TENNESSEE ROAD BUILDER

Volume 29, Issue 4 July/August 2026





2026 TRBA Mid-Year Meeting

THREE DAYS IN NASHVILLE CENTER ON INDUSTRY CHALLENGES, CELEBRATIONS & More



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TRBA, Rogers Group Grow Industry Interest with Metro Nashville Schools, TCAT Academy Providing Front-row Learning Adjacent State's Largest P3 Project

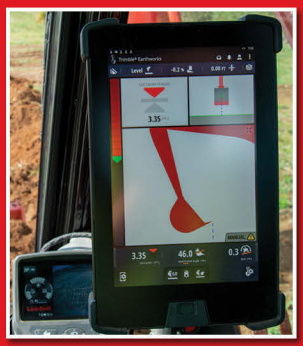


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National Summer Transportation Institute Innovation Highlights Program's Strategy to Attract Future Industry Leaders
TDOT's 2026 Events Held at Tennessee State, Middle Tennessee State



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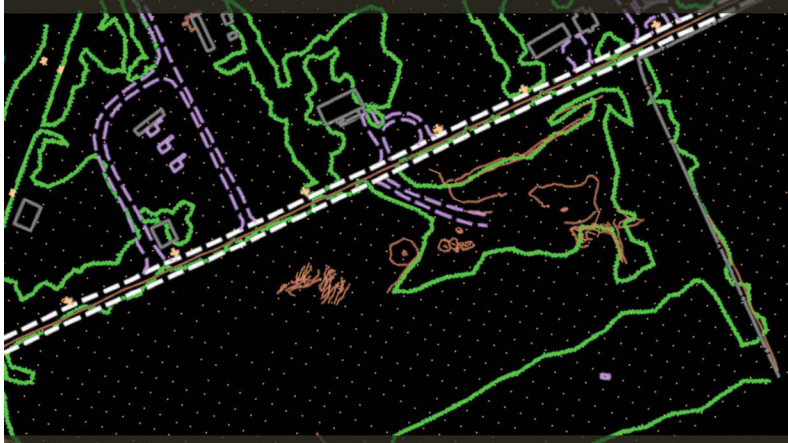
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July/August 2026
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TRBA Tennessee Road Builders Association

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COMMENTARY

By Kent D. Starwalt
Executive Vice President



A Fuel Tax Holiday Would Leave Tennessee with a Bigger Bill

Everyone understands the frustration of filling up a vehicle when fuel prices are high. Families feel it in their household budgets and businesses feel it in the cost of moving goods and operating equipment.

However, while the desire to provide relief is understandable, suspending Tennessee's state gasoline and diesel taxes would come with a substantial cost, uncertain savings for motorists and another price adjustment when the suspension ends.

The first, and greatest, problem is the loss of revenue for Tennessee's roads and bridges. Fuel taxes help support the transportation system we depend on every day, including state highways and local roads. Suspending those collections would interrupt an established funding source while the need for maintenance, repairs and improvements continues. The consequences would reach communities across the state.



The potential loss is significant. A March 2026 analysis by the Penn Wharton Budget Model estimated that a two-month suspension of Tennessee's state gasoline and diesel taxes could reduce revenue by approximately $211 million. That is a modeled estimate rather than a fiscal analysis of a specific Tennessee bill, but it demonstrates the scale of the tradeoff.

Without replacement funding, lost revenue could mean delayed paving, postponed bridge work and slower progress on projects intended to improve safety and reduce congestion. Replacing the money from another state funding source would simply shift the expense. The obligation to maintain our transportation system will remain.

The second problem is that eliminating a tax does not guarantee an equal reduction in the price motorists pay at the pump. Retail fuel prices reflect market conditions throughout the supply chain. A tax suspension changes one component of that price, but it does not require every penny of the reduction to reach the consumer.

Research on temporary gasoline tax suspensions in Illinois and Indiana found that about 70% of the tax reduction reached consumers through lower prices. Tennessee's experience could differ, but the lesson is clear: Lawmakers can guarantee that the state stops collecting the tax. They cannot guarantee that motorists receive the full benefit.

The third problem arises when the holiday ends. Restoring the tax adds that cost back into the fuel supply chain, creating upward pressure on pump prices. In the same Illinois and Indiana study, researchers found that 80% to 100% of the restored tax was passed along to consumers. That raises the possibility that drivers receive only part of the savings when the tax disappears, then bear a larger price adjustment when it returns.

The actual pump price would still depend on market conditions. Falling fuel costs could cushion the tax's return; rising costs could compound it. Either way, a temporary suspension creates an expiration date for the relief without resolving the underlying causes of expensive fuel.

Tennesseans deserve policies that respect both their household budgets and their transportation needs. Reliable roads and bridges help families get to work, businesses make deliveries and communities grow. Weakening the funding that supports those connections carries a cost long after a temporary tax holiday ends.

Suspending gasoline and diesel taxes would trade dependable transportation revenue for uncertain, short-lived savings. Tennessee should protect its road funding and pursue relief that delivers a clear benefit without leaving motorists and communities with a bigger bill down the road.

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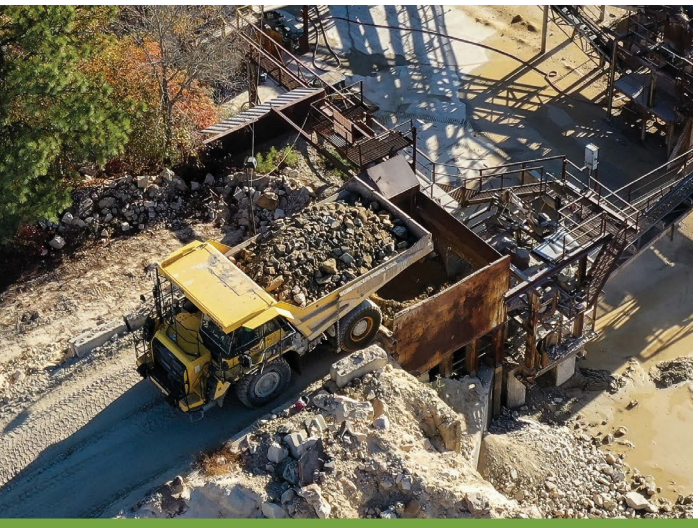
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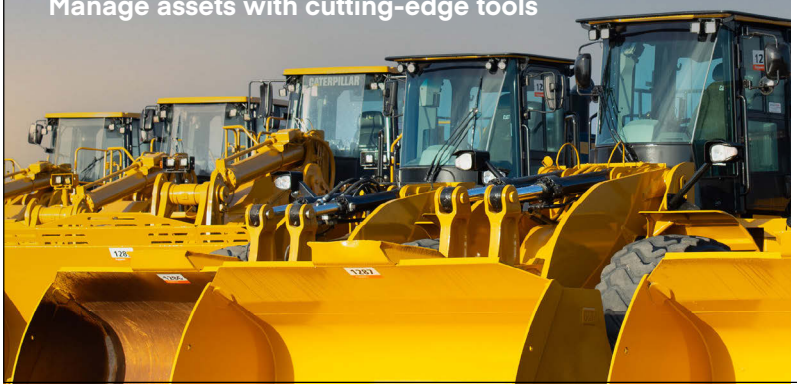


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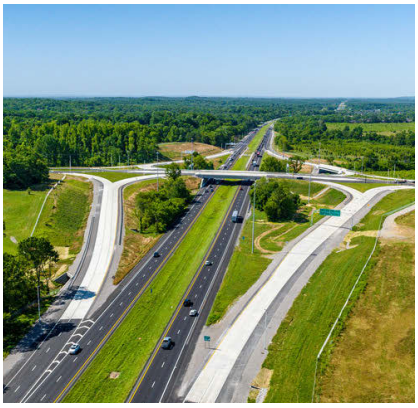
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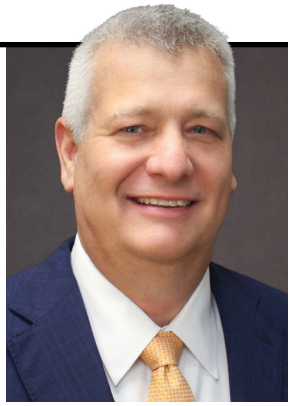
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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Jeremy Mitchell
President



Managing Risk in a Time of Opportunity

There is no question that this is one of the most exciting times to be a roadbuilder in Tennessee. Population growth, economic development and evolving project delivery methods are creating significant opportunities for contractors across our state.

