

TAG TEAM

Winter 2005



main photo by WJ McCarley, Amarillo District

Main photo: Traffic moves carefully along I-40 in Amarillo after a winter storm. **Inset photo:** A maintenance worker clears snow from roadways in the Lubbock District.

Winter Road Maintenance Keeps Motorists Moving

While folks in cities like Austin may see a snow flurry once in a blue moon, residents of Lubbock, Wichita Falls, Amarillo and surrounding areas often find their communities and roads covered with snow and ice during the winter months. In Amarillo, for example, the temperature falls below 32 degrees 111 days out of the year on average. Amarillo storms in November alone cost more than \$746,000 in equipment, labor and materials to maintain the roads. [continued on page 5](#)

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from the director

Happy New Year! We hope each of you had a wonderful, safe and healthy holiday season. With this issue of *Tag Team*, I am pleased to pen my first "Message from the Director," which will become a regular addition to the newsletter. This gives me the opportunity to communicate initiatives of TxDOT and VTR and share information with you. Greater sharing of information will be a key focus for VTR this year.

We are particularly glad to have this forum to thank you for your excellent work in 2004. Because of your and ISD's efforts, we successfully implemented in most counties the new Point of Sale Sticker Printing (POSSP) for vehicle registrations. Additional components will be implemented in 2005. This was a monumental achievement and our customers are overwhelmingly pleased with the improved efficiency and effectiveness the system offers. Our POSSP demonstration at the Capitol was one of several legislative events to highlight the excellent programs and services that VTR and the counties provide to the public. (See related story on page 6.)

VTR certainly buzzed with activity last year. We saw an increase in several areas of our business, including a two percent increase in registered vehicles, six percent increase in specialty plates issued and renewed and a 27 percent increase in e-mails answered. The VTR Web site had about 11 million hits in 2004 and more than 490,600 people renewed their vehicle registration online. As more and more customers turn to the Internet for information and services, we could see a decrease in the number of phone calls and letters.

December 2004 marked a historic moment for TxDOT. Gov. Rick Perry, in support of his Trans-Texas Corridor initiative, made a rare appearance at a meeting of the Texas Transportation Commission. The commission announced its selection of a private consortium led by Cintra to build and operate billions of dollars in toll roads across Texas at no taxpayer expense. During the meeting Gov. Perry said, "When our hair is gray, we will be able to tell our grandchildren that we were in a Texas Department of Transportation meeting room when one of the most extraordinary plans was laid out for the people of Texas."

Looking toward the new year, the 2005 legislative session is gearing up. For those of you who track and analyze proposed bills that may affect VTR and respond to legislators' requests, this means many long hours and tight deadlines. Your work is greatly appreciated. Other exciting projects for 2005 include launching a public education campaign to deter registration evasion and implementing a telephone system for renewing vehicle registration, to name just a few.

As you can see, VTR will have a full plate in 2005. I hope each of you feel that it is an exciting time to work for TxDOT and VTR. I know I do. I am looking forward to the accomplishments we will make together this year.

Jerry Dike
Director, VTR

Mission Valley Plate Unveiled

A new specialty license plate that will raise funds to restore the Socorro Historic Mission is now available for purchase.

The Socorro Historic Mission, located south of El Paso, is one of the nation's earliest missions and is considered to be one of the most outstanding examples of Spanish mission architecture. Established in 1680, the mission was destroyed by flood in 1829 and was rebuilt in 1843. Preservation and restoration efforts have been ongoing for the Socorro Mission, as well as other sites along the El Paso Mission Trail.

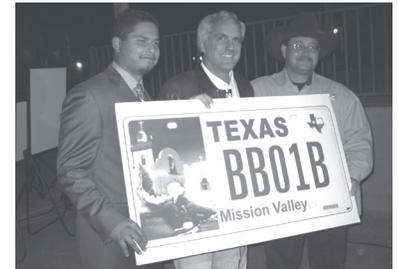
"Our Mission Valley plates will put El Paso's Mission Valley on the map," said State Senator Eliot Shapleigh, who unveiled the new plate during a ceremony in El Paso. "I hope everyone buys them to promote our missions and to invest in restoration."

