

# FHWA RETIREES NEWSLETTER

8TH EDITION

JULY 2022

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## FHWA Retiree Reunions Make a Comeback

After three years of uncertainty due to the COVID, FHWA Retirees held a very successful reunion in Lexington, Kentucky from May 17 to May 20, 2022. The last reunion was held in 2019 in Schaumburg/Chicago, Illinois. A 2020 reunion scheduled for Boise, Idaho, that was about ready to go, had to be canceled when the virus struck. A 2021 reunion scheduled for Lexington, Kentucky met the same fate. This year a decision was made to try again for Lexington based on a great program and also on financial considerations. The bottom line, financially, is that due to hard bargaining by our host teams in Boise and Lexington, we are looking forward to a 2023 reunion in a place to be determined.

With more money in the bank than we had when we left Schaumburg, the Board is exploring many options for our next reunion. We are not quite ready for a "Save the Date" notice, but we left Lexington with a unanimous resolve from those in attendance to move ahead and continue the reunion tradition next year.

Evan Wisniewski, the lead Lexington host, provided the following account, which captures the program, traditions and spirit of the reunion. The board and all the attendees are deeply appreciative of the dedication and persistence of Evan and his wife Susan in organizing and carrying to fruition an outstanding reunion.

## Kentucky Reflections – 2022 Evan Wisniewski

As I look back on the FHWA Retirees Reunion held in Lexington, two thoughts come to mind. First, what a long, strange journey this has been over the past five years from when I first suggested a reunion be held in Kentucky. We weathered two reunion cancellations (Boise and Lexington) caused by all the COVID craziness that aggravated personnel issues in the hospitality industry and made scheduling

events difficult. Second, when the FHWA Retirees Reunion board decided the reunion would be held as scheduled in Lexington, who would show up? The truth is we missed you! We had 62 registered for the event and we carried on!

On Tuesday, May 17, early arrivals got to Lexington's Marriott Griffin Gate Spa and Resort. They helped our hosts set up registration and

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arrange the hospitality room with a great selection of beer and wine with a complement of delicious finger foods to boot.

On Wednesday, 16 adventurous golfers headed to the Canewood Golf Course in Georgetown. The challenging, tight layout has significant character and was voted the top course in Scott County in 2021. The scramble format was used with the winning team finishing at -6. The winning team was Nick Graf, Michael Halladay, Tom Herritt and Evan Wisniewski besting the second place finishers George and Peggy Ostensen and Joyce and Bob Curtis who finished at -3. Despite a protest lodged against the winning team for having prior course knowledge (it was my home course), the protest was denied by Commissioner Wisniewski. Our lunch was held at a historic restaurant built in 1790.

Wednesday afternoon, back in the hospitality room, the amazing puzzle crew began seeking to complete a difficult 1,000-piece puzzle before Friday evening. JoAnn Cheatham, Judy Carmichael and Edna Gorman led the crew. This was my first reunion where I did not place a single piece in the puzzle.

With the rest of the attendees arriving in Lexington, we could look forward to the welcoming reception. The hors d'oeuvres featured mini Kentucky hot browns, Bang Bang Chicken and Cobb Shakers.

On Thursday, May 19, we toured Keeneland Race Track and the Buffalo Trace Distillery. We learned that Keeneland is a National Historic

Landmark and open to the public every day. The track is home to spectacular Thoroughbred racing twice a year and the world's largest Thoroughbred auction house four times a year. We were able to watch the morning workouts of Thoroughbreds prepping for races. We learned about the history of Keeneland and got an overview of operations for racing and sales.

Then we headed to Frankfort on US 60, which crosses through some of the most beautiful horse farms in the Bluegrass Region. After we reached the Buffalo Trace Distillery, we enjoyed a box lunch. There we visited a 130-year-old brick warehouse that contained 24,000 barrels of aging bourbon, a small bottling line used for Blanton's Bourbon and the rare brand vault. At the end of the tour, we had a great tasting experience. We were able to sample Wheatley Vodka, Buffalo Trace, Blanton's, Eagle Rare, Bourbon Cream and Freddie's Root Bear. To top it off, there was a bourbon ball for dessert. A visit to the gift shop proved expensive (how many bottles, Carmichael?).

