



In this month's issue of the newsletter, we must bid adieu to an integral part of FDOT...

Mr. Nick Tsengas

Will the real Nick Tsengas please stand up. See this month's Spotlight for more.





NOTES FROM THE DISTRICT 2 ITS ENGINEER

Yahoo! It's finally warm, the grass is turning green and the yard work has begun! Gosh, I miss Winter already! So much for some of my free time on weekends for the next several months☺. This has been one heck of an eye opening time for the ITS program. It began with the selection of a firm to design the ITS deployment along I-75 from Gainesville to the Georgia State line. That was followed up by the District Two TSM&O workshop which addressed past, present and future projects which will integrate and improve the movement of traffic along our roadway corridors. This was followed up with the stretch run of the RTMC design and then the selection of the design team for the ITS deployment along I-95 in St. Johns County. Whew, you've got to wonder where we can still find the time to deal with our daily maintenance and operations issues.

Hearing all of that you'd think the topic of my April discussion would revolve around one of the items mentioned above but you would be totally wrong! This month's discussion revolves around Disney World and how I feel their vision of managing traffic is a good guide to what we can do with Transportation System Management and Operations in the future. My wife and I decided to take advantage of Disney's three-day Florida resident pass since it's been over 25 years since my last visit to the Magic Kingdom. Since it's been so long we went "all out" by staying on property, forking over additional cash for the meal plan and signing up for fast pass bracelets in all the parks. I figured "what the heck it's been a while since my last visit so let's splurge!"

On our first day I immediately noticed how they managed transportation for the millions visitors each year. Disney had huge amounts of parking, trams, monorails, buses and ships for visitors going to Epcot, Animal Kingdom and Disney World. We opted for the bus that came to our resort and I immediately noticed the real

time data gathering being performed by the attendant at our stop. Due to the nature of my career I had to ask about the process. Basically, this person gathers AVL data on the buses via their network that provides him with info on the number of passengers, location and ETA to our stop. He said that when there is a need based on the data their bus service will incorporate additional buses or change certain routes to accommodate the extra amount of users. Sounds pretty neat, right?

Of course, I had to push the envelope and asked why Disney hasn't incorporated Kiosks and software at each stop to perform the same function he's doing. With a smile he said "Customer Service!" but I'm sure in the back of his mind the words "you idiot! We're Disney!" probably crossed his mind. With that I walked away thinking this was the proper approach since visitors from around the world often expect that personal touch during their vacation. Kind of thought it was like our 511 IVR in that instead of digital technology some users just want to hear a voice to make them feel more comfortable.

As we made our way around the Magic Kingdom I paid closer attention to their transportation system. To me, the monorails were a great way to get visitors from point A to point B while providing the added value of something that felt like a ride prior to entering a park. Likewise, the trams were not only there for a convenience but also as a need. There's no better way to start your day's journey than to have someone pick you up to get your family safely across the huge parking lots. However, when you really think about it they've greatly reduced the number of pedestrian movements that could lead to traffic conflicts and accidents as motorists make their way around the lot. Bet that did not cross your mind during your last visit to one of the parks!

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NOTES FROM THE DISTRICT 2 ITS ENGINEER CONTINUED

I could mention the ships that caught my eye but really want to focus my attention on the technology used that helped make the parks a wonderful experience for visitors. First on my agenda is the *Fast Pass* system they use to guide people during their day. Basically, a user can set up their preferred rides via a cell phone application that allows a person to schedule their anticipated arrival to that location at a particular time. When they arrive they get to access the ride in the express line that cut the wait time by about 70%. It was kind of amusing listening to the comments from people waiting in the other line for 40 minutes and the wives chewing out their husbands for being TOO cheap to pay the extra money for a *Fast Pass*. Yes, it cost a little extra for this feature but then again there were a ton of smiles in the *Fast Pass* line when compared to the normal queue. It made me think this was kind of like the Express Lane projects the Department is currently undertaking.