The El Paso Mission Valley license plate, designed by artist Reyes Mata III, features an image of the mission with a Tigua tribal dancer on the left side of the plate.

"I presented the missions in the most reverent way I could," said Mata. "We also needed to pay homage to the Pueblo presence—that's where the Tigua dancer comes into play."

The specialty plate unveiling ceremony at the mission was attended by El Paso District Engineer Chuck Berry, P.E., and other TxDOT representatives.

The plates are now available for passenger vehicles and light trucks and cost \$30 annually, plus \$40 if personalized, in addition to regular registration fees. Of the \$30 annual fee for each plate, \$22 will be used by the Texas Historical Commission to fund grants for preservation and rehabilitation efforts for the Socorro Mission.



Pictured (from left): Socorro Mayor Guillermo "Willie" Gandara Jr., State Senator Eliot Shapleigh and Tigua Governor Arturo Sencclair show the Mission Valley license plate design to an audience during a ceremony at the Socorro Mission near El Paso.

VTR News Briefs

From Customer Information Services

Judy Thorp, Customer Information Services branch manager, graduated from St. Edward's University on August 14, 2004, with a Master's Degree in Business Administration.

Judy said she could not have achieved this goal without the wonderful benefit of the TxDOT Education Assistance Program, her director Bobby Johnson and, especially, her husband.

From Production Data Control

Senior Airman LaToya Joyner, daughter of VTR employees Torris and Donna Beasley, was recently deployed to Iraq. LaToya's duties include attending to the needs of Iraqi military prisoners and escorting special convoys.

High Fives

From Jonnie Marton, Dallas Region

Beth King received a letter from Ralph Harris, a dealer from Mississippi, praising Beth for the excellent service she provided. Mr. Harris said he wished his people in Mississippi were as good as ours.

From Adriana Ortiz, El Paso Region

We would like to acknowledge Yolanda Lindsey for her excellent customer service response. TxDOT Legislative Analyst Steven Polunsky called our office on behalf of Representative Pete Gallego's office to obtain information on a title application that had been rejected. Yoli received the call and was "very helpful in resolving the issue and giving it her immediate attention." Representative Gallego's office was pleased with her response. A job well done, Yoli! Keep up the good work.

From Ann Pierce, VTR Special Plates Branch Manager

I wanted to give "kudos" to all VTR staff who participated in the Clean Air pilot program that was put on by the department. It was a great success and we all helped keep Texas air a little bit cleaner.

From Dawna Eckwall, VTR Special Plates Branch

I recently received a call from a disabled veteran named Mr. Renaud. He asked me to convey how appreciative he is of the great care and excellent service he has received each time he has called VTR Special Plates Branch staff. He thinks Texas is the best place to live because of its respectful treatment of veterans. Mr. Renaud's kindness was so sincere that I wanted to share his comments with the entire office.



VTR Star Award Winners

Ruben Gonzalez and Joan Minton were named the VTR Star Award winners for 2004 by Division Director Jerry Dike at the October manager's meeting.

When Ruben Gonzalez began his career with TxDOT on March 24, 1972, he was fresh out of the U.S. Army and eager to start his new job as a title examiner in El Paso.

Over the years, Ruben saw many advancements to the state's registration and titling system. During his tenure, he accepted several promotions that took him to McAllen, Odessa and back to El Paso, where he eventually assumed his current position of regional office supervisor in 1996.

Ruben is known for his hard work and attentiveness to the needs of his staff, tax assessor-collectors and other partners.

"I believe in doing my work to the best of my ability, and I find a lot of satisfaction in bringing credit to TxDOT and my office," he said.

Joan Minton joined the Registration and Title System (RTS) Help Desk in Austin after working in the Hutchinson County tax office for five years. As Joan's expertise grew, her job evolved into a more technical role. Instead of simply taking the calls, she became involved in projects to resolve some of the issues they presented.

Now a systems analyst, Joan has been instrumental in implementing Internet registration through IVRR and IVTRS. She has also been involved in other major projects, such as RTS II.

"I'm the second person at the help desk to receive this award, and that's a reflection of our team's experience and talent as a whole," she said.