In my conversations with fellow TRBA members, I continue to hear a consistent message: Winning work alone does not guarantee success. While the need for new infrastructure continues to grow, so do the costs and complexities of delivering that work. Equipment prices, fuel costs, insurance premiums, material uncertainty, workforce challenges and contractual risks require us to approach growth with discipline and purpose.

Today, our greatest challenge is often not finding work, it is delivering that work safely, profitably and consistently in an increasingly complex and competitive environment. Through TRBA, we have an opportunity to learn from one another, share best practices and address the challenges affecting every member of our association.

Equipment & Fuel Continue to Affect How We Operate

For many roadbuilding contractors, equipment represents one of the largest investments in the business. The cost of replacing or expanding a fleet has increased dramatically, while maintenance costs continue to rise as equipment becomes more advanced and technology driven.

Fuel remains another major expense, but managing consumption has become just as important as managing price. Contractors who understand where, when and how fuel is being used are better positioned to improve productivity, control operating costs and remain competitive.

Across our industry, we are seeing greater emphasis on fleet utilization, preventive maintenance, telematics, idle-time reduction and equipment lifecycle planning. Success today requires us to maximize the value of every machine and every gallon of fuel.

Insurance & Risk Management Matter More Than Ever

Insurance costs continue to rise throughout the construction industry, as carriers are placing greater emphasis on safety performance, claims history, fleet management practices and overall risk controls.

The good news is that contractors can directly influence many of these factors. Companies that invest in a strong safety culture, workforce training, driver accountability and incident prevention create safer jobsites and position themselves more favorably from a risk and insurance standpoint.

Protecting our employees has always been a moral obligation. In today's environment, it is also essential to the long-term health of our businesses. As industry leaders, we must continue reinforcing the idea that safety is not simply a set of rules, it is a shared responsibility that begins with leadership and extends to every person on the job.

Managing Material & Supply Risk

Although supply chains have stabilized compared with a few years ago, price uncertainty remains a reality for many construction materials.

Not long ago, most of us could bid a project with reasonable confidence that material pricing would remain valid for an extended period – sometimes for the duration of the job. Today, many suppliers require early commitments, limit the validity of their quotations, or include escalation language.

Contractors must evaluate supplier commitments earlier, shorten bid-validity periods where appropriate, identify long-lead items and prioritize early buyout strategies. Managing this exposure requires close coordination among estimators, project teams and suppliers well before materials are needed in the field.

Adapting to New Delivery Methods

New and evolving project delivery methods are also changing how contractors evaluate and pursue work. Design-Build, Construction Manager/General Contractor (CM/GC), Progressive Design-Build and – the newest addition – Choice Lanes can create meaningful opportunities, but they can also introduce different forms of risk.

These delivery methods often require earlier commitments, increased collaboration and a deeper understanding of design responsibilities, schedule requirements and contractual obligations. As procurement methods continue to evolve, we must evaluate not only the opportunity presented by a project but also the risks associated with how that project will be delivered.

Experience, preparation and the right project partners become even more important when the contractor assumes greater responsibility earlier in the process.

Beyond the Quantity Takeoff

As contractors, we have all seen projects where the quantities were estimated correctly, but the difficulty of performing the work was underestimated. For subcontractors, some of the greatest risks are not found in the quantity sheets – they are found in the plans, specifications, schedule, site conditions and contract documents.

Understanding when and how the work must be performed can be just as important as understanding how much must be installed. Project phasing, traffic restrictions, access limitations, coordination with other trades and narrow schedule windows can significantly affect productivity and cost.

Subcontractors must also understand the terms of their agreements. Risk allocation, schedule obligations, payment provisions and flow-down clauses can directly affect profitability and project success. The strongest subcontractors evaluate the entire project, not just the quantities, before submitting a bid.

This level of preparation benefits everyone. When subcontractors thoroughly understand the work and the terms under which it will be performed, projects are more likely to begin with realistic expectations and a stronger foundation for success.

Growth Balanced With Discipline

The opportunities available to Tennessee roadbuilders continue to grow, but not every opportunity is the right opportunity.

Before pursuing the next project, we should ask ourselves several important questions: Do we have the right project team? Do we have the necessary equipment, workforce and financial capacity? Does the work align with our strengths? Most importantly, do we fully understand the risks we are accepting and our ability to manage them?

Backlog alone is not a measure of success. Growth for the sake of growth is rarely good for our businesses. Strategic growth, supported by disciplined planning and consistent execution, creates value for an organization, its employees and the communities it serves.

Sometimes the most important decision a contractor makes is not which project to pursue, but which project to pass on.

Looking Ahead

The future for Tennessee roadbuilding contractors remains positive. Demand for infrastructure improvements continues to grow, investment opportunities remain strong and our industry plays a vital role in supporting the state's economic success.

Success in today's market requires disciplined decision-making, sound risk management and a commitment to continuous improvement. The strongest companies understand their capabilities, pursue work that fits their strengths and remain disciplined in managing the risks they accept.

This is where active involvement in TRBA provides tremendous value. Through industry relationships, committee participation, advocacy and the sharing of best practices, our members gain insight into emerging challenges and opportunities while helping ensure that our industry's voice is heard on the issues affecting us all.

Tennessee's future is bright, and our industry is uniquely positioned to help shape it. Ultimately, our success will be measured not simply by how much work we win, but by how safely and effectively we execute it; how responsibly we manage risk; and how well we maintain the trust of our employees, project owners and the communities we serve. That is a responsibility we all share, and one TRBA will continue to support.



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2026 TRBA Mid-Year Meeting

THREE DAYS IN NASHVILLE CENTER ON INDUSTRY CHALLENGES, CELEBRATIONS *& More*



Just one week into a new fiscal year and two months after an addition to the state's historic level of transportation program investments, TRBA members met for its annual Mid-Year Meeting for industry updates and information – as well as a little camaraderie and celebration.

Attracting a record 570 attendees, the July 8-10 TRBA Mid-Year Meeting was a timely event, as it was just days after the July 1 start of FY27 and was the first time for association members to meet as a group since May's announcement of a non-recurring $400-million addition from the Tennessee General Assembly to support vital infrastructure improvements.

The welcomed General Assembly funding boosts the state's road and bridge maintenance program by $50 million; allocates $150 million in additional Bridge Preservation Program funding; and provides $200 million to accelerate capacity-adding projects in Tennessee's 10-year Plan.

The 2026 TRBA Mid-Year Meeting's opening General Session on Wednesday, in addition to its traditional divisional meetings, provided an update from TDOT as well as insight on how the state's roadbuilding industry is strengthening its workforce efforts to meet Tennessee's infrastructure needs.

General Session



Following a welcome to Downtown Nashville and the association's largest event of the year, 2026 TRBA President Jeremy Mitchell, of BELL & Associates Construction LLC, introduced the three-day conference's opening speaker, which was Rotunda Public Affairs Founder/CEO & President Chris Burger to provide an update on Go Build Tennessee.

Rotunda Public Affairs is a full-service firm in Nashville and Washington, D.C., that works with public affairs campaigns, communications, government relations, stakeholder engagement and event management. However, Burger's Mid-Year Meeting presentation centered on Go Build Tennessee – a public awareness organization that connects students and career changers with training programs and career paths across the state of Tennessee. TRBA is a founding member of Go Build Tennessee.