Another neat feature was the park event schedule provided on their cell phone application. There were several outdoor shows, parades and fireworks throughout the parks during the day. Traditionally, a visitor would use the brochure provided at the front of the park to get information on the day's schedule. The family would have to plan their day, keep an eye on their watch and often by-pass a ride to catch Minnie and Mickey along the parade

route. The cell phone application allows an individual to negate that concern since it alerts them in advance on the upcoming parade. All the visitor has to do is set-up the application to provide an alarm that will notify them in advance about the event. It's a pretty nice feature to provide since I felt it enhanced the experience at the park.

This cell phone application also had a value added feature in that it allowed Park Management to pass along unanticipated emergency alerts to a large number of visitors at one time. It did not happen during my visit but I could just imagine walking across the park only to find that an area was shut down due to an incident. This feature would alert visitors well in advance so that the area could be kept clear for responders dealing with the emergency. This kind of reminded me of the 511 and NOAA systems that alert users about major events via a cell phone application.

One final note is my favorite topic of discussion, FOOD! My wife and I signed up for the meal plan that allows us to reserve a table at a restaurant via an appointment. We debated splurging money for this feature but quickly learned it was a great investment on our part. Basically, a visitor can pre-pay for their meals and snacks while scheduling a particular time for their sit-down dining at a preselected restaurant. Mind you, this was all at a discounted price that helped Disney Management schedule the proper staff at select locations. At each restaurant we walked up to check-in, grabbed a spot in the waiting area and were seated at our table within two minutes of our reservation time. How valuable was it? Every restaurant that had our reservation told walk-up diners that the wait was 40 minutes or more.



NOTES FROM THE DISTRICT 2 ITS ENGINEER CONTINUED

Disney World is definitely “all in” with technology while keeping in mind customer service for a positive experience. In a way, TSM&O, ITS and 511 systems have a similar goal. In each we want to manage the movement of traffic while keeping customer service at an optimum. We want to save money while providing value added services to our menu. We want to be able to alert as many people as possible by keeping the information within reach of their fingertips. In a sense we want to work smarter and not harder at providing a service to the public that is truly beneficial to the great State of Florida.

NORTH FLORIDA TPO UPDATE

The North Florida Transportation Planning Organization projects are coming along very well with the final pieces being completed in the next few months. First on the list is getting all of the BlueToad data on-line consistently by reconfiguring the fiber communication network for greater redundancy. That has been the biggest challenge as of yet since some of the issues are out of the ITS Office’s control. As an example, in early April we had just about every unit reporting data. I was overwhelmed with excitement as I looked at the map reporting data from Nassau County all the way down to Clay. The following day my bubble was burst when I saw all the units off-line. When I investigated the situation I learned that a couple of roadway construction projects had accidentally damaged the fiber optic cable that was feeding us data.

Our ITS Network team was tasked with finding a solution that would create redundancy at several points in the network. Once this information was provided we assigned several tasks to field crews so that future cuts would not take down BlueToad data being fed to the system. As of April 24th the final task that needs to be

completed is having our ITS contractor splice the redundant fiber into the network. Hopefully, this will resolve all of the problems we’ve encountered over the past year thereby allowing the data to be generated on a much more consistent basis.

This redundancy is also critical due to JaxPort project coming on-line into the network in the near future. Our staff has held discussions with the JaxPort Information Technology staff, so the next step is distribution and intermixing of the fiber optic cable. Once we’ve completed this task the five ports managed under JaxPort will be able to exchange data and real-time information on a dynamic basis. Likewise, they will be able to share data with the Transportation Management Center (as well as us with them), thus enhancing our intermodal capabilities. We have also begun discussions with their Operations Staff with a goal of developing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) between agencies by this coming August.

These discussions have been held with JaxPort’s Operations Security Manager, Mr. Chuck White, on some of the opportunities that have been created by this project. One goal is to deploy BlueToad within their facilities that can be tied to the BlueToad system that’s currently along our roadway. This will allow us to gather much needed data on freight movements throughout the region, hence allowing us to address strategic intermodal roadway systems that will benefit the most from future improvements. Also, this connectivity will allow us to provide messaging along I-95 and I-295 when a port needs to alert incoming freight about major issues that may create delays in handling their loads. All of these scenarios will be addressed during the development of the



NORTH FLORIDA TPO continued

SOP with a goal of beginning interagency operations by the beginning of Fall.

