

FHWA RETIREES NEWSLETTER

3RD EDITION

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Greetings!

We hope you are safe and healthy at this time of COVID-19, the worldwide pandemic. This edition was planned to focus on a report on a successful late April Boise

reunion. As you were notified, the reunion had to be cancelled and Steve Moreno provides a full report below.

Report by Lyle Renz, Board Chair

Hello Everyone. Greetings from the Board! We are really sorry the Coronavirus Covid-19 Pandemic caused us to have to cancel the Boise FHWA Retirees Reunion this year. Plans are being made for it to be held in 2021. The Boise Host Committee is willing to go through the considerable effort of making all the preparations again. The group planning to hold the reunion in Lexington Kentucky in 2021 is also willing to delay their schedule by a year and reschedule it for 2022. We are all anxious to get back to renewing our old friendships, making new ones, and seeing the sights in the Boise and Lexington

areas. Many thanks are due for both host committees.

You will see in this newsletter that we now have an FHWA Retirees Reunion Website. Special Thanks Go to the Committee of George Ostensen, Joyce Curtis, and Rita Steinke for recommending it as a way to improve communications for our retiree group. Also special thanks to Al Steger for volunteering to develop the website for us and to be the webmaster. Please give it a try, I think you'll like it.

STAY SAFE!
Lyle Renz

Boise 2020 vs Covid 19 WOW!

Report by Steve Moreno

Recently a friend asked, “So how’d that national FHWA Retiree Reunion event turn out?” It was just a year ago we signed the contract with the Riverside Hotel in Boise, Idaho. In the months preceding the 2019 Chicago Reunion, our hosting team discussed the strategic plan of having a reunion in Boise. With lots of coffee, and some arm twisting, we reached the conclusion that we would indeed host the event. **WOW!**

Now that the strategic decision was made, we needed to approach the tactical aspects of what constitutes a fun event in Boise, ID. We scoured the nation’s colleges to avoid graduation dates and determined the last week of April was a perfect combination of decent weather and limited scheduling conflicts.

The question became, “How can we make the visitor experience different than previous years?” All the pieces were coming together nicely, and we were feeling pretty upbeat about hosting. We began to receive registrations. Our next team action was the tasting party at the hotel. **WOW!** We are on our way.

Then **COVID -19** became newsworthy. Retirees were the first group identified as being particularly at high risk to the infection. As the calendar progressed it became evident that this wasn’t a two-week news event.

Soon we began to re-examine the Riverside Hotel cancellation clauses. Cancellation penalties are tied to the calendar and based on how close to the event the cancellation occurs. Two time-frames were looming, 60 days and 30 days. Penalty provisions were going to cost between \$10-\$15,000. At this point no government agency had announced recommendations regarding travel or sheltering in place. The ever-conservative host team thought it was time for a face-to-face with the hotel staff. A few days prior, the hotel staff was advised to enforce cancellation penalties against all scheduled potential events. **WOW! RISKY BUSINESS!**

We told the hotel we really didn’t want to cancel but rather reschedule to Spring 2021. We advised we’d take the matter up with our Executive Board. We were informed by the Executive Board that Team Kentucky had already signed an agreement with their host hotel. Ultimately the Executive Board gave us the approval to proceed into 2021. Meanwhile the government agencies issued stronger recommendations to stay home and avoid travel. **WOW!** Saved by the government. The hotel recognized events were way beyond our control.

What happened the scheduled week of the event?

Here in Boise, Monday, the planned check-in day, began with a light drizzle that concluded early in the afternoon. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday

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when all the events had been scheduled we had perfect, cloudless days with low humidity and 80 plus degrees temperatures. Go-home Friday wasn't quite so nice, but hey, Host Team Boise was off the hook.

So, where are we?

We've been keeping our head down to see what happens in the Covid-19 emergency. Idaho is in stage two of a reopening plan. What if the virus spikes?

We have yet to sign a 2021 contract with the hotel. We have alerted various vendors of our 2021

intentions. We are considering asking 2021 retirees in advance of the 60-day penalty clauses to let us know if they intend to come to Boise. Like some of our other ideas this is way different from previous reunions. So, our story ends in much like a TV series season finale, teasing for the next season. **WOW!**

The bottom line, if it proves feasible, the host committee and the Retiree Executive Committee are ready to give it another try next year. Stay tuned!

