



## **LK Nandam, District One Secretary and Southwest-Central Florida (SWCF) Connector Task Force Chair**

Assistant Secretary Courtney Drummond began the Executive Team meeting by presenting and recognizing the Chairs of the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES) Task Forces, starting with LK Nandam, District One Secretary and Southwest-Central Florida (SWCF) Connector Task Force Chair, for his leadership, dedication and outstanding diligence in delivering the Final Report on November 12, 2020.

This milestone comes after more than 16-months of study by the regional Task Force, made up of 47 members including local government officials, planning and economic development leaders, environmental groups and community stakeholders. With the report delivered to the Governor and state legislature, next steps include high-level needs assessment, establishing planning sections, coordination with the Environmental Technical Advisory Team, evaluation of potential alternative corridors, continued public engagement and refinement of corridor enhancements. From there, the project goes into project development and environment study (PD&E).



“It was a great experience and I want to thank the entire M-CORES Team with a special thanks to Chief Engineer Will Watts and Chief Planner Huiwei Shen” said LK Nandam, District One Secretary.

Photo of LK Nandam, District One Secretary

### **Thank you video!**



## A NOTE FROM L.K.



Hello District One! We have not published our First Edition newsletter for over a year now. I was reflecting on our journey last year and realized how challenging last year has been as we explored new ways to deliver our program, keeping ourselves engaged and connected. I want to thank each and everyone of you for your efforts adjusting and delivering our program even with the challenges filling our vacant positions.

Thanks to our IT team who provided great support. Under this virtual environment we were adapting to engagement with new routine away from collaborative workstations and our daily breakroom run. We all knew that at some time the emergency is going to end, and we will have to transition back to our new normal which means finding that sweet spot with some continuing to telework but also be present in the office. This is what is expected of organizations in public service.

With all of us returning to the office, we need to familiarize ourselves working in an office again. Small things like traveling to work or sharing a space with colleagues, even setting up the office workspace, may require re-adjustment. I want you know that your Leadership is here for you. Yes, District 1 is going to look different and feel different, but we are all in this together. I ask that everyone be respectful of each other and patient with each other. Everyone has worked hard to stay engaged during this virtual time, but face to face meetings provide a much richer, more targeted experience. I am looking forward to face-to-face interactions, which is a key ingredient to the family atmosphere we have always had here at D1.

I am confident we will be filling positions again as we roll into the new fiscal year. Next year is exciting because of the additional budget the department is expected to receive for infrastructure. We will continue to make a difference by focusing on building the right street for the right place as we implement key infrastructure projects in our district. Let's keep moving the needle in the right direction.

Welcome back to the buildings D1!

# **D1 CULTURE CLUB HIGHLIGHTS**

## **SONDRA CASON**

A Day in the Life of Sondra Cason  
Bartow Headquarters Switchboard Operator

When one walks into the lobby of District One Headquarters in Bartow, they are greeted with a warm hello and a friendly smile that belongs to one of the most genuine people you'll ever meet. That person is Sondra Cason, our headquarters switchboard operator.

She started her DOT career as an OPS employee in Materials. Then went to Bartow Operations for a year before taking over the switchboard position. She believes her main purpose is to assist people with a caring and helpful attitude. "Sometimes, just a smile or kind gesture can brighten a person's day because we never know what someone may be going through," she says.

You never know who will walk through those front doors. A common occurrence is some poor, lost soul looking for the courthouse or other government building. One such person that Sondra says she will never forget is a woman who was looking for the Property Appraiser's Office. During their conversation, the woman began sobbing as she revealed her daughter worked in the World Trade Center on 9/11. In her final moments that day, her daughter called to tell her to please take care of her three boys. Interactions like this illustrate how Sondra makes people feel at ease with her warmth and compassion.

This warm nature radiates her surroundings. One look at the lobby and you can see the effort Sondra puts in to making it an inviting area. Whether it's from the decorations that are often her own or how neat and tidy things are, she takes pride in the appearance. Even the first-floor women's restroom is supplied with a variety of creams and lotions she brings for the women to use. (Editor's note: Gentlemen, step up your game. No reason why we can't have nice things too in the men's restroom. Men need to look and smell good too. A lotion or two won't melt your brain.)



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Additional duties that she oversees are the Mike Rippe Auditorium calendar, which is open for use by other government agencies, along with monitoring (via camera) the back receiving area and granting access to vendors. Also, if you've ever strolled around the HQ campus and enjoyed the landscaping, chances are Sondra had a hand in selecting those flowers and plants that help brighten your day.