On a final NFTPO note, I had the opportunity to meet with their staff to go over the 50% Design of the new RTMC. It was very enjoyable for me to see the excitement on their faces as I went over the design, the color schemes and the amenities on campus. I did feel bad that construction has been delayed by a few months due to issues with the Architect but I continue to keep my focus on the end result since I know this new facility will benefit every agency that's involved. The staff is deserving of a top rate facility due to the performance they've given to the North Florida region over the past several years. It's time to help the NFTPO show the nation that they are one of the top performing transportation organizations in the country.

Pete Vega
District 2 ITS Engineer

MAINTENANCE

ITS device failures continued to be few and far between this month, which has meant that the ITS Maintenance Contractor has been installing BlueTOAD travel time devices and performing preventive maintenance throughout the system. Crews have been cleaning cabinets, checking for loose connections, trimming grass and weeds, lubricating locks and hinges, and taking care of all of the other items needed to keep the ITS devices and system components in good working order.

Although the maintenance section has been light on troubleshooting and repair work for the past several months, we are beginning to gear up for Hurricane and Lightning seasons. Beginning around the end of May to the first part of June, the Jacksonville area will see increased thunderstorms, heavier winds and of course the

threat of Tropical Storms and Hurricanes. Early predictions are that this is going to be a quiet Hurricane Season with five hurricanes, of which two are predicted to be Category 3 or higher. However, one thing to keep in mind is that 1992 was supposed to be a quiet Hurricane Season as well with only three hurricanes predicted and no projections of a major hurricane. The results of the 1992 Hurricane Season are all too familiar with many Floridians as that was the year of Hurricane Andrew, which made landfall near Homestead, Florida and destroyed many homes and commercial buildings and left many without electricity for months.



Lightning wreaks havoc on ITS devices

Since we are in the ITS business and not the Weather business, we will leave the predictions to the experts. But, one thing that we always make sure to do is to be prepared and stay proactive to help ensure that the ITS System is available to the highest degree possible to provide real-time traffic information.

Kevin Jackson
ITS Field Specialist



CONSTRUCTION

The final plans have been submitted for the Phase 9 Project on the I-295 East Beltway from I-95 going north to Atlantic Boulevard. This project was previously put out for bid, but there was a protest of the proposed contract award and so the project had to be put out for bid again. The project is now scheduled to Let in May and construction should begin around November of this year.

The I-10 Interchange ITS Project, which includes the installation of fiber optic cable, CCTVs and MVDS within the area of the I-10/I-95 Interchange, is behind schedule but continues to progress. The contractor and their sub-contractors installed the remaining devices and the fiber optic cable throughout the project this month. Construction is anticipated to be completed in May and final project testing is expected to run into June.

The SR 23 Toll Project, which is installing ITS on SR 23, I-10 from I-295 to just west of SR 23, and I-95 through St. Johns County is currently under design. The fiber optic conduit and cable design for I-95 through St. Johns County has been provided to the Contractor as released for construction design plans. Construction on this portion of the project is expected to commence in the next month. Construction crews will be installing conduit alongside I-95 by trenching and directional boring over the next few months. Once a majority of the conduit is in place more crews will be installing pull boxes and splice vaults along the conduit path to allow for fiber installation and long term maintenance of the infrastructure.

The I-75 ITS Project in Gainesville from CR 234 to SR 121 continues to progress. The contractor is currently installing conduit within the project limits. This project will install fiber optic cable, 3 DMS, CCTVs, vehicle detectors and Bluetooth

travel time readers along the I-75 corridor within the project limits. The project will also install 2 DMS and 2 CCTVs on US 441 in the area of Payne's Prairie. In addition, FLIR infrared CCTVs and visibility sensors will be installed on Payne's Prairie on both I-75 and US 441. The contract duration for this project is 400 days.