Launched by former Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam in 2016, Go Build Tennessee is a statewide initiative and nonprofit organization designed to address the shortage of skilled construction workers by encouraging young people to enter the trades. Burger talked about the range of challenges about building and training Tennessee's workforce as well as provided statistics – both positive and negative – on the obstacles and opportunities Go Build Tennessee is having. Included in those statistics were:

- Only 16% of Gen Z parents believe a four-year degree guarantees long-term job security (a Gen Z is someone currently between the ages of 14 and 29)
- Only 7% of Gen Z parents say they prefer their child to pursue a trade/vocational program
- Nearly 40% of parents say they'd actively encourage a vocational path if it meant more artificial intelligence (AI) resilience

Burger spoke about Go Build Tennessee's efforts in securing earned media to shift perceptions about skilled trades and promote exploration into skilled trades through videos, paid advertising, billboard campaigns and more. To learn more about the program, which has been extended by the state through June 2029, visit www.gobuildtennessee.com.



Staying on the topic of the need for skilled workers and workforce development, 2026 TRBA Second Vice President Nick DiBartolo discussed a program that TRBA and his company, Rogers Group, are partnering in with other education organizations.

DiBartolo, who serves as Rogers Group's Area Vice President of Construction, spoke about the state's opportunity and challenges when it comes to "Building Tennessee's Future Infrastructure Workforce." Stating the challenges and timing of his presentation, DiBartolo spoke on "The Reality" that most students have never visited a construction jobsite or operated equipment and don't know about construction careers or the earning potential of working in the industry. Joining TRBA and Rogers Group in this effort are Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) Nashville, Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) and Cane Ridge High School. (See related article on page 24). While the audience's industry members are aware of the current workforce challenges, a national late-summer survey of more than 1,800 contractors provided further proof for the workforce concerns, as 87% of companies surveyed said to have openings for hourly craft positions. DiBartolo was joined in the session by MNPS's Adam Brewer, Cane Ridge H.S.'s Denise King and TCAT-Nashville's Crystal Hunter.

The General Session switched gears from efforts to find workers to that of doing the work, as TDOT's Gwen Whittaker provided an update on several TDOT construction issues.

Whittaker, who was appointed TDOT Director of Construction in 2025, spoke on a range of topics – from the Department's new 2026 Standard Specifications and the DOT's move to a cloud-based electronic bidding platform, to alternative delivery provisions, upcoming meetings, updates on the DBE and Buy America programs and more.

A former TRBA Scholarship recipient, Whittaker is a Tennessee Tech University alumna. She joined TDOT in its Engineering-in-Training Program, and after working in local government for a while returned to the Department in 2003. Whittaker worked in Regional Operations and the Construction Division prior to being appointed Director of Construction.

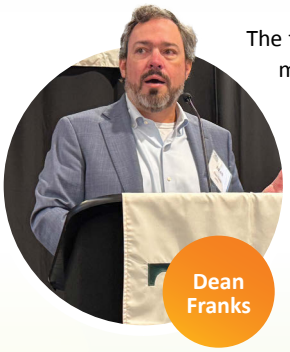
Following the workforce and TDOT sessions, TRBA members attended their respective Aggregate, Asphalt, Bridge & Concrete, Grading and Specialty division meetings.

The opening day's events concluded with an evening reception.

General Membership Breakfast & Meeting

Thursday's full day of activities began with the General Membership Breakfast and Meeting. Highlighting the Mid-Year Meeting's second-day general session were federal transportation updates, conversations with state legislators and TDOT leaders, award announcements and more.

In addition to welcoming attendees and introducing the morning's first speaker, Mitchell provided a quick endorsement for voting "yes" on Amendment 2 in November's election. One of three proposed constitutional amendments on the ballot, a "yes vote" on Amendment 2 would prohibit or ban Tennessee from adopting a state property tax.


Dean Franks

The first of four guest presenters for the morning session was American Road & Transportation Builders Association's (ARTBA) Dean Franks. A 20-year ARTBA veteran who has served as its Senior Vice President of Congressional Relations since 2010, Franks provided a legislative and economic update as well as detailed ongoing efforts in reauthorization of the federal highway transportation bill.

In addition to looking at what the current federal transportation program, the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA), which was set to expire September 30, has meant to the country in way of surface transportation projects and funding, Franks provided a look at some of what IIJA has meant for Tennessee since going into effect in FY 2021:

- 3,185 in new federal-aid commitments
- $5.6 billion in committed federal-aid highway funds (with $3.8 billion reimbursed in work performed)
- $390 million in 12 grants for road/bridge improvements
- $444.3 million in federal transit funds (since FY22)

Franks further showed IIJA's impact on Tennessee by providing a breakdown per county of the number of projects being funded, which transitioned his presentation on the nation's next transportation bill.

As detailed in the May-June 2026 *Tennessee Road Builder* ("BUILD 250 Proposal Packs a lot into Next Transportation Bill"), the U.S. House Transportation & Infrastructure (T&I) Committee's proposal for the next transportation program was unveiled in May. "Building Unrivaled Infrastructure & Long-Term Development for America's 250th Act (BUILD 250) is the $580-billion, 5-year program proposal to fund the nation's transportation program from FY27-FY31. Along with talking about the estimated $7.2 billion Tennessee would receive under BUILD 250, Franks talked about "The Great Unknowns" regarding the on-time passage of the next federal transportation bill – which he listed as including: "search for revenue," "bipartisanship," the "Trump factor" and "election politics."


Sen. Becky Duncan Massey

The focus of Thursday's Membership Meeting turned from federal transportation issues to those at the state level, as the next two presentations featured conversations with Tennessee legislative and DOT leaders.

The chairs of the Tennessee House and Senate Transportation committees sat down with TRBA's Executive Vice President Kent Starwalt to discuss updates on state transportation issues. Introduced as both being champions and advocates for highway and bridge funding, Sen. Becky Duncan Massey and Rep. Dan Howell provided insight on a range of topics from transportation funding, work zone safety and their legislative priorities in the next legislative session.


Rep. Dan Howell

For the next session, Starwalt made his way from moderating the session with Sen. Duncan Massey and Rep. Howell to being a part of a panel discussion with TDOT Commissioner Will Reid. Moderated by TDOT Bureau Chief of Communications and Legislative Affairs Cary Martin, Commissioner Reid and Starwalt conversed on the topics of funding, economic development, workforce development and the partnership between TDOT and TRBA.

TDOT Commissioner Reid didn't have to go far following his presentation with Starwalt, as he remained on stage to accept an honor that symbolizes the state's efforts to provide a quality road system.


Will Reid


Cary Martin

Perpetual Pavement Award

Another year, and another award denoting Tennessee's quality asphalt roads and the long-lasting service of perpetual pavement.

Since 2001, when the Asphalt Pavement Alliance (APA) began recognizing the long-lasting asphalt roads on North America's state and local road systems, it seems as if Tennessee has become a regular – almost annual – stop. That was proven again, as TDOT was presented with its 21st APA Perpetual Pavement Award – the most of any transportation agency in the U.S. and Canada.

APA is a coalition of the National Asphalt Pavement Association, Asphalt Institute and State Asphalt Pavement Association. The Perpetual Pavement Awards honor state and local agencies for long-life asphalt roads demonstrating outstanding design, quality construction and exceptional durability.

Tennessee's most recent Perpetual Pavement Award is for a section of State Route 53 from linear mile (LM) 0.24 to LM 2.46 in Smith County. Constructed in 1981, this 2.2-mile stretch was recognized in 2025 by APA in its Perpetual Pavement Awards' By Performance Category – which denotes pavement being at least 35 years old and having never experienced structural failure and maintaining an average interval of at least 13 years between resurfacings.