Guest article by Tom Everett, FHWA Executive Director

FHWA Retirees and Friends,

Our hearts go out to everyone affected by the COVID-19 public health emergency. This unprecedented global event presents challenging times for the Nation and the transportation community. To all who have expressed concern for the health and well-being of the FHWA employees, thank you for caring. Family is one of FHWA's core values. This core value – where we support, care about, listen to, and respond to employees and their family needs – has helped FHWA get through difficult times in the past, and it will continue to guide us during the current pandemic.

Under the leadership of Secretary Elaine L. Chao and Administrator Nicole R. Nason, FHWA continues to exemplify the Agency's long-standing traditions of prioritizing safety, people and partnerships with State, local, and tribal governments to serve our Nation's transportation needs. FHWA has leveraged the talents of its workforce to ensure essential projects and goods and services have continued to move during the COVID-19 public health emergency in a safe and efficient manner. Just a few of many examples of FHWA's impressive results while working in an almost all-virtual environment include:

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- FHWA's work with Congress to obtain legislative clarification regarding States' authority to issue special permits or overweight vehicles and loads on the Interstate when the President declares a national emergency or major disaster under the Stafford Act.
- FHWA's guidance and flexibility for States to take a proactive risk-based approach to bridge and tunnel inspections to support their annual compliance determination recognizing the need to balance public safety and the health and safety of the transportation workforce.
- FHWA's Notice of Enforcement Discretion allowing States to temporarily permit the use of food trucks at Interstate rest areas to serve commercial truck drivers. This flexibility provides additional nourishment options for commercial drivers who work tirelessly to ensure the safe and timely delivery of critical medical supplies, food, and other essential goods to urban and rural communities during an extraordinary time when many traditional eateries along Interstate exits are closed or have limited serving capacities.
- FHWA held its first-ever virtual cost estimating review (CER) workshop for a \$1 billion major project, which includes the construction of new

railroad main tracks, two new rail flyover bridges, and a new rail/highway grade separation. This virtual multi-day CER workshop included approximately 40 participants from FHWA, FTA, and State highway and rail organizations.

I am so proud of the men and women of FHWA who have found remarkable ways to persevere through these unparalleled times. I continue to be in awe of their creativity, resilience, and determination. I believe it is especially important to communicate with and check in on the well-being of FHWA employees during these ever-evolving times. The entire FHWA Leadership Team continues to use technology and other means to connect to FHWA employees across the country. In closing, I would like to offer a message of friendship, service, and optimism. Since many readers of this newsletter have spent their careers taking care of others – in both professional and personal capacities – please take some time to take care of yourself, and that includes both your physical and mental health. You are a valued part of our FHWA family, and we are just one phone or video call, email, text, or an old-fashioned penned letter away.

Stay safe, and I wish you and yours continued good health.

Tom Everett
FHWA Executive Director

FHWA Retirees Unveils New Website

You asked for it. Now, it's a reality!

During the 2019 *FHWA Retirees* reunion in Chicago, the Executive Board created a subgroup to explore ways to improve overall communication with existing and future retirees to generate more interest and increase participation in our reunions. In late June, an email blast announced an on-line survey to generate ideas to help guide the Board with that task. Over 200 responses to the survey were received. A *FHWA Retirees* website was the number one response to the question: What suggestions do you have for the *FHWA Retirees* group to improve communications among retirees?

The original plan was to have a website ready to unveil at the 2020 reunion in Boise, but that plan was upended by the corona pandemic. Nevertheless, the website development continued on-schedule. We are happy to announce that the new *FHWA Retirees* website is now ready for prime time.

Here is what you will find when you go to fhwa-retirees.org/ On the homepage will be much the same information that you are reading in this newsletter. But you will be able to access it whenever you want, and you won't have to remember where you filed the newsletter or the last email. You will also find current information on all upcoming

reunions. As the reunions get closer, you will also find downloadable registration materials.