John Kell
District 2 ITS Construction Project Manager

ROAD RANGER UPDATE

The Road Rangers kicked off the beginning of April by holding their monthly Road Ranger Safety Meeting at the FDOT Urban Office Training Center at 11:30 A.M on April 2. They celebrated their contract anniversary on April 1 and Marshall Adkison kicked off the meeting by congratulating the Road Rangers for the excellent service provided throughout the year. He then jumped right in to discuss several events where MOT performed by the Road Rangers was exceptional. Marshall also stressed the importance of proper MOT and how having that element perfected can save their lives.

During the discussion of events an open dialogue was formed and the Road Rangers were provided with the opportunity to share some of their perspectives and give insight on how they perform in the field. This provided a learning opportunity for the Road Rangers to see real life incidents and re-enforce that safety is everyone's responsibility.

It is with great pleasure that we continuously receive positive letters and calls from motorists which pour into our office here at FDOT. The Road Rangers are typically the first incident responders on scene and they represent the face of FDOT that the public sees and remembers the majority of the time. This is why

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ROAD RANGER UPDATE

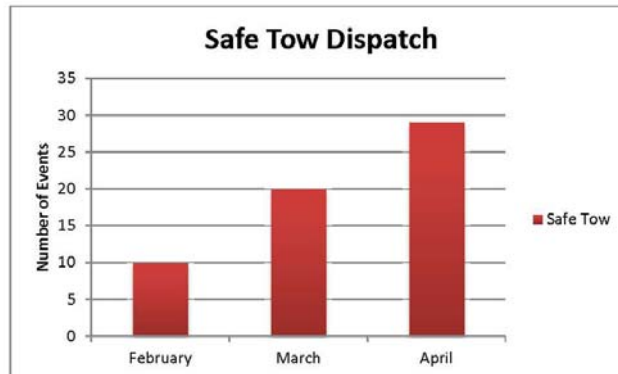
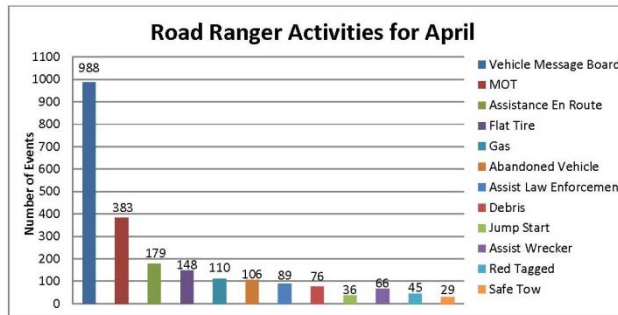
this service is extremely important and we can be assured that the Road Ranger Service Patrol is a welcomed service to our motoring public.

While we at FDOT are aware of the benefit of this program, it is always good to receive proof of this fact.

There has been a significant increase in travel for the month of April but luckily less incidents than previous months. The Road Rangers have assisted a total of 1,133 travelers and made it easier for those stranded motorists to feel safe

by keeping the roads clear. The Rangers provided many different services from gas to helping with flat tires and debris.

The charts below illustrate the Road Ranger activities for the month of April as well as the different types of reported events. When comparing several past months, we can see that the safe tow program is being utilized more each month as time progresses, this shows how essential this program is and how the Rangers help motorists by providing an option for a safe tow.





RISC – RAPID INCIDENT SCENE CLEARANCE - UPDATE

District 2 has not had any RISC incidents in the last couple of months and we are very thankful for that. In case any active calls occur we are proud to say that our RISC Contractors remain ready to respond to provide excellent service to our travelers. This program greatly assists with our goals set in the *Open Roads Policy* of clearing our interstates in 90 minutes.

ALACHUA-BRADFORD TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM UPDATE

The Alachua-Bradford TIM Team held its meeting at the FDOT Gainesville Operations office on April 19, 2014. The TEAM focused on many different aspects of incident management and developed key forms of communication to work together in the future.

Craig Carnes kicked off the meeting and we welcomed Rebecca White as the new PIO. Rebecca will be replacing Laurie Windham at the Alachua-Bradford TIM Team meetings. We are very happy to have Rebecca on board and hope to achieve even greater success with her in the future.