Tradition was served Friday morning with the always exciting business meeting hosted by George Ostensen. I gave a short reflection on how the twists and turns of the last several years were finally behind us. We had a surprise visit from the Mayor of Lexington, Linda Gorton. Mayor Gorton is a personal friend of Jim and JoAnn Cheatham. Todd Jeter, Kentucky Division Administrator, gave us a brief overview of new legislation and programs. This was no small task

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since the abbreviated version had to be attorney approved. Lyle Renz recognized Dale Wilken for his dedication to the FHWA Retirees Reunion over the years and also presented a report on where future FHWA Retirees Reunions may be. Although the Griffin Gate offered, it will not be in Kentucky! We also reflected on those from the FHWA family who are no longer with us. They are gone but not forgotten. Sally Myers reported on the annual raffle and silent auction. A significant amount was raised to help offset any unforeseen costs in Lexington or future reunions. The meeting was adjourned at about 11 a.m.

Friday afternoon was free and some visited Mary Todd Lincoln's house while a few trekked south to the Shaker Village. Me? I went to lunch and home for a bit.

At 6:30 we met for the closing family dinner. Once again the Marriott came through with excellent service and delicious food. Our choices of steak, chicken and pasta were outstanding. I loved the Kentucky Butter Cake with bourbon glaze for dessert. Music was enjoyed through the evening.

The puzzlers had not completed their task! The hospitality room reopened

after dinner to the task at hand. About two hours later at 11 p.m.—success! Mission accomplished; puzzle complete.

Final thoughts. I value the opportunity to reconnect with friends and colleagues I have known, some of them for 50 years like John Bowers, Roger Larson and Henry Grothaus. Others I met for the first time like Dane Ismart and Fred Ducca. In my opinion, we share a love and respect for our past public service and cherish others who feel similarly. We missed YOU! I hope to see you at our next reunion wherever it is.

I would also like to thank all who helped to make the Lexington reunion happen: First, Richard Crane for your early help in finding a selecting a place. Very sorry that issues kept you from being part of the entire reunion; Keith and Mary Herbold for being co-hosts, far from their Illinois home; once again, to Gary and Cathy Hamby for handling the task of mail registration; and to Ken and Sally Myers, our raffle gurus, who head up a longstanding reunion fund raiser and tradition. Most importantly, I thank my wife Susan who helped me whenever I became frustrated with anything (everything?) that came up during this five-year journey.

## A Shout Out to Larry and Bonnie Staron

Larry and Bonnie have been stalwarts at most, if not all reunions, since Larry retired from the Washington Office of Program Development about twenty five years ago. They were always busy,

always helping out and always dancing. They were on the steering committee and managed the bar and refreshments at the Williamsburg, Virginia reunion in 2015. Every year they helped out at the

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bar. Three years ago at the Schaumburg/Chicago reunion Larry was slowing down. After the three years gap in reunions, regular attendees were hoping to see Larry and Bonnie again. Sure enough they were there. They would not miss it. Their son, Daniel, and daughter-in-law, Eileen, were recruited to drive to Lexington and back from Northern Virginia and help

out. The four threw themselves into the spirit of the reunion, and attended all the events. They helped out in the raffle. Larry drew the tickets to determine the winners. On the final evening there was a line to express appreciation for their efforts to make the reunion and hopes to see them at the next one.

## FHWA Retiree Leadership

The Executive Board consists of: Lyle Renz, Chair; Phil Miller, Treasurer; Kevin Heanue, Newsletter Editor; Joyce Curtis; Evan Wisniewski; Rita Steinke and Steve Moreno. Dale Wilken retired

from the Executive Board after many years of service including many as Chair. In addition, Al Steger serves as our Webmaster, and manages our mailing list.

## What's New at FHWA?

### A New Name for DOT Headquarters

On May 6, 2022, President Biden signed S. 400 naming DOT headquarters after two former Secretaries of Transportation: the "William T. Coleman, Jr. and Norman Y. Mineta Federal Building."

Secretary Coleman, the first African-American to hold the post, served under President Gerald Ford (March 7, 1975 – January 20, 1977). President George W. Bush appointed Secretary Mineta, the first Asian American Secretary of Transportation, who would serve the longest term in the office (January 25, 2001 – August 7, 2006).

### FHWA Remains One of the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government

According to the 2020 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, FHWA remains the number one operating agency to work for in the United States Department of Transportation and ranks in the top 15 percent of all federal agencies.

### Tom Everett, FHWA Executive Director retires

Prior to becoming Executive Director, Tom served as the Associate Administrator for FHWA's Office of Infrastructure. Prior to that, he served as the Director for the Office of Program Administration.

