

Employees educate public through Speakers Bureau Program

By Bob Kudelka

When Kershaw Maintenance employee Billy Nowlen speaks to civic groups, he carries with him a secondary road sign.

As he comes to the part in his talk when he discusses sign vandalism and costs for replacement, Nowlen holds up the sign and says, "This is how you can find out whether the road you live on is maintained by us."

The visual aid is one tool Nowlen, a member of the Speakers Bureau, uses to help inform his audience about SCDOT. Twelve years after government restructuring, there are still many misconceptions about what the Department does - and what it doesn't do.

Educating the public about the Department is the goal of the Speakers Bureau program, which trains employees to deliver accurate and consistent messages about SCDOT's mission.

"The public often lacks knowledge about who we are," said Executive Director Elizabeth S. Mabry. "Many services we provide are taken for granted. It's important that we tell our story...We're the only ones who really know our story."

Mabry said the public should know that more funding for the highways in South Carolina is not about growing government, but instead would lead to better maintained roads and bridges. This would lead to fewer fatalities.

"Engineering strategies do save lives," she said.

Through the Speakers Bureau, SCDOT employees will be dispatched to speak at civic and business groups throughout the state. Mabry said 600 invitations for SCDOT to give presentations would be sent to civic and business groups in the coming six months.

"We will make sure everyone knows this is a top-notch agency with top-notch employees," Mabry said.

A recent independent report ranks SCDOT as third in the nation in cost-effectiveness and efficiency, Mabry said.

At a workshop for employees in the Speakers Bureau in March, Deputy Director for

Executive Support Michael Covington and Director of Community Relations Vivian Patterson presented tools for employees to use as they give presentations to the public.

They include:

- "At Your Service," a script and PowerPoint presentation outlining the basic functions of the Department, such as who to call when a pothole needs fixing or a ditch needs clearing.
- "Statewide Transportation Challenges," a six-minute video that discusses the many challenges facing SCDOT as it maintains the fourth-largest state maintained highway system in the nation yet is the lowest funded and has a \$2.6 billion annual shortfall for highway and transit needs over the next 20 years.

Covington and Patterson told the group of speakers the tools are a guide and encouraged them to tailor their presentations for specific groups. At each presentation, the speaker will be accompanied by a county representative qualified to answer questions about specific projects in that area. The South Carolina Transportation Policy and Research Council also plans to send a representative to each engagement.

Covington did a practice run of the "At Your Service" presentation while Patterson gave an overview about the speaker's bureau program and its importance in improving communication with the public.

The two-day workshop also featured public speaking and presentation skills by Liz Stewart, of Stewart and Associates.

Participants in the program said the workshop was beneficial and informative.

As an Assistant Program Manager, Machael Peterson regularly speaks with government and civic groups concerning projects underway in her region in the Augusta area. She wanted to join the Speakers Bureau to help get SCDOT's message out to the public.

"I knew from STARS training that many of us were to be 'ambassadors' and there's a common message that Ms. Mabry wanted to get out," Peterson said. "I thought it would be a good opportunity to practice that message, get the

training needed and incorporate that message in our regular meetings with local municipalities, community members, and project information meetings."

Nowlen said he finds that the old myths about the Department still exist.

"People still call us the 'highway department,'" he said. "And you'd be surprised at the number of people who ask you about property taxes when you talk about funding."

Giving people accurate information is the rewarding part about being a member of the Speakers Bureau, Nowlen said.

"It really gives us an opportunity to share our message, and more often than not, people are very appreciative," Nowlen said.

Members of the Speakers Bureau are Todd Anderson, Julie Barker, Sherry Barton, Barbara Beagles, Jerry Brannon, Thad Brunson, Thelma Bush, James Cassidy, Leland Colvin, David Cook, Todd Cook, Bobby Crider, Sheila Crouse, Glynis Davis, Randy Day, Deborah Durden, Victor Edwards, Angela Feaster, Tina Feaster, Anne Futch, Tesa Griffin, Christy Hall, Wendy Hollingsworth, Mark Hooper, Michelle James, Glennith Johnson, Bryan Jones, Carol

Jones, Brian Keys, Christopher Lacy, Hilda Leslie, Mark Lester, Roberta Mack, Keith Melvin, Billy Nowlen, Tommie Parker, Ron Patton, Machael Peterson, Penny Phillips, Mark Pleasant, Randy Ponton, Matthew Pugilese, Malzone Russell, John Sanders, Clint Scoville, Mark Walker, John Walsh, Kelvin Washington, Bryan Webb, Carmen Wright and Randall Young.

County Engineering Representatives are:

District 1: Matt Pugilese and Lorena Boger, Aiken; Tom Hammond and Billy Nowlen, Kershaw; Wayne Keeyes, Lee; Michael Wilson and Tina Feaster, Lexington; Tony Magwood and Brian Motley, Richland; J.D. Wilcox and Chris Geter.