We then jumped right into the meeting working as a team to get everyone involved and up to speed on current events occurring in the area. Ed Ward presented the EOC update to the TEAM and he also mentioned that he will be conducting FHWA Training at the end of April for those who are interested in participating. Pete Vega was unable to attend so Craig Carnes then took the lead to give everyone the ITS Updates. Craig shared with the TEAM that the SunGuide connection between Gainesville and Jacksonville was successfully installed and that the two TMCs are now able to use the same software to view Interstate CCTVs and communicate between the TMCs.

During the meeting Craig also mentioned that FDOT District 2 provides a SHRP II Incident Management Training Course. If anyone is interested in the SHRP II Incident Management Training Course please contact Craig. He stated he will work with any agencies' schedules, including nights and weekends to make the training course available. Members then discussed several incidents that occurred since the last TIM meeting. They sought better communication throughout the agencies by listening to everyone's perspective on each incident. Members came away with a clear understanding of different responsibilities enlisted to each agency.

The TEAM had a great turn out from the representative agencies and we would like to thank everyone for taking the time out of their schedules to participate. The representatives are as follows: Metric Engineering, FDOT ITS, FDOT Traffic Management Center, Alachua County Environmental Protection, Atkins, FDOT PIO, FDOT EOC, DBI, Alachua County Sheriff's Office, FDOT Traffic Operations, Florida Forestry Service, Gainesville Traffic, Gainesville Police Department, FDOT Gainesville Maintenance, FHP, University Towing, and the Alachua County Fire Department.

The next bi-monthly meeting will be held on June 11, 2014 at the FDOT Gainesville Operations Office, 5301 N.E. 39th Avenue at 10:00 A.M. We look forward to seeing everyone there!





FIRST COAST TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM UPDATE

The First Coast TIM Team will hold its next bi-monthly meeting on May 20, 2014 at the FDOT Urban Office Training Center, 2198 Edison Avenue at 10:00 A.M. Please mark your calendar to attend this meeting. We are looking forward to seeing everyone there to have a successful TIM Team moving forward.

District 2 TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM MISSION:

The Florida Department of Transportation District Two's Traffic Incident Management Teams through partnering efforts strive to continuously reduce incident scene clearance times to deter congestion and improve safety. The Teams' objective is to exceed the Open Roads Policy thus ensuring mobility, economic prosperity, and quality of life.

District 2 TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM VISION:

Through cooperation, communication and training the Teams intend to reduce incident scene clearance times by 10% each year through 2015.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Traffic Incident Management Website:
<http://jax511.com/D2TIMwp/>

OPERATIONS

In October of 2004 I found myself sitting on my porch when my neighbor, Penny Kamish, approached me about a job. "Computers, traffic, customer service, FDOT, etc." were some of the buzz words she was tossing around. All I knew was that being a GM at Firehouse Subs had run its course and I was looking for a new challenge. I was 1000 miles away from my closest family member and Penny had become my "Mother of the South" so I took her up on her job offer and started work at the FDOT District 2 Traffic Management Center.

I worked under Penny and Derrick Odom (you know him now as a famous Action News Star) on the first ever District 2 TMC contract. I learned a lot about traffic, people, life and work ethic from these two. Derrick stressed work environment, attention to detail, customer service and problem solving.



Derrick Odom,
Action News Traffic Anchor

Penny provided life lessons, human resources knowledge, tenacity, big picture ideas and how to run a small business type operation. I owe so much of who I am today to these two. They

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OPERATIONS continued

witnessed my wedding, birth of my children, job promotions and the growth of our TMC Operations. Most of all, they watched me grow from a college graduate with a job to a man with a career. I owe so much to both of them I cannot fit it in one article.



Penny Kamish, Dancing with the Stars, Jacksonville edition, to benefit Special Olympics (no she doesn't dress like this for work)!

Another thing I can thank them for is introducing me to Pete Vega.