The holidays are when Sondra really goes above-and-beyond for everyone. Not only does she make sure the decorations are hung with care, but on the last working day before Thanksgiving and Christmas, she brings in several incredibly delicious cakes that she bakes herself. A stampede typically ensues when word gets out that Sondra's cakes are in the lobby. Within an hour, only crumbs remain. If you are one of the lucky people to get there in time, you know how heavenly they are. It's her way of rewarding the few who come in to work before the holiday.

Some of her favorite things include watching Hallmark movies, the color red, and of course eating dessert as evidence by her baking prowess. She enjoys traveling and hopes to take more special trips soon. Recently, she and her daughters went to New York City. Her two biggest pet peeves are rudeness and slow drivers in the left lane! Amen, sister!

Ask Sondra what her greatest accomplishment in life is to this point and she will tell you her family. The loss of her parents at an early age made her value and cherish the time with the people closest to her. FDOT has become a second home for her family. Her husband, Richard, worked at DOT for 30 years before retiring. He currently works as a consultant for HDR in Right-of-Way. Their youngest daughter, Rebecca Milam, works in Project Management. She got her feet wet at DOT as an OPS at the age of 16. After various jobs, including working as a consultant, she has been a full-time DOT employee since 2013. Sondra's sister, Tammy Wooten, works in Maintenance. However, Sondra and Richard's

One reason why people apply and stay at District One is because of the family environment. The Cason's are just one example of many where one family member got hired and enjoyed it here so much they recommended job openings to other family and friends. For Sondra, that speaks volumes to the culture that has been established here. And because of her, that family environment has been maintained and strengthened.

We are blessed to have someone like her be the first face individuals see when they enter our building. If you have not had the privilege of meeting Sondra, stop by the front desk and introduce yourself to her. You'll be better off for doing so.

*Written By: Blake Edwards & Nancy Thompson*



From A Sweet Ending To A New Beginning

• HONK SHOUT CHEER & WAVE •

• IT'S A  
RETIREMENT  
PARTY PARADE •

HONORING

**Nancy Thompson**

**Retirement Parade**

April 21, 2021

District Headquarters

Circle Drive

1:30pm to 2:30pm

Drive through to wish Nancy well  
or drop off cards/gifts in person!