Tom has also held positions as the Structural Engineer Team Leader in the Office of Bridges and Structures, Bridge Management/Inspection Engineer in the Resource Center, and other key positions including Technical Programs Team Leader in the Tennessee Division and Structural Engineer in FHWA's former Region 3. Tom joined FHWA in 1985 as a Highway Engineer Trainee.

Tom is a registered professional engineer and holds a master's degree in Civil Engineering from Johns Hopkins University and a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from Rutgers University.

### **Mayela Sosa Named Acting Executive Director**

Mayela Sosa, currently the Director of Field Services – Mid-America, joined FHWA in 2000 in the Texas Division, after spending five years at the Texas Department of Transportation where she worked in transportation planning. Since then, she has taken on leadership roles in four other assignments over 17 years, starting as a Team Leader in California, progressing to Deputy Division Administrator in Arizona, before advancing to Division Administrator in Hawaii and Indiana. In her current role, she has provided oversight and leadership for 13 FHWA Division Offices in the Mid-America region.

Mayela holds Bachelor of Arts and Master of Public Affairs degrees from the University of Texas at Austin.

### **Are FHWA Employees Going Back to the Office?**

The answer to the question posed in the title above does not have a simple answer. For most of the COVID period FHWA employees were in a telework status, meaning they worked from home and all communications were by email, phone, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom.

In February 2022, FHWA employees were advised that DOT would return to the offices on a staggered schedule. FHWA was assigned Monday, April 25. Until then, they were on maximum telework, but reopened with a more liberal telework policy.

Early guidance advised:

“Please continue discussions with your supervisor about your new work schedules - including, for those eligible for telework, the number of days per week you may be able to do so. We have asked the human resources offices in the Operating Administrations to engage supervisors and employees on the specifics of those new individual work schedules over the upcoming weeks.

Specifically, the Telework Agreement form now offers the following telework arrangement options:

- Ad Hoc or Emergency Purposes Only
- 1 to 2 times per week (Up to 4 times per pay period)

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- 3 days per week (Up to 6 times per pay period)
- 4 days per week (Up to 8 times per pay period)”

In general, each employee can work with the supervisor to establish a different schedule. Many people have done so. A lot of people discovered that with Microsoft Teams and Zoom, plus other advances in technology, they can accomplish much of what previously could be done in person, from their telework location. Reports are that on any given day in-office staffing remains below pre-pandemic levels.

P.S. Retirees, aren't you glad that you do not have to deal with bureaucratic language anymore?

### **FHWA Political Appointees**

FHWA has several political positions. Only one requires Senate-confirmation, Federal Highway Administrator. As reported in an earlier Newsletter, Deputy Administrator Stephanie Pollack, who was appointed on February 24, 2021, has been heading the agency. She is a political appointee, but her position does not require Senate confirmation. No word yet on a permanent, Senate confirmed Administrator.

Chief Counsel also is a political appointment. The current CC is Andrew W. Rogers.

Associate Administrator for Highway Policy and External Affairs, also a political appointment, is Randall K. (Keith) Benjamin II.

## **Please 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](mailto:fhwaretires@gmail.com) with the following information: name, spouse's

name (if applicable), street address, telephone number and email address. If you are so inclined, send a copy of this newsletter to a fellow retiree who is not on our mailing list and suggest that they sign up.

## **FHWA Retirees Communications**

The oldest and very successful tradition of the FHWA retirees is holding reunions since 1987. Communication in those days was by US mail. When the Internet came along, we added the

practice of notifying those on our mailing list of the deaths of colleagues as we learned of them. Our reunion related communication also shifted to the web as most retirees



established web access. More recently there has been a communications revolution and we have tried to keep up. Our approach has been two-fold. We established both a web site and a newsletter, both electronic. Lastly, we have published articles about our upcoming reunions and reports on the completed ones in FHWA News. We think it is important to let current FHWA employees know of our activities to encourage them to join us in the future.

We invite you to take a look at our website (<https://fhwa-retirees.org>) and share your thoughts about how we can make it more valuable. Any comments can be sent to ([fhwaretirees@gmail.com](mailto:fhwaretirees@gmail.com)).

If you are not getting FHWA News you can get on their mailing list or make a change in your contact information, provide your name and street address to [Greggmiller@dot.gov](mailto:Greggmiller@dot.gov).

**Stay tuned for future “FHWA Retirees” reunion plans**