Ruben Gonzalez



Joan Minton



Letters

Thank you very much for an extremely comprehensive reply that answered all of my questions (regarding transferring a vehicle as a gift). You cannot believe how pleased I am with the response, as most times when asking a question I get a canned response that does nothing to get to the answer. Thanks again.

Rodger Hoofnagle

E-mail received by Barbara Johnston, Customer Information Services Branch, Austin

Dear Ms. Thorp:

This letter is regarding the assistance provided by Candy Southerland and you with a vehicle title.

I would like to thank both you and Candy for your excellent service with the mistake on the title for the above referenced Jeep. It was a quite stressful situation, but Ms. Southerland was prompt, courteous, and absolutely excellent in dealing with my situation. Because of both of you, the matter was taken care of promptly and for that, I cannot thank you enough.

I wanted to be sure to let you know that your service did not go unnoticed. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Javier O. Lopez

This letter was sent to Judy Thorp, Customer Information Services Branch Manager, Austin



News from the Regions

Abilene

By Pam Hagan

We'd like to welcome Jeanna Gordon aboard as an Operator Specialist I. She brings two years of VTR Customer Service experience to this position.

Our office participated in several charitable holiday programs, including donating to Mission Thanksgiving and the Abilene Food Bank, and raising money for a TxDOT employee diagnosed with cancer and a member of the community who needed heart surgery.

For Christmas, our office sent Tammie Gazda's husband, Brian, a holiday card thanking him for his service in Qatar.

Amarillo

By Glinda Ornelas

On November 2, 2004, we had a blizzard in Amarillo that left us with almost 11 inches of snow. Ann Willard and other employees worked hard to clear ice and snow from state vehicles. (See related story on page 1.)



Austin

By Jerry Dike

William "Bill" Pool has been named Regional Manager for the Austin Regional Office. Bill began working for VTR in 1962 as a title examiner in Austin. He has more than 30 years of experience with registration and titling issues. Throughout Bill's career with TxDOT, he has served in various capacities ranging from title examiner, investigator/auditor, regional office supervisor, assistant chief of field operations, special plates manager and Customer Help Desk manager.

Beaumont

By Hollie Singleton

The Beaumont Region would like to thank Marie Reddin and the Houston Region for helping us out during our

employee shortage. Everyone enjoyed working with Marie.

All employees sent a Christmas care package to Friend Jackson's son, Webby, who is stationed in Iraq.

Dallas

By Jonnie Marton

We would like to welcome our new manager, John Gray. John comes to us from Arizona, where he was manager of the Motor Vehicle Division.

We are looking forward to Robert Fuentes' return to our office in January. He has been stationed at Fort Hood for the past two years.

El Paso

By Adriana Ortiz

We have welcomed two new employees with extensive customer service skills, Cecilia Jacquez and Yolanda Lindsey. Cecilia has cashiering experience with Chase Manhattan Bank. Yolanda returns to TxDOT after a two-year break in service.

The El Paso Regional Office staff was elated and proud to hear that Ruben Gonzalez had received the highest VTR honor, the Star Award. We acknowledge and admire the dedication and integrity he brings to this office.

Congratulations go to Abel Reyes for obtaining his Associates Degree in Business Administration from El Paso Community College. He will continue his education at The University of Texas at El Paso.

Fort Worth/ Arlington

By Judy Baxter

November was a big month for our office as we hired four new employees. Please join us in welcoming Jeneta Engel, Susan Sevar, Angela Foster and Michele Stone. We are extremely excited to have them here. Welcome, ladies!

Lubbock

By Debbie Nelson

The Lubbock office won the District pumpkin carving contest for the second year in a row with an entry titled, "Windy Pumpkin." It was a tribute to the controversial Windy Man sculpture by Mike Ford. The sculpture was designed to be erected around our fair city as part of the Marsha Sharp Freeway project.



San Antonio

By Belinda Martin



Our office held many holiday activities this year including Secret Santa, "5 Days of Christmas," a luncheon and a Christmas desk-decorating contest. Sylvia De La Rosa (pictured) garnered first prize, second prize went to Juan Luna and Seberina Palomarez, and Randi Quintero won third prize.