The TDOT Region 3 roadway carries approximately 2,500 vehicles per day and has served more than 136,000 equivalent single-axle loads (ESAL) since its construction. The pavement has required only two resurfacing treatments in 45+ years of use and has experienced no structural failures or drainage issues.

TDOT was one of 13 agencies recognized with a 2025 Perpetual Pavements Award and S.R. 53 was one of 11 pavements recognized in the By Performance Category.

Accepting the award on behalf of TDOT was Commissioner Reid.

Commissioner's Quality Awards

From the honoring of long-time quality roadways in Tennessee to recognition of recent quality work in the state, TDOT Director of Construction Gwen Whittaker joined Commissioner Reid in helping celebrate and announce the Commissioner's Quality Awards for the 2025 construction season.


Gwen Whittaker

With the influx in recent years of alternate-delivery project methods by TDOT, a new category has been created. Joining the honoring of Small Contract Category – for projects costing below $10 million – and Large Contract Category – for projects more than $10 million – award winners, was the addition this year of the Alternate Delivery Contract Category.

Like past years, an all-encompassing criterion was used in determining the winning projects and contractors:

- Pavement & bridge smoothness
- On-time completion
- Motorist & worker safety
- Environmental treatment
- Acceptance & performance testing
- Being within budget
- DBE, Prompt Pay & Certified Payroll submittals
- Difficulty & construction challenges

Each TDOT Region could submit qualifying projects to vie for the Commissioner's Top-Quality Awards. Here are the finalists and overall winner in each category:

Small Contract Category

Finalists

Region 1 – Summers-Taylor Inc. for the emergency spot repairs of 11 sites on U.S. Route 19 West (S.R. 36) from S.R. 352 to the North Carolina state line in Unicoi County.

Region 2 – Wright Brothers Construction Co. Inc. for construction of a concrete I-beam bridge on S.R. 68 over Brush Creek, including grading, drainage and paving, in Polk County.

Region 3 – Dement Construction Co. LLC for construction of a concrete Bulb-Tee beam bridge and box bridge, including grading, drainage and paving, on a state industrial access (SIA) route serving Motivation Drive in Lawrence County.

Region 4 – Ford Construction Co. for construction of turn lanes on U.S. 51 (S.R. 3) at Greenfield Drive/North Morgan Street for SIA support serving Williams Sausage Co. Inc. Headquarters in Obion County.

Winner

Region 1 – Summers-Taylor Inc.


Summers-Taylor Inc.

Large Contract Category

Finalists

Region 1 – Baker's Construction Services Inc. for emergency spot repairs and reconstruction on U.S. 321 (S.R. 67) to the North Carolina state line in Carter and Johnson counties.

Region 2 – Summers-Taylor Inc. for construction of a concrete box beam bridge, retaining walls, signals and paving, including grading and drainage work, on S.R. 60 from the four-lane north of Interstate 75 to S.R. 306 in Bradley County.

Region 3 – Civil Constructors LLC for construction of two concrete Bulb-Tee beam bridges, signals and paving, including grading and drainage work, on S.R. 266 (Jefferson Pike) from S.R. 102 (Nissan Drive) to east of I-840 in Rutherford County.

Region 4 – BELL & Associates Construction LLC for the interchange modification on I-55 at Crump Boulevard, including grading, drainage and construction of steel bridges, retaining walls, ITS, signals and paving in Shelby County.

Winner
Region 4 – BELL & Associates Construction LLC

Alternate Delivery Category Finalists
Kiewit Infrastructure South Co. for the emergency bridge replacements over the Nolichucky River (S.R. 81 and S.R. 107) in Greene and Washington counties



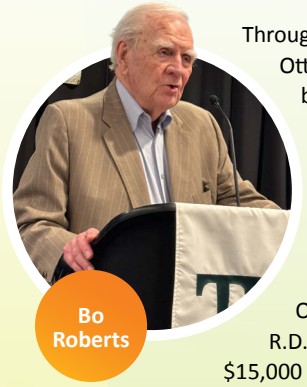
Kiewit Infrastructure South Co. for the grading, drainage and paving on S.R. 468 from near Fredonia Road to S.R. 222 (Project Blue Oval) in Haywood County.

Ford Construction Co. for the reconstruction and widening of S.R. 222 (Project Blue Oval) in Haywood County

Winner
Kiewit Infrastructure South Co. for the emergency bridge replacements in Greene and Washington counties

Ollie Otter Update

The morning meeting's final speaker was Bo Roberts, who provided an update on the Tennessee-based, nationally known Ollie Otter Child Safety Foundation. The Ollie Otter Program, which TRBA is a founding sponsor, focuses on child passenger seatbelt safety and injury prevention.



Throughout its 20-year existence, the Ollie Otter Child Seat Safety Foundation has been supported by TRBA members' financial assistance. This financial support helped inspire the creation of Ollie's Den of Honor, which recognizes those TRBA members who have donated $10,000 or more to the Ollie Otter Child Safety Foundation. Joining Ollie's Den of Honor is Pikeville-based R.D. Construction LLC, which has donated $15,000 toward Ollie's work.

Since 2007, the Ollie Otter Seat Belt & Booster Seat Safety Program has visited all 95 Tennessee counties and regularly appeared at more than 350 school presentations and community events annually. During that time, Ollie has handed out more than 1.3 million high fives across Tennessee in promoting child seat safety.

In celebration of Ollie Otter's 20 years, Roberts talked about the upcoming celebration on September 24 and an opportunity to support "The Ollie Otter Story" by becoming a member of the Ollie Otter Booster Club.

Spouses' Breakfast Meeting

Concurrently held during Thursday's General Membership Breakfast & Meeting was an opportunity for TRBA members' spouses to meet and discuss association and industry activities and more.

Leah Mitchell, wife of 2026 TRBA President Jeremy Mitchell, led the meeting by welcoming attendees to the Spouses' Breakfast and introducing Heather Little, wife of current TRBA First Vice President & Treasurer Kevin Little, to provide the invocation.

Following breakfast and before providing several announcements, Leah Mitchell promoted the opportunity to become members in the TRBA Auxiliary. "The dues are $30 annually," she said, "and those funds are used to give civil engineering scholarships throughout the state of Tennessee."

In addition to supporting the TRBA Scholarship Program, the association's Auxiliary also funds internships for the Ollie Otter Child Safety Foundation, which was started 20 years ago by then-TRBA Auxiliary President Carol Coleman. Two decades later, the Ollie Otter Foundation is renowned throughout Tennessee and 11 states for its work and safety message – which spouses had the opportunity to learn more about.

The Spouses' Breakfast concluded with games and prizes; announcements on afternoon events as well as coming events (see page 19); and a reminder that passports are required to attend the 2027 TRBA Annual Meeting and that wearing camouflage is not allowed in Barbados. So, passport – yes; camouflage – no.

The action-packed morning meetings segued into an activities-filled afternoon, as Mid-Year Meeting attendees had their choice of perfecting their aim in golf and shooting clay competitions as well as at a group Popstroke event. Or, they could enjoy the sites of Downtown Nashville or accommodations of the Renaissance Nashville Hotel.

The first 18 holes and practice round of the Mid-Year Meeting's traditional golf and shooting clay competitions were held, respectively, at the Gaylord Springs Golf Links and Tennessee Clay Target Complex. The Popstroke & Lunch event was held at the recently opened mini-golf venue in Nashville. Nashville features the nation's largest Popstroke with three 18-hole mini-golf courses throughout the indoor-outdoor complex. Located in seven states, Popstroke was founded in 2019 and has Tiger Woods and TaylorMade Golf Company among its ownership group.

Following the afternoon of activities, attendees met for the final group event of the Mid-Year Meeting – Thursday's Dinner & PAC Auction.