**Virtual Celebration**

April 28, 2021

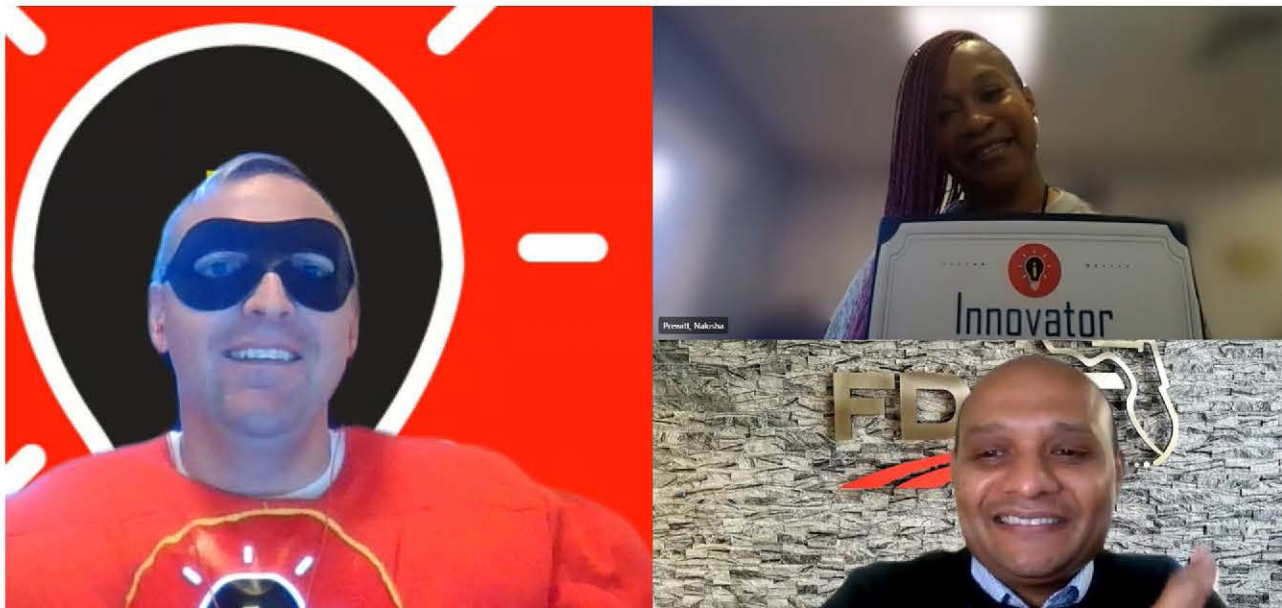
2:00pm



# Nakisha Prewitt

Heartland Operations - Sebring

## D1 Innovator of the Quarter



Nakisha Prewitt of Heartland Operations - Sebring is hereby recognized for Innovator of the Quarter for her Innovative Idea titled "Streamlining the approval process for filling a vacant position utilizing DocuSign". Her idea was implemented in December 2020. Nakisha noticed that in SpringCM, only the Supervisor and Director can review and sign off on each Position Description (PD). Therefore, the process needed to be revised so the PDs could be reviewed and approved by others in the workflow prior to uploading them into SpringCM. A SharePoint site was created similar to the Purchase Approval Request SharePoint site to handle this new way of processing approval requests for PDs. After several unsuccessful tests of this site, Nakisha suggested using DocuSign instead. She volunteered to spearhead this effort and created user friendly templates for Maintenance, Construction, Traffic Operations and Materials to utilize. The template incorporates requesting approval for PDs as well as Request to Advertise (RTA) saving an additional step when filling a vacant position. Nakisha also took the initiative to create step-by-step detailed instructions and held trainings on using the templates in DocuSign with the Operations' Administrators and Cost Center Managers. Utilizing the templates in DocuSign has expedited the approval process from days, and at times weeks, to less than 24 hours. With the pandemic, DocuSign has been a very useful tool to obtain digital signatures efficiently and timely from employees working from home. Nakisha has a lot of responsibilities on her plate with being the Heartland Operations Office Manager and is currently enrolled in Certified Public Manager classes, but she willingly jumped right in with this innovative idea and took on the challenge of finding a workable solution. Nakisha is a true team player with exceptional patience, outstanding customer service and attention to detail. She is hereby awarded "Innovator of the Quarter" effective 1/1/2021.

Nakisha is our Innovator of the Quarter for the third quarter of FY2021.

**Congratulations Nakisha!!!**



As part of a growing need for transportation safety education, new infrastructure updates, enforcement, and community engagement, the Florida Department of Transportation District 1 has launched a social media account called Safety by Design Florida. It can be found on both Facebook and Instagram platforms. This effort is to further enhance the Safety by Design outreach and awareness efforts throughout the District 1 region. Social media has also allowed the Safety by Design team to provide online surveys, reach target communities through marketing ads, as well as build partnerships with local and regional organizations.



As of 2019, it is estimated that 69 percent of the US population gets news through Facebook. [1] With more organizations and populations getting news and information on social media, using these online platforms to educate and encourage safe transportation behaviors for all road users is a complimenting experience to the in-person outreach approach. Safety by Design officially launched on May 9th 2020. To date, Safety by Design has reached over 297,000 users, with an organic reach of over 38,000 users. Safety by Design is a few “Likes” away from reaching a milestone of 1,000 followers. We would like to encourage you to join our Safety by Design

virtual community to keep up-to-date on what’s happening in your area and how to stay involved.

Safety by Design Florida is a grassroots effort for connecting communities to the transportation network District 1 has envisioned for the future. At this time, connecting with our families, friends, colleagues, and neighbors can best be done by “Liking”, “Sharing”, “Commenting”, and “Posting”. Help spread the word about the great work being done throughout Central Southwest Florida, and let’s use the tools provided to communicate these efforts with our communities.



# Bike to School Day

Bike to School Day Registration is now open! Register your family, neighborhood, or school today at [walkbiketoschool.org](http://walkbiketoschool.org). The tenth annual National #BiketoSchoolDay is on **May 5, 2021**, and registration is now open! Register your family, neighborhood or school today at [walkbiketoschool.org](http://walkbiketoschool.org).



## CONNGRATULATIONS!



Kayleigh Parish is the daughter of Kristy (SWAO) and Chuck Parish (FMOC). Kayleigh will be graduating on June 5th from North Fort Myers High School. She is a member of the Nation Honor Society, National Society of High School Scholars and will be graduating with Summa Cum Laude distinction. Kayleigh's plans will be attending The University of Central Florida starting this summer.