Waco

By Michele Hurtt

Our office joined in with the Waco District for their 4th Annual State Employee Charitable Campaign Festival. The theme this year featured a fajita and salsa contest. The money collected by our team, "Salsaritaville," was donated to the American Lung Association in honor of Elizabeth Hunt's husband, Bobby.

For Christmas, Virginia Lewis made some fun ornaments for the office tree—tiny, laminated license plates!



Motorcycle Mania Alive in VTR!

Specialty Plates Available for Motorcycles

By Adrienne Leyva, VTR Public Information Office, Austin

Picture yourself zooming down the open road (at the proper speed, of course). The engine roars, the wind is at your face and the sun warms your back. This is no trip in the family minivan – you're on a motorcycle. Now picture the finishing touch, a specialty motorcycle plate. Close to 300 motorcycle enthusiasts have obtained specialty license plates since TxDOT began offering them in May 2004.

VTR has its share of motorcycle enthusiasts, and some have promoted the specialty plates on their own time at bike club meetings, rallies and charitable rides. Their efforts have helped draw more than 17,600 visitors to the motorcycle plates Web page over the last six months. Motorcycle specialty license plates available include Airborne Parachutists, Big Bend, Enduring Freedom, Fight Terrorism, God Bless America, God Bless Texas, Native Texan, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Vietnam Veteran. The Fish Texas plate is available for trailers.

Ann Pierce, VTR Special Plates Branch manager, has led her own promotion blitz. She and her husband Deke, a motor officer for the Travis County Sheriff's Department, are members of a law enforcement bike club known as Blue Knights. Ann has passed out motorcycle plate flyers and applications at weekly Bike Night meetings, the Republic of Texas rally and several charitable rides. She has also sent e-mails to club chapters to build awareness among the biker community.

"I keep a stack of flyers in my car, so they are always with me," said Ann. "I have nearly all the Blue Knights in Georgetown with specialty or personalized plates on their motorcycles. In fact, Deke is the proud owner of the first-issued God Bless Texas motorcycle plate."

With more than 254,000 registered motorcycles in Texas, there's still a big market to tap. But VTR motorcycle enthusiasts like Ann are working hard to spread the word to "easy riders" across the state.



Pictured above are Deke and Ann Pierce during the Tackett Charity Run to raise money for a severely ill young boy; also pictured is retired Dallas Region employee Charlie White, who recently rode in a Christmas Toy Run to distribute toys to needy children.

Winter road maintenance continued from page 1

Tag Team (TT) talked to Mike Taylor (MT), P.E., director of operations, Amarillo District, to find out what it takes to keep traffic moving during winter's icy blasts.

TT: What is it like to maintain the roads in and around Amarillo?

MT: The day-to-day duties are no different than in any other region. We do service checks of the equipment and keep up the roads just like everyone else. But when cold temperatures mix with moisture, the duties become drastically different.

TT: What is the chain of events for your team when conditions are right for ice and snow?

MT: We watch the weather forecasts and stay in touch with the National Weather Service. When conditions are right for ice and snow, we try to get out ahead of it. If necessary, we call out our maintenance workers in the wee hours to pre-treat bridges, decks, hills and other trouble spots with anti-icing agents like magnesium chloride to keep ice from forming on the roads. We like magnesium chloride because it lowers the freezing temperature of treated roads to about 27 degrees, and it is less corrosive than salt.

We also have one on-road anti-icing system installed next to ice-prone bridge decks. It can be activated remotely via computer to spray anti-icing agents on the decks. It's

a good innovation in winter road maintenance, and we've been very satisfied with it. We do our best to be proactive, but sometimes Mother Nature will still get the best of us.

TT: Once ice and snow has collected on the roads, what happens next?

MT: If there's significant snowfall, we send out trucks with plows to clear the snow, and we'll use magnesium chloride to help melt the ice. Here in Amarillo after a heavy snow, it can be hard to see any landmarks, much less the lanes on the highway. This can be particularly hazardous for motorists because there are no visible guides – everything is white. We drop sand on the roads to help give motorists a path to follow. The sand also helps give traction for the tires.

After the snow and ice melt, the clean up and repair work begins. Pot holes that have formed must be repaired and sand needs to be cleared from the roads.