Dinner & PAC Auction

Mitchell welcomed fellow TRBA members to the evening event and before turning the night's emceeing duties over to Starwalt, the association's 2026 President thanked the Mid-Year Meeting's nearly 80 companies that helped sponsor the year's event (see page 21) and listed upcoming association activities.

Following dinner, Starwalt welcomed members to the 23rd TRBA Tennessee Highway Contractors-Political Action Committee (PAC) Auction and introduced the auctioneers from Ritchason Auctioneers. Their enthusiasm encouraged bidding to reach a record total of $150,000, which benefits the association's and industry's political efforts as well as helped maintain TRBA as one of the state's top lobbying groups in political spending. Items in the silent and live auctions included diamond jewelry; guided quail, boar and coyote hunts; tickets to concerts and sporting events; golf trips and more.

The final day of the 2026 Mid-Year Meeting was highlighted by Friday's final round of the golf tournament. (See competition results on page 20.)

Looking Ahead

2026 Fall TRBA & TDOT Regional Meetings
Region 1 – November 20, 10 a.m. ET
Region 2 – November 19, 1:30 p.m. ET
Region 3 – November 10, 1:30 p.m. CT
Region 4 – November 13, 10 a.m. CT

2027 TQAI
January 26 & 27
Franklin Marriott Cool Springs
Franklin, TN

99th TRBA Annual Meeting
February 16-20, 2027
The Hilton Barbados Resort
Needhams Point, Bridgetown, Barbados

2027 TRBA Day On The Hill
March 9
Nashville



2027 TRBA Mid-Year Meeting
July 14-16
Embassy Suites by Hilton Nashville Downtown
Nashville

100 Year TRBA Anniversary in 2028
March 8-12, 2028
Signia by Hilton Diplomat
Beach Resort, Hollywood, FL

2028 Mid-Year Meeting
July 12-14
Embassy Suites by Hilton Nashville Downtown

Golf

The 2026 TRBA Mid-Year Meeting's golf tournament included 80 golfers competing in Thursday's and Friday's rounds at the Gaylord Springs Golf Links northeast of Nashville. Here are the top three finishing teams in each flight of the 36-hole, foursome team scramble:

Golf Results

First Flight
First place: 115 (59-56) – Zack Bacon, Mike Edwards, Mike Larkin & Roy Rothenberger; **Second place:** 118 (56-62) – Hunter Davis, Ed Everett, Kenneth Garrett & Dylan Vaught; **Third place:** 119 (61-58) – Jake Exline, Don Fletcher, Nick Phelps & Matt Smith

Second Flight
First place: 122 (62-60) – Nate Grida, Michael Harvey, Adam Kusch & Beefy Rogers; **Second place:** 125 (62-63) – Brad Cummings, Jeremy Dickson, Jason Johnson & Kent Starwalt; **Third place:** 126 (64-62) – Josh Coley, Ben Ketelsen, Eli Martin & Chad Rutzinski

Third Flight
First place: 127 (68-59) – Dale Crass, Will Odom, Westley Ramlow & Jeff Stuckey; **Second place:** 130 (67-63) – Taylor Bates, Charles Grote, G. Rollins & Darryl Thompson; **Third place:** 133 (67-66) – Gene Drake, Chuck Huff, Kevin Rieg & Carter Watson

(Editor's note: The TRBA Mid-Year Sporting Clay Event scheduled for Saturday was cancelled due to inclement weather.)





2026 TRBA MID-YEAR MEETING *Sponsors*

"Thanks for everyone for your participation, and I cannot say thank you enough to those who so graciously helped with sponsorships."
– TRBA Executive Vice President Kent Starwalt

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J&D Specialized Equipment Hauling

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Brown & Brown

Spouse's Breakfast
Marsh McLennan Agency

PopStroke Event
Rogers Group Inc.

Thursday Night Reception
Power Equipment Co.

Thursday Dinner Open Bar
Bell & Associates Construction LP

Thursday Dinner
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CLAY SHOOT

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Wilson & Associates PC

Lunch
Scott Insurance

Sporting Clay Carts
Wright Bros. Construction Co. Inc.

Sporting Clay Stations
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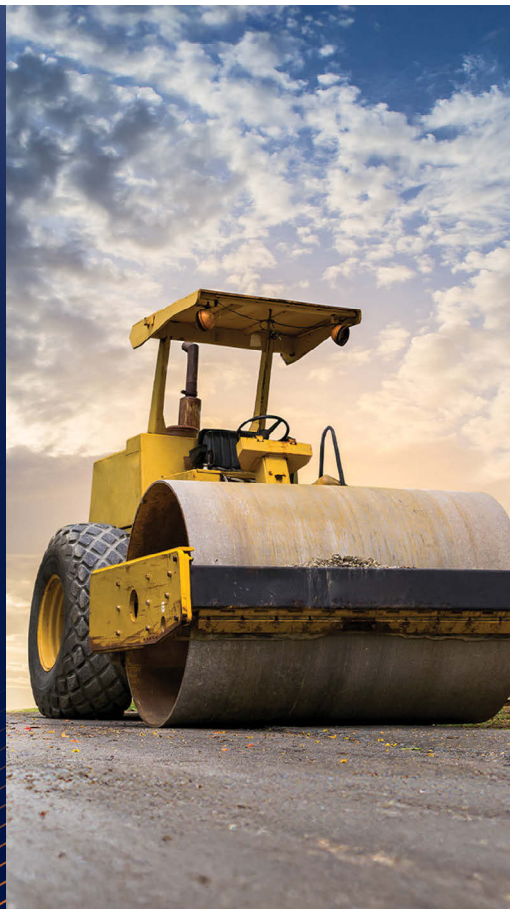
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TRBA, Rogers Group Grow Industry Interest with Metro Nashville Schools, TCAT

Academy Providing Front-row Learning Adjacent State's Largest P3 Project

High school students southeast of Nashville at Cane Ridge High have a front-row seat for the construction of Tennessee's first Public-Private Partnership (P3) project – and the roadbuilding industry is hoping students are watching.

Workforce program partners – which include TRBA and Rogers Group Inc. – hope the up-close vantage point from the Antioch school's campus to the Interstate 24 Southeast Choice Lanes Project gets students out of their seats and into industry careers.

The $9.2 billion I-24 Southeast Choice Lanes Project will add two price-managed lanes in both directions of the 26-mile span of roadway between Downtown Nashville and Murfreesboro. The consortium DriveTN, which will manage project construction and operate the tollway over the next 50 years, was selected in August. Project completion is set for 2035.

Looking at the P3 project and its less than two-mile distance from Cane Ridge H.S., Rogers Group Vice President of Construction, Middle Tennessee, Nick DiBartolo said, "… What better opportunity to introduce kids to the heavy/highway construction business."

It's an opportunity that the Nashville-based construction group, along with TRBA, Cane Ridge H.S., Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) and Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) Nashville are hoping students take toward careers in heavy-equipment operating, construction labor, surveying, utilities, skilled trades and more.

DiBartolo, who is serving as TRBA's 2026 Second Vice President, said data is showing a shortage in Tennessee of approximately 315,000 skilled trades over the next several years – which will impact all facets of the roadbuilding industry. "If we want the workforce five years from now," DiBartolo said, "we have to start developing it today."

Leading a session at July's TRBA Mid-Year Meeting, DiBartolo was joined by fellow workforce partners MNPS-Department of College & Readiness Adam Brewer, Cane Ridge H.S. Academy Coach Denise King and TCAT-Nashville Accreditation & Grants Coordinator Crystal Hunter. Titled

"Building Tennessee's Future Infrastructure Workforce," the session showcased an effort begun 18 months ago to promote industry careers to Middle Tennessee high school students.

DiBartolo mentioned to his fellow TRBA members that with analysts projecting peak labor needs for the I-24 Choice Lanes project being from 1,100 to 2,700 workers, "The challenge isn't a lack of opportunity – it's a lack of awareness."