Pete Vega is the District 2 ITS Engineer and a role model. I am not writing this to kiss Pete's butt (that has the opposite effect with him) but to help you see how much Pete means to ITS, District 2, the State of Florida and me. Much like

Derrick and Penny, Pete pours time and effort into growing our program and making it the best, not only in the state but the country. Send an email at 11:00 PM during the NCAA Men's basketball Championship game to Pete and within minutes, a response. Keep sending those emails and you get a text telling you to relax and enjoy the game. Every time there is an opportunity to learn about ITS, TMCs, TSM&O, Managed Lanes, FDOT, Traffic Ops, you name it, Pete sends you a calendar invite. Pete boils down to this, he wants to succeed, he wants his program to succeed and he wants all of his people to succeed. I look forward to Pete's daily visit where I can pick his brain and most of all, just listen to him and soak up as much information as I possibly can. He cares about his job, his program and his people. He shoots it straight and has pulled the "yocals" up here in Jacksonville up among the cutting edge cities in the country. Hard work and determination, the days of the 40 hour work week are the thing of the past.

I am coming up on 10 years at the District 2 TMC and I could not be more thankful for the people I have been surrounded by. Each one of them are wonderful leaders and continue to be champions in the industry. Team and personal success go hand in hand. I have 30+ years left and I thank these three for helping lay the foundation. I hope I have touched some of the 100+ Operators that have come through the TMC the way these three have touched me. Thank you Pete, Penny and Derrick.

Ryan Crist,
TMC Manager



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

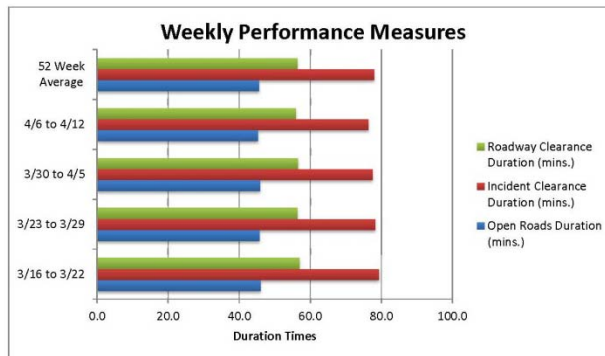
As expected, April brought much needed warmer weather to District 2 but unfortunately it also brought the rain. This of course was reflected by the increase in the amount of travel in our area along with the increased congestion and crashes throughout the District. Between the months of March and April there was a 31% increase in crashes in our area alone. This brought our average up to about 213 crashes per week! Very astounding statistics. Luckily our Incident Clearance, Roadway Clearance, and Open Roads duration times were all significantly lower this month than the previous month of March.

The average clearance duration for the past 12 months has considerably dropped due to the great TEAM that we have here in District 2 with our Road Ranger services along with all of our

other partnerships. SunGuide reports that the weekly average incident clearance duration in April was only 78 minutes as compared to 102.8 minutes in March. This is a testament to how wonderful our TIM Team is performing when it comes to getting our interstates clear for our motorists.

There has also been a drastic increase in the amount of abandoned vehicles, debris on the roadways and disabled vehicles along our interstates. Reports show an average increase of approximately 27% of abandoned vehicles and almost double the amount of debris between the months of March and April.

The following charts illustrate the Performance Measures data for the past few weeks as well as the different types of events reported.





MARKETING

From gymnasiums to golf courses, 511 is taking a “boots on the ground” approach to spring marketing! And by the time summer rolls around, we’ll be needing a new pair of shoes. Our whirlwind spring marketing tour commenced last month with a visit to Bishop Kenny High School where we spoke to almost 900 students in grades 9-12. This marked the fourth year we participated in their Health and Safety Fair, and through those connections, we also received an invitation to participate in Ridgeview High’s health fair next month. Not only will we be needing new shoes, we’ll need “ultra chic” shoes to keep up with the latest high school trends.

Our next stop took us once again to the I-95 Florida Welcome Center. This time I was joined by the lovely Sherrell, Traffic Engineer Intern and newest Metric Employee, as we greeted visitors on Good Friday! Everyone was in good spirits as they escaped the cold and headed into the Sunshine State. We handed out mints (which we found is the universal pronunciation pretty much around the globe, or at least in Germany). This one couple lit up with excitement as we finally spoke a word they could understand! And of course, we had beach balls for the kids. But the biggest and most important gift... the 511 system itself! Motorists were delighted to know all of their traffic bases would be covered during their visit to our beloved state.