District 2: Randy Day, Abbeville; Luther Padgett, Edgefield; Phillip Garner, Greenwood; Michael Jones, Laurens; Tommie Parker, McCormick; John Derrick, Newberry; Steve Dorn, Saluda;

District 3: Bobby Patterson, Anderson; Michael Holden, Greenville; Jerry Wayman, Oconee; John Sanders, Pickens; Fred Fleming, Spartanburg.

District 4: Bobby Middleton, Cherokee; L.B. Cannon, Chester; Steve Childers, Chesterfield; Brett Montgomery, Fair-

field; Johnny McKay, Lancaster; Jerry Brannon, Union; Perry Crocker, York.

District 5: Benjamin Blanks, Darlington; L. Terry Morris, Dillon; E. L. "Roy" Parnell, Florence; Richard A. Pope, Georgetown; Randy C. Graham, Horry; Harold Coleman, Marion; A. Dale Stewart, Marlboro; H. L. "Ringer" Powell, Williamsburg.

District 6: Wendell Mulligan, Beaufort; Michael Popielarz, Berkeley; Kenyatta Spruill, Charleston; Walt Holladay, Colleton; Laura Geddings, Dorchester; Malzone Russell, Jasper.

District 7: Loraine Williams, Allendale; Gene Cooner, Bamberg; Stan Holladay, Barnwell; Charlie Jones, Calhoun; Coley Holladay, Clarendon; Eugene Smith, Hampton; Bobby Crider and David Brandyburg, Orangeburg; William Locklair, Holly Hill.

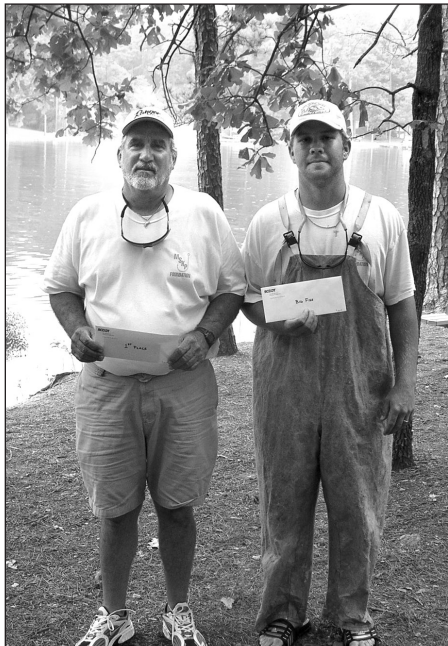
District Customer Service Representatives are Fred Teeter, Districts 2, 3; and James Law, Districts 5, 6.

For more information on how to join the Speakers Bureau or to schedule a speaker, contact the SCDOT Community Relations Office at 803-737-3935.



Employees watch the 'Statewide Transportation Challenges' video that explains the funding challenges in maintaining the state's road system.

Employees net fish, fun at tournament



1st Place
David Settle and Travis Parrish

The 26th Annual SCDOT Bass Tournament was held May 10 on Lake Murray. Ten two-man teams competed in the event.

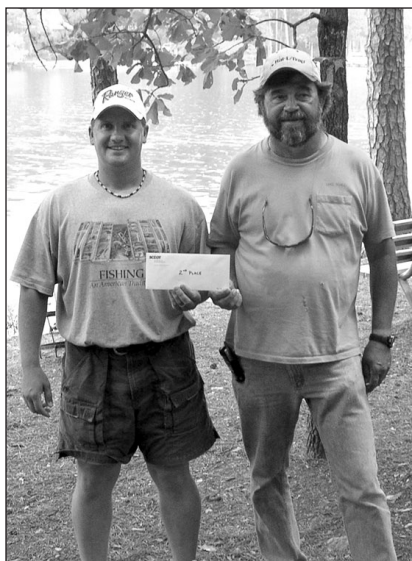
First Place honors went to the team of David Settle (Preconstruction - Planning) of Leesville and Travis Parrish of Batesburg with a seven bass limit weighing 27 lbs. & 8 ozs. They also had the big bass of the tournament at 8 lbs. & 4.5 ozs.

Second Place honors went to the team of Greg Rikard (Preconstruction - Utilities) of Leesville and Norman Monts (Richland Surveys) of Chapin. They weighed in a seven bass limit weighing 26 lbs. & 1 oz.

Third Place honors went to the team of Ashley Lindler (Newberry Maintenance) and Joel Page, both of Little Mountain. They weighed in a seven bass limit at 25 lbs. & 10 ozs.

Congratulations go out to these winning teams for a job well done. Thanks to all who participated. Be sure to mark your calendars for next year's planned event to be held on Lake Murray.

The event will be held again next year on Confederate Memorial Day. For more information on the event, please contact Greg Rikard at (803)737-5005 or Wayne Corley at (803)737-1725.



2nd Place
Greg Rikard and Norman Monts



3rd Place
Ashley Lindler and Joel Page