What if we introduced these careers before graduation?

With many high school students having never visited a construction site, operated equipment or met someone from the roadbuilding industry, a workforce effort patterned from previous TRBA and association members' efforts with TCAT was instituted.

TCATs are a network of technical colleges providing vocational education and training. While Tennessee's technical colleges date back more than 60 years, the state's system of career training was revised in the mid-1990s and in 2013. There are now 22 TCAT campuses and more than 30 satellite locations throughout the state.

TCAT Nashville's Hunter said she met DiBartolo through an Advisory Committee meeting, which she describes as a back-and-forth between industry and academia. "Those meetings are really about what industry needs," she said. "'So, what does industry need and do post-secondary and secondary educators meet the need?'"

Mentioning Rogers Group and DiBartolo as being among the industry's big supporters in detailing what is needed by the industry in way of skills training, Hunter said, "They do a lot of industry involvement around that (construction) pathway, and so just being that technical education provider in the room was how Nick and I got on the same page with (Cane Ridge H.S.'s) Miss King and kind of connecting those dots."

In 2022, TCAT-Knoxville, with the help of area TRBA members, began offering heavy-equipment operating curriculum and training. That relationship grew with the establishment of an apprenticeship program in February 2025 partnering Rogers Group with TCAT-Knoxville to provide related technical instruction (RTI) for participants interested in pursuing careers in heavy-equipment operating, truck driving and construction labor. Seeing early success in the program, Rogers Group and TCAT began talks of expanding the program to other TCAT campuses.

"As we started to replicate the TCAT-Knoxville program with the Nashville TCAT, we started talking about the fact that the largest project in Tennessee (I-24 Southeast Choice Lanes Project) has Cane Ridge High School sitting dead center in the middle of the project," DiBartolo said. Aware that workforce recruiting efforts need to begin earlier – based on the industry's shortage of skilled craftsmen and the reality that career choices are being made by the time students are high school freshmen and sophomores – DiBartolo said the MNPS's Academy Model seemed right for expanding workforce efforts.

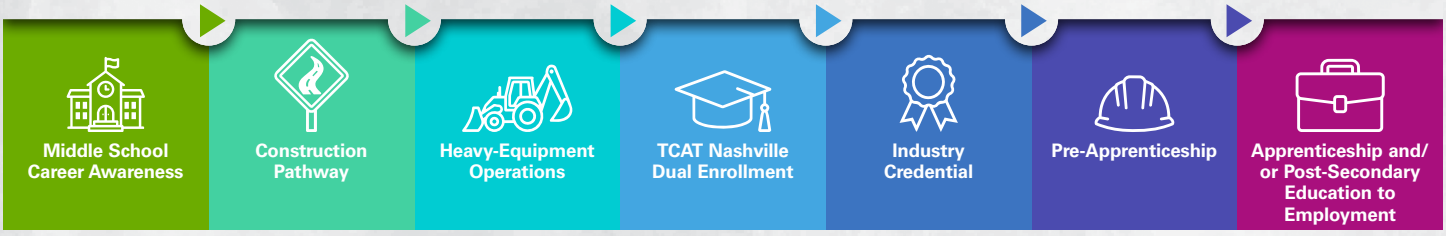
Created in 2005, MNPS's Academy Model centers on career-based learning where students have a range of academies to explore – each focusing on specific career fields. Once they select their academy of study, students receive hands-on learning with opportunities to earn college credits and industry certifications.

As one of those zone academies, Cane Ridge H.S. offers instructional training and preparedness in Architecture and Construction, Health Management, Arts and Communications and Broadcasting. The school's Academy of Architecture and Construction – which has approximately 180 students enrolled in the program – includes construction fundamentals, safety training, blueprint reading, carpentry skills, hands-on projects and industry exposure.

From Education to Employment

METRO NASHVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Academy Model used by Metro Nashville Public Schools includes a "pathway" for students toward careers and industries to build future workforce. This flowchart shows a student's progression from deciding to enter the roadbuilding construction industry to post-education/training to employment:



According to DiBartolo, Cane Ridge H.S. was a strong candidate to partner with because of its already established Academy of Architecture and Construction – which focused on vertical construction. "The construction component had generally focused on residential and commercial," said DiBartolo, adding, "and if there is going to be approximately 1,000 craft people at any one time on this I-24 project, what better opportunity to introduce kids to the heavy-highway construction business than by essentially replicating the structure that is already in place (at Cane Ridge) by working with TCAT?"

Hunter, who has worked with TCAT-Nashville since 2017, agrees. "Initially, the school offered Residential/Commercial Construction, which included some heavy-construction curriculum … So, we're not really changing the curriculum as much as we are expanding it to meet industry needs … The goal is to provide more than just an overview of roadbuilding construction and more of using heavy-equipment and giving them more the terminology and training instead of just the basics."

Hunter added that with the I-24 Southeast Choice Lanes Project providing potential employment opportunities for area residents, "We're looking at it as, these are students in 10th, 11th and 12th grade that over the next three years when they graduate high school are going to have potential employment opportunities right there in their backyard."

Cane Ridge H.S. was awarded a $250,000 Innovative School Models (ISM) grant from the Tennessee Department of Education that allowed its construction curriculum to expand through the hiring of an additional instructor, classroom renovations and purchases of desktop versions of heavy-equipment simulators for student training.

Through his work with Rogers Group and TRBA, DiBartolo has seen positive results from the industry's workforce efforts and believes the partnership among MNPS, TCAT Nashville and the roadbuilding industry could do the same. "There are a number of initiatives going on across the country and across the state to help bring awareness," he said of programs such as Go Build Tennessee and the Be Pro Be Proud truck. Speaking of the latter, DiBartolo said, "Being in that (Be Pro Be Proud) trailer on some of the tour stops, you have a chance to see (the students') eyes light up as they run the simulators – and the engagement – and they realize that there are opportunities out there …"


Nick DiBartolo

Invitation for Industry Insight, Involvement

Seeing both the need and opportunity to grow the roadbuilding industry's workforce, TRBA provided time at the association's biggest in-state event for DiBartolo, MNPS and TCAT representatives to discuss the partnership with the association at the Mid-Year Meeting.

"Anytime we can provide an opportunity at our meetings to highlight or showcase workforce development programs, we're going to do that," said TRBA Executive V.P. Kent Starwalt.

As well as providing an overview of Cane Ridge's Academy, an invitation was given to TRBA members to get involved. "We are always looking for folks who want to join the advisory board as a business partner and provide their insight, feedback and needs," DiBartolo said. "And then hopefully in turn, act on those desires and volunteer their employees …" DiBartolo listed several ways roadbuilders can generate and grow interest in the industry, from guest speaking and providing job shadow opportunities for students and teachers, to offering help with curriculum. He said an example of assisting with curriculum would be "to work with some of the teachers, so they can tailor their teachings toward the industry; like teaching how math is used on the jobsite, or how we look at rock formations and things we do for erosion control …"

Hunter said if contractors want to also take a more active role in preparing the industry's future workforce, "We have TCATs all over Middle Tennessee," adding that every construction company in the region has probably employed at least one TCAT grad. "I would say to (TRBA members) to reach out to the TCAT closest to you and start asking questions around the roadbuilding and construction programs about what they can do to support them," she said. "And then as always, get these programs into high schools. These dual enrollment and dual credit opportunities (between high schools and TCATs) for our high school students are crucial. Not only for career exploration but also career advancement … Also, offering opportunities right out of high school or after they complete certification is giant – to let them see that there are livable wages at the end of that training and encouraging them and giving them the information on the front-end will help high school students decide what the best option is for them."

Another way for industry support is monetarily. "Financially, supporting the program in order for it to grow is critical," DiBartolo said. "Because in order to grow it and get the number of simulators and tools and miscellaneous supplies for the lab practicums is going to need industry support."