Probably the most notable highlight of our month (and next month) is our joint partnership with THE PLAYERS. We were delighted and mesmerized as they led us on a Progressive Press Conference around their state-of-the-art facility in Ponte Vedra Beach last week. In return, we’ll play host to officials from THE PLAYERS as well as members of the media next month (Monday, May 5th) at our FDOT facility on Edison Avenue.

The last item on our agenda for the month of April included a visit to Checker Cab where we spoke to almost 200 employees at their Employee Appreciation Luncheon. What a treat! We’re grateful to share space on our calendar with some of Jacksonville’s finest! A huge thanks to Mary Nichols and the team at Checker Cab.

Before you head out to enjoy this beautiful spring time weather, make sure your trip begins with a call to 511. You can also log onto www.FL511.com or, of course, download our free 511 Traffic App.

Know before you go and keep moving!

Sherri Byrd
Marketing Manager



Sherrell Law, spreading the word about 511 to visitors at the Florida I-95 Welcome Center



SPOTLIGHT ON...NICK TSENGAS

This month's featured Spotlight is kind of unique in that I am honoring a very talented, devoted and valuable District Two Executive who is leaving the Department for greener pastures at the end of May. Mr. Nick Tsengas announced his retirement over one month ago but I held out on sharing this information in the March newsletter because I felt this was a cruel prank he was playing on all of us....but **alas** I was wrong! It's been an interesting 20 plus years working for and with Nick so I have tons of stories to tell. Unfortunately, I'll need to try to keep it brief for the sake of our readers. Let's start from the beginning and see if I can work my way toward 2014 without boring anyone.

As many may know I used to work for DOW Chemical until the summer of 1993 prior to joining the Department. It was a great job but the 80 hours per week and 30 straight days on field assignment took a toll so I decided the time was right to try something new. As I scoured the Want Ads and pounded the pavement there was this unique opportunity to apply for an Area Engineer position in District Two's Jacksonville Maintenance office. At the time, my severance pay was dwindling pretty quickly so I thought "what the heck" and submitted an application to the Department. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever consider a career in transportation even with my almost psychotic obsession of daily traffic patterns.

So, I was given the opportunity to interview for a position I knew nothing about and who would be the first face I see? Neil Diamond?! (You need to know Nick to get this punch line). Let's take a quick flash back to college first. I was supervisor of security at USF's Sun Dome during my college days and had the opportunity to meet a number of acts along the way. Neil Diamond was one of my favorite attractions because I knew all the words to his songs and he sold out every show, thereby making it a very interesting

evening. During his stops at the Sun Dome I had the chance to spend quality time with Mr. Diamond and his security personnel as we strategized the positioning of staff throughout the show. Okay, time to head back to September 1993.

So, as I'm sitting in the hot seat trying to answer every question to the best of my ability that dang song "Sweet Caroline" kept playing in my head. It finally got to the point that I tried to avoid eye contact with Nick so that I could focus on the questions. Geez, he must have thought I was pretty rude when he asked a question and I'd reply back to one of the other interviewers. I'm just glad I did not screw up by answering one of the questions with "well, Mr. Diamond I would handle it this way...."

After about two months with the Department I started questioning my decision to enter this field of work. It wasn't that the job was so bad but the feeling of not providing my worth to the Maintenance Office really bugged me. One day Nick took me out for a final field review of the State Road 9A project in northeast Jacksonville. Nick was all spiffed up due to a meeting he had scheduled with some politicos later in the day so he asked me to join the group as they made their way down a hill to examine the work done around a bridge. I felt like a sheep among wolves as I made my way down the incline but kept reminding myself that I can't let Neil (oops, I meant Nick) down.

Once we got to the base of the bridge the construction Project Manager began to discuss some of the issues encountered during construction. Prior to explaining one major issue he looked up to see that Nick was still at the top of the hill. He said "great, Nick's not here but there was a problem that we could not address in construction so maintenance will have to handle it once we sign off with the

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SPOTLIGHT ON.. Nick Tsengas continued

contractor. It involves...yada, yada, yada...hey, who are you (as he points to me)?” I answered “I work for Nick so I’ll be sure to let him know about these issues the maintenance office will inherit.” (Smile! Bazinga! Maybe I will stay after all!). You should have seen the smile on Nick’s face when the construction Project Manager said they’d address these issues with the contractor.

