

The Connector

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SC DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

SPRING 2005

SCDOT employees honored for military service

By Bob Kudelka

At the Williamsburg Maintenance shop in Kingstree, Terrel Gamble makes sure his dump truck is running. His job depends on it.

While in Iraq, Gamble hoped his truck ran well. His life depended on it.

Gamble was a truck driver and gunner for the US Army Reserves stationed in Balad, Iraq, north of Baghdad, from November 22, 2003 to April 4, 2005. He was one of 13 SCDOT employees honored by Executive Director Elizabeth S. Mabry and the Commission during a pre-Memorial Day ceremony in May.

During the ceremony, Gamble's job was described by Major General Harry Burchstead of the Army National Guard as one of the most dangerous in Iraq.

Gamble drove supplies sometime hundreds of miles outside his camp, to places such as Fallujah.

"We hauled anything and everything to support the troops behind the wire and outside the wire," he said after the ceremony. That included food, water, medical supplies, ammunition and classified material.

Maintaining his truck was a challenge, with the intense conditions of the Mideast country.

"At least in South Carolina, you've got a little wind stirring," Gamble said. "Over there, you've got a dry 147 (degrees). At 8 or 9 in the morning, it's already 100 degrees."

At the end of each day, Gamble's truck needed to be serviced by blowing air through the filters and checking the coolant. You didn't want to break down, he said, "once you went outside the wire."

"We ran into altercations where we had live gunfights," Gamble said. "In the heat of the moment, you need to keep going and get out of the kill



Front Row: SCDOT Executive Director Elizabeth S. Mabry, David Smith, Mark Ethel, Adam Wesley, Mitchel Gullede, Dennis Smith, Frankie Bennett, Terry Fulton, Elveridge Smith, General Harry Burchstead. Back Row: FHWA Division Administrator Bob Lee and SCDOT Commissioners John M. 'Moot' Truluck, Bob Harrell Sr., Chairman Tee Hooper, Marion P. Carnell, John Hardee, Bobby T. Jones and Bud Turner.

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zone."

Gamble turned somber when asked about his worst experience. On Oct. 27, 2004, Staff Sgt. Jerome Lemon, a Bennettsville native and SC Trooper, was killed when his convoy was caught in an ambush.

"That particular day I'll never forget," Gamble said.

The SCDOT Commissioners congratulated each employee; the SCDOT ensemble performed patriotic songs; and the employees were presented with memory boxes as a token of appreciation.

"While you were away, we worried about you," said SCDOT Executive Director Elizabeth S. Mabry. "We missed you. We prayed for you. You made us proud. There's no way we will ever repay you. I can just stand here and humbly say thank you."

Barbara Wessinger, a Headquarters employee whose husband is returning from active military duty, presented the memory boxes.

"You sacrificed a portion of your lives to serve and protect this great country," Wessinger said.

General Burchstead thanked SCDOT

for its continued support of employees who serve in the military.

Miss South Carolina Ashley Wood attended the ceremony and said, "I am honored to have the opportunity to provide a special welcome and thank you to these men who have so courageously and selflessly served our country."

The ceremony very meaningful to the employees.

"I thought it was great," said Elveridge "Smitty" Smith, who works at the

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SCDOT

New Cooper River Bridge set to open July 16

By Bob Kudelka

From the beginning, SCDOT made sure the Charleston and Mount Pleasant communities were involved in the design and construction of the new Cooper River Bridge.

So it is no surprise that the opening ceremony events have the same type of community involvement.

Several months ago, SCDOT formed a planning committee that included Commissioners Bob Harrell Sr., 1st District, and John M. "Moot" Truluck, 6th District; Mount Pleasant Mayor Harry M. Hallman Jr.; Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr.; a citizen appointee from each community; and a senior staffer appointed by each of the mayors. SCDOT Director of Special Projects Bobby Clair chaired the committee.

"This will be a big community event as well as a statewide event," said Clair, the Department's top engineer overseeing the bridge project. "We wanted to make sure we included everyone in the planning and that we kept the public involved up through the ribbon cutting. We're having an

extended celebration."

Like the bridge construction itself, the opening events are bold as well as complex. They include a massive fireworks show, a subdued black-tie event and a ribbon-cutting that will cap off the week's events.

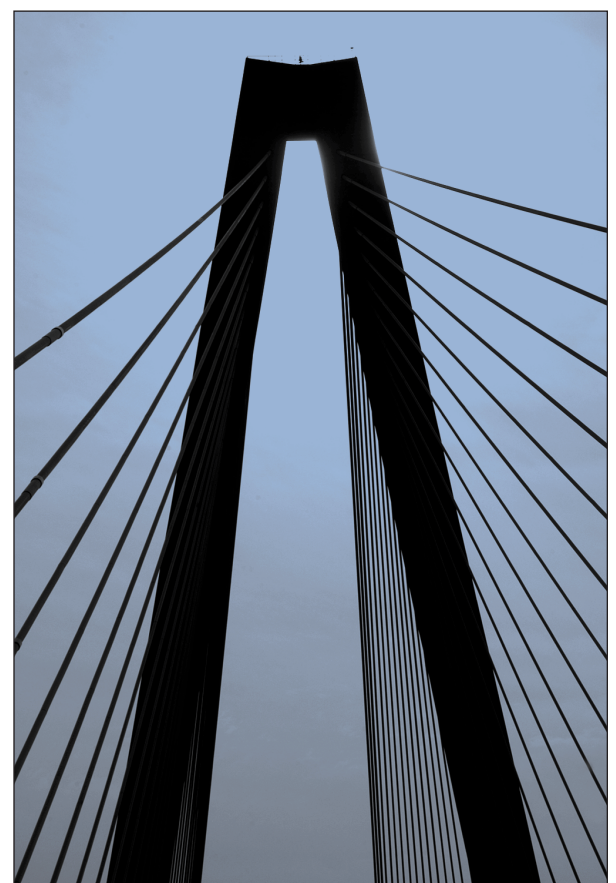
To maintain the public involvement, the committee has set aside two days before the opening in which people can walk on the bridge. These two "public days" are scheduled for the weekend before the opening.

"There will be transportation from the foot of the bridge to public parking lots," Clair said. "If you're unable to walk the bridge, we'll have a limited amount of transportation up and down the bridge to give those folks a view of the bridge also."

The public days are the best chance for an up-close look at the cable-stay structure that will grace the harbor for the next 100 years.

No one knows how exactly many people will attend the two public days, but it is expected to be a heavy turnout.

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