DiBartolo repeated the message he shared with TRBA members at the Mid-Year Meeting:

"Every student we expose to our industry becomes a potential operator, technician, foreman, superintendent, estimator, or project manager. If every company here commits to one workforce initiative, the impact across Tennessee could be significant.

"… The biggest lesson from all those efforts is simple: Industry must lead.' Tennessee's transportation program is stronger than ever, but we will not deliver tomorrow's roads, bridges and infrastructure without tomorrow's workforce … If we can connect students to industry earlier, provide training and credentials and create clear pathways to employment, we can build a sustainable workforce pipeline for Tennessee's highway construction industry for decades to come.

"We're not just building roads. We're building the people who will build Tennessee's future."

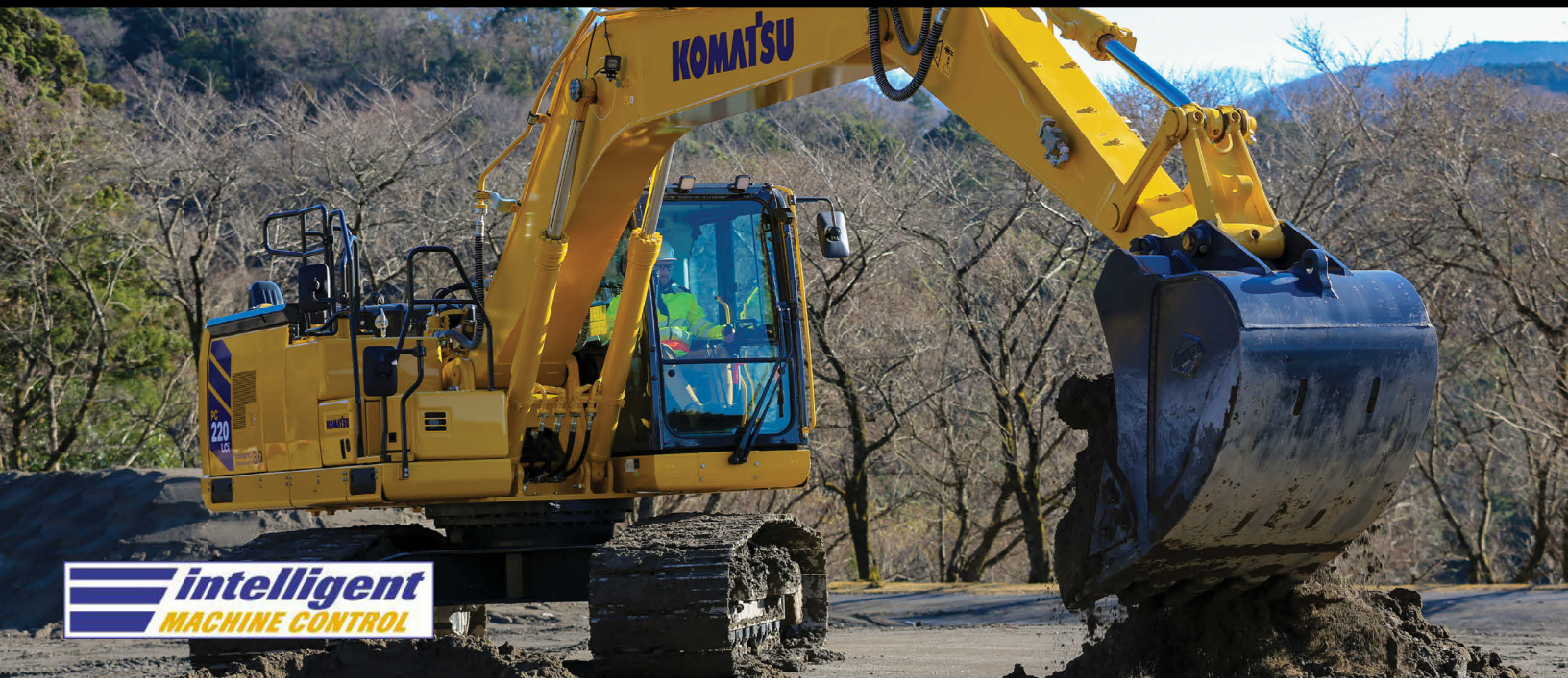
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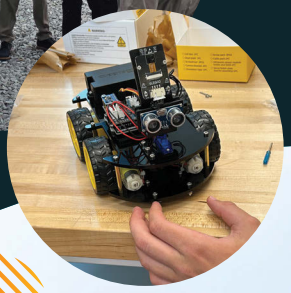
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INNOVATION HIGHLIGHTS PROGRAM'S STRATEGY TO ATTRACT FUTURE INDUSTRY LEADERS

TDOT'S 2026 EVENTS HELD AT TENNESSEE STATE, MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE

When one thinks about the Tennessee Department of Transportation and innovation, they are likely to point to more recent times such as the 2023 Transportation Modernization ACT and creation of its 3-Year Alternative Delivery Plan. However, TDOT's Jessica Starling says the Department's innovative ways go back nearly 25 years prior.

This summer, as in years past, TDOT joined other state DOTs in hosting the National Summer Transportation Institute (NSTI) Program. Started by FHWA in 1993, the NSTI introduces middle school- and high school-age students to careers in the transportation industry. The multi-week programs combine instructional opportunities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and insight into transportation careers.

"TDOT is committed to finding positive, innovative ways to showcase the transportation industry and inspire future talent," said Starling, TDOT's Civil Rights Division Director. "By hosting programs like NSTI, TDOT helps spark interest among students who are exploring potential career paths – many of whom may never have previously considered transportation as an option."



The NSTI is federally funded and held in states throughout the U.S. TDOT's NSTI programs returned in 2026 to the campuses of Tennessee State (TSU), June 15-July 10, and Middle Tennessee State (MTSU), July 6-31. This year, 36 students were enrolled in the program, including 10 of whom were from outside the state. "Through this four-week program, students gain hands on experience with guided projects such as building and programming robots and drones, 3D printing, bridge design and flight simulation, while also benefiting from direct interaction with transportation professionals," said Starling, who has directed TDOT's Civil Division since 2023.

Both the TSU and MTSU programs began with "TDOT Week," which featured personnel from various TDOT divisions and a site trip to one of its regional offices. The opening week concluded with a luncheon and an opportunity for students to engage with TDOT leadership.

While NSTI's success centers on its innovative, hands-on instruction, those same qualities are making competition to be in the program even more challenging – as applications came from not only in-state students but also from Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina and West Virginia. "The program is highly competitive," Starling said. "Each year, TDOT receives approximately 50 applications for 20 available spots (at each university program)."

The selection of participants is based on academic transcripts, submitted essays and letters of recommendation. The essays center on the student's interest in the program and how participating will help further their goals in STEM or transportation-related careers. Letters of recommendation from the school counselor and a computer science, mathematics, pre-engineering or science instructor are also used as deciding factors in selecting participants. "We look for students who demonstrate genuine interest in exploring the transportation field and who show enthusiasm for the opportunities the program provides," Starling added.

An updated curriculum this year increased student enthusiasm even more, according to Starling. "That strategic shift made a noticeable difference," she said. "This year's cohort was one of the strongest we've had. The students were consistently enthusiastic, highly engaged in daily activities and eager to learn. Feedback from instructors echoed this sentiment, noting the students' motivation and curiosity elevated the overall experience and contributed to a more dynamic and productive program environment."

The program's curriculum, however, is just part of the learning process for NSTI participants. With many students spending time away from home for perhaps the first time, the NSTI's residential format provides lessons in building friendships, collaborating with different perspectives, strengthening social skills and more.

"By spending time away from home and living on a college campus, students gain valuable independence and confidence," Starling said. "This experience allows them to learn how to navigate a new environment, manage their daily routines and adapt to increased responsibility. It also exposes them to campus life, helping them envision what attending college could look like and fostering a sense of belonging in a higher education setting."