# Right of Way - How is it Acquired?

What exactly is, “Right of Way” as it pertains to the Department of Transportation?

There are various types of land rights that the Department acquires to widen roads. Typically, the Department acquires FEE SIMPLE which is the total bundle of land rights and are usually shown as a 100 parcel. We also acquire EASEMENT interests which show up as an 800 parcel, as well as a TEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION EASEMENT which are 700 parcels and are temporary in nature.



One of my interview questions when I applied to be a Right of Way Specialist at the DOT was, “Explain to me the difference between Eminent Domain and Condemnation”. I stammered through with an answer which I am sure was comical, but I will never forget the question. Here is the correct response. “Condemnation is the seizure of private property by a government for a public purpose. Eminent domain gives governments the power to take private property.”

It all starts when Right of Way receives the “268” which is the delivery of the Right of Way maps, title work and documents from Right of Way Mapping and Surveying. The Right of Way department is made up of many “mini” departments. These internal departments are Cost Estimating, Budgeting, Appraisal, Acquisition, Relocation, and Property Management.

Before any work can begin, a Project Resolution must be filed in the county the project is occurring, the Environmental Study must be completed and funding available. At that point, the Appraisal department orders appraisals for each of the parcels. These appraisals are different than a typical house appraisal as it shows the before value, all the values of what we are acquiring, the after value, cost to cure and any severance damages that may have been caused by our taking.

While the appraisals are being worked on, the Acquisition Agent is contacting the owner of the property and sending them a certified letter explaining all their rights as a property owner when the Department needs their land for a road project. The agent also examines the title work to see if they have any questions on the ownership and then physically visits the parcel to make sure any unrecorded interests are added to RWMS. RWMS, or Right of Way Management System, is the computer program that Right of Way uses to track all aspects of acquiring parcels.

The Property Management department drives the entire project to make sure there are no encroachments on the project and to look at what is involved in clearing the parcels after they are purchased. Additionally, all the Utility Subordinations are created by Right of Way Mapping and Surveying and sent to the Utilities Department for review and execution.

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Any time the Department acquires a parcel, it MUST address all possible interests. For example, if we are buying a portion of a fenced field, the agent must make sure the field is not rented out to a rancher for agricultural properties. All these interests in the land must be addressed and the interest owner either has to sign a Quit Claim Deed, or have their interests taken at the Order of Taking. When acquiring a retail parcel (e.g. a shopping center), the agent must find out if there are any cross -easement agreements between portions of the shopping center to figure out which tenants have an interest in the parcel. The agent attempts to get copies of the unrecorded leases, talks to the business owners, and does research on the internet to get the information they need. Being a Right of Way Agent is akin to being a detective of sorts. It makes the work very challenging and interesting.

Once the appraisal is in and approved, the agent will set up a meeting with the owner and their attorney, if they have one, and meet to make the offer. The agent must know the appraisal details as well as details of the construction plans and be able to explain the purpose of the project in general as well as expound on the details of the parcel. Many times, medians are added for safety reasons so that needs to be explained to the owner, especially if their access has changed due to the project. The agent should also know if there are slope changes, where the traffic lights will be, lane changes, driveway closings and any other areas of the design that the owner or attorney may ask about. The agents work closely with the always helpful DOT Design Project Manager for this information.

If there is a business on the remainder of the parcel and they meet the qualifications, they will also receive, via certified mail, a Business Damage Notification letter explaining their rights to claim a Business Damage. This is a damage to the business, not the real estate, caused by the taking.

On parcels where we are taking part or all of a building or residence, we also offer Relocation benefits to the owners and tenants on the property. This is done under the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. The Department will relocate or pay to relocate families, businesses, personal property, mobile homes, and signs. Relocating people is one of the most difficult yet most rewarding parts of the job. I am still in touch with a family I relocated in Miami 15 years ago, and they ended up in a much better house, with approximately the same mortgage payment and were so grateful for my assistance with their move. I still get a Christmas card from them every year. On the other hand, many people do not want to move so this can be one of the most difficult jobs in clearing of the right of way.

The Agent has some flexibility to try to settle the parcel based on information they receive from the owner or their attorney. They can use that information to justify a settlement higher than the appraisal amount.