TT: Do you have any tips for motorists traveling in freezing weather?

MT: Motorists should allow plenty of time to reach their destination and be prepared for the travel conditions. This means having a safety kit, cell phone, blankets, food and water in your car in case you get stranded or stuck behind an accident. Being prepared is definitely the key to staying safe.

Cross-Training Creates Flexibility, Opportunities

We are fortunate to have many long-term employees at VTR. To assure future retention, VTR has implemented formal cross-training programs in several regions to help new hires advance in their careers. All regions are working to introduce similar programs.

"The intent is to prepare employees for career-ladder promotions that allow entry-level employees to progress into higher positions as they gain knowledge and experience," said Field Operations Director Harry Morgan.

This type of training for advancement resulted from reclassifying certain job groups. The reclassifications allow for a progression of responsibilities within the VTR Operations Specialist I-III positions.

"There is now greater opportunity for employee development, a better-trained staff, and employees are more involved with the counties," said Assistant Field Operations Director Michael Cuellar.

The San Antonio Regional Office has an extensive cross-training program that corresponds with the three grade levels of the VTR Operations Specialist position. Employees receive training on a variety of key duties, gain valuable hands-on experience and progressively

become skilled in all duties of the VTR Operations Specialist I and II positions, including county training and apportion audits. Once these skills are mastered, the employee is considered for promotion to the VTR Operations Specialist III position.

"Our county trainers are ambassadors," said San Antonio Regional Office Supervisor Jerry Frey. "They represent the department through direct contact in the 254 counties that they support."

The Fort Worth Regional Office offers a cross-training program designed to advance entry-level employees into higher positions as their abilities grow. The program allows phone operators and customer service representatives to rotate job duties every six months. Upon completing this training, two employees will move to the apportion section for two years where they will gain the knowledge and skills to begin auditing apportion accounts and provide county training. The Fort Worth program also includes cross-training for office coordinators to gain experience in all sections of the office.

"As a result, we have experienced improved team building, professional

development, better customer service, and less employee burnout," said Fort Worth Regional Office Supervisor Carolyn Coverson.

The Carrollton/Dallas Office is cross-training new employees on the bond issuance process. Employees train in a two-week rotation at the side counters to handle bond requests and then return to front counter activities. After the new employees are skilled in processing bond requests, they will learn to handle refunds. More experienced employees are learning to complete International Registration Plan (IRP) audits or records checks on new IRP accounts.

"Our office is seeing more flexible coverage during employee absences, greater employee innovation and improved job satisfaction," said Dallas Regional Office Supervisor John Gray.

"We are implementing cross-training in all regions so we can reap the benefits of consistency and flexibility throughout the state," said Assistant Field Operations Director Jeff Kirk. "It helps with retention when employees see they have a chance to move up."

Special thanks to Jerry Frey, Carolyn Coverson, John Gray and Field Operations for contributing to this article.

Capitol Events Demonstrate VTR Programs

VTR team members, in coordination with the Legislative Affairs Office, made several very successful visits to the state Capitol this fall to share information on the programs and services the division provides to Texans.

A team showcased the Point of Sale Sticker Printing (POSSP) process during a demonstration Sept. 1. Visitors were able to see stickers and receipts printed by the Remote Sticker Printing System equipment that will be used by subcontractors. Operations, Public Information and RTS Help Desk branch members explained the benefits of POSSP. The new process directly connects registration stickers to vehicles by printing license plate numbers and partial Vehicle Identification Numbers (VINs) on the stickers. This is a tremendous benefit to law enforcement. Visitors also learned that POSSP eliminates the need to account for sticker inventory and is more efficient and effective.

The Automobile Theft Prevention Authority (ATPA) teamed up with law enforcement representatives for a VIN etching and HEAT registration event Sept. 29. Sixty vehicles were

registered at the event, and visitors learned more about ATPA's programs to reduce vehicle theft across the state.

Legislators and their staff attended a specialty plate briefing by VTR Director Jerry Dike on Oct. 27. They learned about the status of new license plates, how House Bill 2791 was implemented, the new marketing initiative by a private vendor and other changes introduced during the 78th Legislative Session.