Though it has served as an NSTI host since 2002, Starling said TDOT personnel are constantly learning and refining the program. "Engaging closely with students allows us to better understand what motivates the next generation; what types of learning experiences resonate most; and how we can continue to modernize our outreach efforts."

Similar to TDOT's innovative efforts in its Construction Division to bring improvement to the state's roads and bridges, Starling hopes innovation can attract tomorrow's leaders to the industry.

"TDOT's NSTI program plays a vital role in preparing the next generation of transportation professionals. By engaging students early and exposing them to real-world STEM and transportation concepts, the program helps cultivate future talent who can carry forward – and in some cases complete – the projects and long-term plans being developed today. This pipeline of skilled, informed, and motivated students is essential to sustaining and advancing Tennessee's roadbuilding industry."









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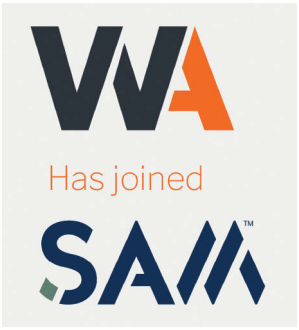
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NEWSMAKERS

Wilson & Associates Acquired by SAM



Wilson & Associates P.C. recently announced it was acquired by **Surveying And Mapping LLC** (SAM), a national geospatial and inspection services company.

The acquisition allows Wilson & Associates (WA), a 54-year-old company based in Franklin, to expand its Geographic Information System (GIS) services in construction/utilities and access additional national resources, personnel and technology. The company will continue serving its clients from its Franklin, Cookeville and Johnson City offices, as well as its established field offices.

"For us, this is about building on what has made WA successful and creating more opportunities for our clients and our people," said company President/CEO **Joey C. Wilson II**, PE, PS. "We have grown tremendously, both in the work we perform and the capabilities we can offer, never losing sight of who we are or how we take care of our clients. Joining SAM gives us the opportunity to continue that growth while opening new doors for our employees and expanding what we can offer our clients."

"WA brings significant experience, strong technical capabilities and long-tenured, trusted relationships in key strategic markets," said SAM President/CEO **Chris Solomon**, RPLS. "By bringing our teams together, we are strengthening our presence in Tennessee and across the Southeast while expanding the expertise and resources available to our clients."

SAM, headquartered in Austin, Texas, delivers an integrated suite of solutions across land and aerial surveying, subsurface utility engineering, construction and asset inspection and digital data management. Employing more than 1,800 professionals, SAM works with investor-owned utilities, transportation agencies, energy providers and other infrastructure owners. For more information, visit https://www.sam.biz/.

TDOT Bridge Replacement Highlighted by AASHTO



The **State Route 107/Sgt. Elbert Kinser Bridge Replacement** project in TDOT Region 1 and Greene County was selected as a regional **2026 America's Transportation Award** recipient by the **American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials** (AASHTO).

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◆Rollbacks

Awarded "Best Use of Technology & Innovation, Medium Project," the East Tennessee bridge replacement project was completed and re-opened to traffic one month ahead of schedule in May 2025 – marking the fastest delivery of a major river crossing in TDOT history.

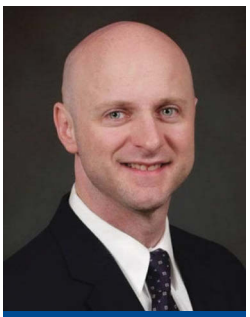
The S.R. 107/Sgt. Elbert Kinser Bridge over the Nolichucky River was destroyed in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene in September 2024 – resulting in a 30-minute detour for travelers and directly affecting the region's economy. Due to water damage, which altered the river's course, traditional construction methods to replace the structure weren't available.

In response, the S.R. 107 Emergency Bridge Replacement project marked TDOT's first Progressive Design Build delivery. Crews mobilized and began working on the $60.4 million project within 72 hours of the disaster – utilizing hydraulic and geotechnical modeling, three-dimensional design technology, digital scheduling platforms and extensive use of precast components.

The S.R. 107 Emergency Bridge Replacement was one of 127 nominated projects by 45 state DOTs in the 2026 America's Transportation Awards. TDOT Commissioner **Will Reid**, P.E., accepted the regional honor at the **Southern Association of State Highway Transportation Officials** (SASHTO) annual conference.

While the S.R. 107 Emergency Bridge Replacement project did not advance from the SASHTO region, 12 projects were selected nationally and are competing for the Grand Prize and People's Choice awards, which will be announced November 15 at the AASHTO Annual Meeting. You can learn more about this year's top projects, visit: https://americastransportationawards.org/.

NSSGA Announces Promotion of Fuqua



Chuck Fuqua

National Stone, Sand & Gravel Association (NSSGA) recently announced the promotion of **Chuck Fuqua** to Senior Vice President of Strategic Communications.

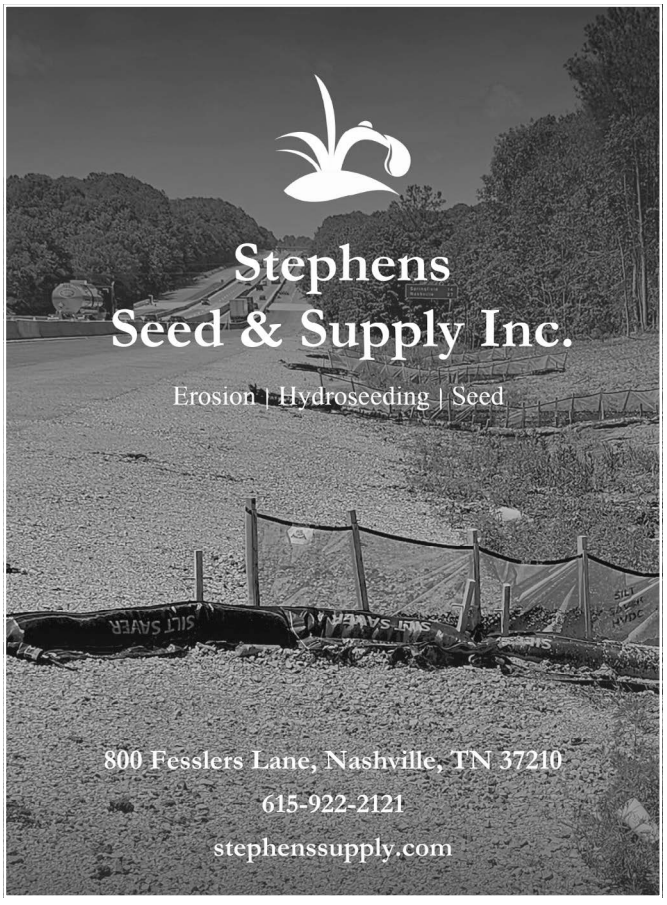
An eight-year associate of the association, Fuqua will oversee NSSGA's public affairs strategy as well as internal communications efforts in a time the aggregates industry is closely involved in the federal transportation program's reauthorization and a new three-year strategic plan.

Prior to NSSGA, Fuqua, a Georgia native, worked 18 years with trade associations. He also gained experience working with the Secretary of Commerce, in the House Press Gallery and in the Media Operations Office at four Republican National Conventions.

"Chuck is a respected and experienced communicator, whose leadership has elevated NSSGA's voice across Washington and throughout the aggregates industry," said NSSGA President & CEO **Michele Stanley**.

NSSGA, headquartered in Alexandria, Va., is the leading advocate for the aggregate industry – as it represents more than 90% of the crushed stone and 70% of the sand and gravel produced annually in the U.S. For more information on NSSGA, visit www.nssga.org.

If you are a TRBA member and have news about your business or company regarding in-state staff changes or honors, and would like it to appear in Tennessee Road Builder*, send the information by email to* editorial@triad-inc.com, or by calling 800-288-7423.





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