As parcels are acquired, , Property Management will remove property improvements, which can be difficult as there are times when the Department pays for improvements in the appraisal, but if the owner does not replace it, the Department needs to work with them in replacing it as that is something that we cannot just demolish. For example, fences around pastureland which keep the cows off the road!



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We settle approximately 70 % of the parcels we acquire, and the rest go to Legal and are acquired via an “OT” or Order of Taking. The amount of the latest appraisal is deposited in the clerk of courts within 20 days after the Order of Taking; that is a must to get the OT, which gives the Department legal ownership of that parcel. After the OT, the parcel will eventually go to Mediation where the amount of money to settle the parcel will be finalized. Those that cannot settle at Mediation will eventually go to a trial. We are fortunate that District One has some of the best Eminent Domain Attorney’s in the State of Florida.

The above is a broad summary of what Right of Way does to acquire and clear a parcel and does not go into all the detail of the statutes, rules, nuances, variances, procedures and regulations we need to follow during the process. It is a great job as every day is different. I have worked in Right of Way for 30 years, and I discover something new each day. The below are some YouTube videos dealing with Eminent Domain that you may enjoy.

[Acquiring land through eminent domain - YouTube](#)

[Explaining Eminent Domain - YouTube](#)

## **Retirement Recognition and Celebration – February 2021**



District Construction recognized the retirement of Jacquelin D. Brown, District Construction Compliance Manager, after completing 35 years of service with the State of Florida. Jackie completed over 30 of those years with the Department of Transportation; more than 20 of them with our District Construction Office where her dedication and hard work earned her the first ever ‘Canopy Roads Career Achievement Award’. This joint recognition from the Division (Federal Highway Administration) and Equal Opportunity Office came with numerous accolades of the achievements

Jackie exemplified throughout her career working with the Division, the Equal Opportunity Office and the United States Department of Labor. Jackie’s Retirement Date was February 28, 2021. Due to Covid-19, the District honored Jackie in transportation style with a farewell motorcade drive by her home.

# BABY ANNOUNCEMENT

**Congratulations to Sutton Tammy (and her family) on the birth of her new granddaughter:**

**Baby's Name:** Taelyn Faith Ostarich

**Proud Parents:** Tiara and Tyler Ostarich

**Proud Grandparents:** Tammy Sutton,  
Traffic Operations and Eddie King, Bartow  
Operations

**Date of Birth:** January 13, 2021

**Location:** Lakeland Regional Medical  
Center, Lakeland Florida

**Time of Birth:** 6:40 P.M.

**Weight:** 7 lbs., 11 oz.

**Length:** 20 inches



# Traffic Operations Mardi Gras Event March 31.





WORKING TOGETHER  
TO MAKE STREETS  
AND SIDEWALKS SAFER

## COUNTY CHAIRS

**Gary Harrell**  
*Charlotte County*

**Kyle Kemmish**  
*Collier County*

**Karen Smoke**  
*DeSoto County*

**Sgt. Chris Norwood**  
*Hendry County*

**David Miller**  
*Glades County*

**Sandra Rojas**  
*Hardee County*

**Lt. Albritton**  
*Highlands County*

**Steve Jansen**  
*Lee County*

**Jim Davis**  
*Manatee/Sarasota County*

**Chief Art Bodenheimer**  
*Polk County*

**Deputy Adrian Rodgers**  
*Okeechobee County*

FDOT District 1 Traffic Safety Programs announce the launch of two newsletters to inform the Safety Community.

The **Safety by Design Team** provides monthly newsletters outlining various Safety programs throughout the District. Last month, the Safety by Design Team celebrated Florida Bike Month in March, highlighting the Central Southwest Florida (CSW) Love to Ride event as well as providing information regarding bicycle safety classes. To sign up for the next e-newsletter, visit the Safety by Design website (<https://e4safetyfl.com/>), and click on the Subscribe to Our Newsletter link located at the bottom of our home page.

Our **Community Traffic Safety Team (CTST)** Coordinator also launched a new, quarterly newsletter in January. Every quarter, the newsletter will highlight projects, programs, and people in the Safety Awareness Community from our 11 CTSTs. In the first Issue, we highlighted the efforts of our partners who met in the month of December – Polk, Collier, and DeSoto Counties. Our next newsletter will be delivered on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. If you would like to be included in our CTST Newsletter email distribution list, please email Theresa Chestnut at [Theresa.Chestnut@dot.state.fl.us](mailto:Theresa.Chestnut@dot.state.fl.us).