In the **About Us** section, you will find information about who we are, what we do, who is eligible, our board members and a recently updated document describing the *FHWA Retirees* history and policies. You will also find copies of all current and past **Newsletters**, and **Photo Albums** for every reunion since our founding in 1988. There is also a **Contact Us** link for easily communicating with the Board. Finally, there is a **Member Area** which includes a **Forum** where you will be able to find friends and share stories, pictures, ideas, and more. You will even be able to upload a short video. Our hope is that you will use this section to stay connected to the FHWA family.

A word about privacy. While the website will be available to the general public, personal information such as names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and things you add to the **Forum**, will be password protected and only be available to members. To become a member, you will have to sign-up by using the **Log-in** link on the website. After you are approved, you will have access to these restricted areas. (There is also a **Board Area** that only the Executive Board can access.)

As you review the website, please send us your feedback. We would love to hear from you. Send comments to Al Steger at alan.steger@gmail.com.

25th Anniversary of the Oklahoma Bombing

Most of us can probably remember where we were on April 19, 1995 when word circulated throughout the FHWA organization that there had been a bombing in Oklahoma City at a federal building. Soon we learned that the FHWA Division office suffered major damage with many casualties and deaths. Eleven of the 168 victims were employed in the Division office. They were:

- Lucio Aleman Jr.
- Mark Bolte

- Michael Carrillo
- Larry Jones
- James Martin
- Ronata Newberry-Woodbridge,
- Jerry Parker
- Michelle Reeder
- Rick Tomlin
- Johnny Wade
- John Youngblood

As we cope with the COVID-19 crisis let us take a moment and remember our fallen comrades.

Current Retiree Leadership

The current board reflects several changes made in Chicago.

Members of the board today are: Lyle Renz, Chair; Dale Wilken, past chair; George Ostensen, who presides at the business

meeting; Phil Miller, treasurer; Joyce Curtis; Kevin Heanue; Steve Moreno; and Rita Steinke. In addition Gary Hamby is the mailing coordinator and Al Steger is the website coordinator.

Retiree Humor

George Ostensen has presided at the reunion's annual business meeting for many years with interludes of retiree humor. In furtherance of the tradition the following humor from George and a number of other FHWA retirees is offered:

- Retirement isn't the end of the road, but just a turn in the road.

- What do you call a person who is happy on Mondays? Retired!
- An engineer walks up to a bar with a slab of asphalt under his arm and says: "A beer please, and one for the road."
- Why are there so many old people in church? They're cramming for the final exam.

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- Covid-19 advice: What is the best way to avoid touching your face? A glass of wine in each hand.
- For the Florida crowd - among retirees what constitutes formal attire? Tied shoes.
- Three retirees, each with a hearing loss, were playing golf. One remarked to the other, "Windy isn't it?" "No," the second man replied, "it's Thursday." And the third man chimed in, "I'm thirsty too, let's go get a beer."
- A senior citizen was driving down the freeway and his cell phone rang. Answering, he heard his wife's voice warning him, "Herman, I just heard on the news that there's a car going the wrong way on I 77. Please be careful!" "Hell" said Herman, "Its not just one car. It's hundreds of 'em!"

Improving FHWA Retiree Outreach

In future issues we hope to include short summaries of interesting or unusual things retirees are doing and photos. We welcome other suggestions. Let us hear from you.

To get started we welcome your

offerings in the way of things to share with fellow retirees in future editions of this newsletter. Send an email to Kevin Heanue kheanue@comcast.net and/or Lyle Renz renzvl@comcast.net with your submission.

Legislation

We hoped to provide an update on highway legislation, but once again there is no clear direction at this time. The House, Senate, and White House are all heading in different directions and no one is seeking additional

revenues. The COVID-19 crisis has totally consumed the House and the Senate. It looks like we will have to wait until after the November election for legislation impacting transportation.

Keep Your Contact Information Current

If you have moved and changed address or have a new email address or if you received this newsletter from a friend and want to get on the email list please let us know. Send an email to fhwaretires@gmail.com with the following information: name, spouse's name (if applicable), street address, telephone number, and email

address.

To receive **FHWA News** or make a change in your contact information, please provide your name and street address to the Managing Editor Ingrid Perkins. Her address is Ingrid.Perkins@dot.gov.

Hope to see you in Boise next year!

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