Pictured above: ATPA teams up with law enforcement to etch VIN numbers at the Capitol.

For the first time ever, VTR, in coordination with the tax assessor-collectors, distributed State Official license plates to officials and current and incoming legislators at the Capitol on Nov. 30. About 30 officials chose to pick up their plates during the event.

Service Awards

years	name	branch/region
30	Debora B. Waits	ADMIN OPS
25	Raul Danny Garza Jr. Gloria B. Guerrero Lanita J. McAfee	Pharr RTS Lubbock
20	Judy Griffith Leslie L. Lempa Beverly M. Wayts	HQ OPS HQ OPS Fort Worth
15	Vicki Allbright Rose Gullien	Odessa Corpus Christi
10	Michael Cuellar Gerald T. Frey Harry Morgan Helen Ramirez James Williams Adam Vasquez	FIELD OPS San Antonio FIELD OPS RTS Waco Austin
5	Vernon J. Boyett Danielle L. Brandenburg Linda Chapman Miguel Pabon Linda C. Page Hollie V. Singleton	Fort Worth ADMIN OPS ADMIN OPS San Antonio HQ OPS Beaumont

New VTR Employees

month	name	branch/region
September	Gustavo Bernal	OPS
	Linda R. Butler	CIS
	Jessica M. Wright	SSB
October	John D. Gray	Dallas
	Robert J. Haapanen	SPB
	June P. Ingraham	ADMIN OPS
	Guy A. Montgomery	CIS
	Bryan P. Wilhelm	VDM
November	Jeneta Engel	Fort Worth
	Angela R. Foster	Fort Worth
	Janice S. Gregg	ATPA
	Barbara A. Matthys	HQ OPS
	William D. Pool	Austin
	Susan K. Sevar	Fort Worth
	Lois A. Sherwood	TCS
	Michele Stone	Fort Worth
	Christopher T. Thomas	RTS HELP DESK
	Jerrie A. Whipple	RTS HELP DESK
Marti Wilbur	CIS	
December	Ivan Alvarez	SSB
	Esther P. Balderas	IRP
	Ellen R. Blackwell	TCS
	Melissa C. Frescas	El Paso
	Adrienne J. Leyva	ADMIN
	Carla R. Smith	El Paso
	Kyle A. Yandell	IRP

Retirements

month	name	branch/region	years
August	Rebecca P. Beck	OPS	34
September	Judy E. Gibson	OPS	20
	Dixie A. Parker	IRP	32
October	Joann C. Reynolds	IRP	5
November	Joey M. Connell	OPS	26

Focus on Health



By Pam Hagan, Abilene Region

In the area of health and fitness, Tammie Gazda has lost 20 pounds and is working to lose another 15 before she's done. Way to go, Tammie!

By Hollie Singleton, Beaumont Region

Friend Jackson continues to participate in bicycle rallies. Her latest ride was on Halloween night. In November, Terri Dembowski's quest for health and wellness recently led her on a three-day hike in the hill country. She hiked with four other women at Lost Maples, Enchanted Rock and the Hill Country State Park. Terri became friends with all four ladies at her gym. She said it was a great experience and she would love to do it again!

By Steve Gary, Longview Region

Longview is watching the weight go away! Debbie Jolly and Shelly Draper are working the Weight Watchers program to their advantage. Together, the ladies have lost 29 pounds in six weeks. Shelly and Debbie support each other in reaching their diet and exercise goals. In fact, the whole office thinks about "points" prior to consuming any food. Shelly says she walks 45 minutes four times a week unless it's raining, then she runs. Their energy levels have increased 100 percent and the ability to perform job duties seems easier.



Texas Department of Transportation

Vehicle Titles and Registration Division
4000 Jackson Ave. Austin, TX 78731

TxDOT Web site: www.dot.state.tx.us



Our Mission: To provide accurate, efficient, and effective vehicle registration and title services

Parting Shot



Pictured: Williamson County Tax Assessor-Collector Deborah Hunt received TACA's 2004 Tax Assessor-Collector of the Year Award. Mike Smith, the 2003 Tax-Assessor Collector of the Year, presented the award to Deborah during the V.G. Young Conference in November.

TAG TEAM

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