**Theresa Chestnut**, *Community Traffic Safety Teams Program Coordinator*  
Florida Department of Transportation, District 1

801 N. Broadway Avenue, Bartow, FL 33830 | Office: (863) 519-2671 | Cell: (863) 450-0805

# 2021 Annual Black History Program

Even during this time of masks, social distancing, working from home and cancelled public events, there were some things that were not denied. This year's Black History Program proceeded despite the disruption of the past year from the COVID-19 pandemic, however in a different way. Although we sorely miss the traditional soul food luncheon at the end of every program, this year still provided a wealth of information highlighting a sad tale which happened locally.



*Photo of Commissioner Leo Longworth, Mr. Gregory Todd Smith and Cheri Kelley*

This year's theme, "A Place in Time", tells the story of a Polk County resident, Abraham Shakespeare who won \$31 million in the Florida lottery and suffered an unimaginable fate.

The honored guest for this year's Black History Program who shared the details of this story was Mr. Gregory Todd Smith, who published the book "Unlucky Number" with the help of ghost writer Ms. Deborah Mathis. This book details the chance purchase of winning lottery tickets that led to riches and business opportunities, but also more problems for Abraham Shakespeare, a hardworking man, who was unfortunately illiterate.

Mr. Smith described his relationship with Abraham and how prior to winning the lottery, he allowed Abraham to work for him at his local business to earn money. He also described in detail how this chance lottery win would ultimately lead to Abraham's demise. Beginning with the constant request from friends and relatives for money and ending with Abraham's association with DeeDee Moore. DeeDee Moore befriended Abraham with the promise of help to recover loans and debts from friends and associates whom he had advanced money.

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Smith explained that Abraham was later reported missing. Police began to investigate but had no concrete evidence of any foul play. During the investigation, Police learned of Smith and Abraham's relationship and the fact that DeeDee Moore had paid Smith to make a phone call to Abraham's mother. After Police questioned Smith, they enlisted his help. This connection led to almost a year-long investigation, with twists and turns befitting a Law and Order or CSI television episode.

Smith describes his initial hesitation in helping the police. He later agreed to help and to wear a wire to secretly record conversations between he and DeeDee. Ultimately, risking his own safety, he chose to work to give Abraham's family some answers and justice in the disappearance of their loved one. Smith's help led the police to the evidence outlining the conspiracy behind Abraham's death and ultimately to his remains found under a concrete slab behind a house on State Road 60 in Hillsborough County. The trial testimony of Greg Smith was instrumental in securing a first-degree murder conviction of DeeDee Moore.

Mr. Gregory Todd Smith, grandson of one of the first self-made black millionaires in Plant City, is a businessman who in addition to managing a training program teaching welding and providing referrals for job placement, also participates in his community by mentoring young people interested in starting their own businesses.

A true hero to the justice system and to Abraham Shakespeare's family, we thank Mr. Smith for sharing with us.

**Special thanks to everyone who participated in the production of this year's program, to all our viewers, and all who supported the Black History Program Committee. We look forward to another successful program in 2022.**



*Photo of Mr. Gregory Todd Smith and Cheri Kelley*

# EMPLOYEES SERVICE MILEPOSTS 2021 (JANUARY, FEBRUARY & MARCH)

## **35 YEARS**

Kenneth Collier, District Materials Office

## **30 YEARS**

Joseph Lee, District Materials Office  
Michael Likens, Heartland Operations

## **20 YEARS**

Lance Huggett, Safety  
Willie Hayes, Bartow Operations Center

## **15 YEARS**

Jessica Whitaker, Human Resources Office  
Marshall Douberley, Construction  
Richard Johnson, Bartow Operations Center  
Rena Reis, Program Management

## **25 YEARS**

Kasmin Williams, Financial Services

## **5 YEARS**

Anna Dunn, Traffic Operations  
Kevin Morissey, Bartow Operations Center  
Bessie Reina, Intermodal System Development  
Kristen Etheridge, District Materials Office  
James Deemer, Fort Myers Operations Center  
Bryan Baker, District Materials Office  
Jonathon Bennett, Environmental Management Office  
Christopher Simpron, Intermodal System Development  
Martin Vargas-Villa, Heartland Operations

This  
quarter's  
milepost  
anniversaries  
represent

**265**

years of  
combined  
employee  
service!