my vow to read a "smart book" in between the murder-mysteries. The reading isn't as much fun; "smart books" aren't page-turners. But "smart books" can be mind-benders and thought-provokers that give a different perspective to challenges I face or gaps I have.

While CRA doesn't write "smart books," we *are* currently working on thought-provoking conferences and meetings into 2020 to help county road agencies be even better at what you do.

As you consider learning and self-improvement this fall – both personally and in your road agency capacity – give these upcoming CRA programs a second look:

Oct. 22 Public Relations Workshop – Taking a deeper dive into Facebook and YouTube, including Facebook Live, dealing with social media criticism and legal considerations.

Oct. 30 Invasive Species Management Workshop – Perhaps a frontier you haven't dealt with, but should. In partnership with

the Michigan DNR's Invasive Species Program.

Dec. 3 Law Symposium (a.m.) – Legal counsels will turn the spotlight on condemnation, abandonment and small cells moving into the road rights-of-way.

Dec. 3 Educational Event (p.m.) – Strengthen your inner office. Bring your lead staff and commissioners to spend some brain time focusing on your road agency core values, specific roles to improve effectiveness, and strategic planning – beginning with the end in mind.

March 10-12 – 2020 Highway Conference/Road Show/Annual Meeting – Our break-out sessions are currently under development, but there will be many mind-bending topics that could change the way you do business and how you approach issues.

The opportunity in the pot of gold [leaves] this fall is capturing that back-to-school sentiment and harnessing it to even one learning situation that improves our performance.

Denise Donohue

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