It was smooth sailing after that as our professional relationship grew into something of a mentor-student situation. Yes, there were times when I’d do something that made Nick pop his lid but he always found a way to turn it into a positive, even though I knew he was pretty ticked off at me. I still remember one “debate” in which I played devil’s advocate with Nick as we tried to work out a personnel issue. I’ll never forget how he kept rubbing his forehead while squinting at me until the moment he snapped and shouted “Dang it Pete, just do what we discussed!” It was a good lesson since I quickly realized you can only go to a certain level before you can tick someone off. Even someone as calm natured as Nick.

Then there was the time one of our field operators got heavy equipment stuck in an outfall ditch in West Jacksonville. The situation was grim as this 20-ton piece of equipment sank into the muck like it was quicksand. I’ll never forget the look on Nick’s face as he drove up to witness this scenario. The reaction of “Holy, \$#!7” oozed out of his body while no words needed to be said. This was a dire situation since the equipment had sunk at least three feet and every option possible had already been tried. Throughout it all Nick stayed cool and collected as we considered alternative solutions. His main concern was for the well-being and safety of our staff so when 2 AM came around he and other managerial staff decided to call it a night and regroup the following morning.

The amazing thing was that all of the on-site personnel felt like they’d let Nick down. At the time I believed they would have continued well into the next day to get this monkey off his back. His judgment to call it a night paid huge dividends because after a few hours of sleep these guys returned with several new options. By the next afternoon a combination of some suggestions helped us in removing this huge piece of equipment with just minimal damage. That was the first time that I realized my good fortune in being under the leadership of Mr. Nick Tsengas. I doubt if many others in his position could garner the dedication and commitment shown by the entire crew as they dealt with this problem.

As time passed Nick got to know me as well. He knew when I was in “debate” mode and would often reel me in before I got too far. He also had a knack for noticing when my blood was boiling over so he’d look me in the eyes, point both palms down and move his arms up/down to get me to calm down. It worked 99% of the time but there was one moment where it just did not work. I was getting a brow-beating from someone at a higher level in District Two and Nick was trying to help me keep my cool. It worked for about an hour until something was said to set me off. I still feel bad about it because my response was filled with fire and brimstone. As I was talking I looked over at Nick. He’d dropped his hands, lowered his head and was either cursing me out in silence or shaking his head at my stupidity. In any case, I survived that moment but walked away with one more valuable lesson from Nick. To this day I’ve learned to walk away when internal temps get over 103 degrees.

There are several additional stories I could share like the time I continually called Nick at



SPOTLIGHT ON..Nick Tsengas continued

all hours of the night to update him on the status of our I-95 road closure due to wildfires in the mid-90s. I knew he probably wasn't happy with my 3 AM wake-up calls but he realized I was following marching orders and brushed it aside as just part of the job. I quickly realized that each of these experiences with Nick was an opportunity to learn from the best. A majority of my staff often ask how I can stay so cool and collected during a tense situation. In reality it was all due to Nick's leadership and ability to show me how the other side was thinking.

I am holding out hope that Nick will be around a few more years to help District Two by working for one of our consultants. The accomplishments of the District Two ITS program over the past sixteen years could not have been achieved without the support and leadership of Nick. He allowed our group to work autonomously while considering the overall impact to the District's Highway Operations Program. He made certain that we had the proper tools, personnel and equipment in place to make it a success. Keeping him within reach would be a huge benefit to the program as we transition under our new leadership in Highway Operations.

Do many of you remember Carol Burnett? How about her very last show on television? Well, the closing song seems so apropos for Nick's departure. It went something like this "I'm so glad we had this time together.... just to have a laugh or sing a song....Seems we just get started and before you know it...Comes the time we have to say, "SO LONG."

Pete Vega
District 2 ITS Engineer



PHOTO GALLERY



Students from Bishop Kenny learn about 511 and how to "Know before they go!"



511 was invited to attend Media Day for The Player's Championship at TPC. What a view of the 17th hole from the Pavillion!

