Debra Rountree retires

By Pete Poore

When Debra Rountree earned her Accounting degree from the University of South Carolina, she was drawn to working in the public sector. Her father was working in state government and her mother had been employed by the federal government. She inherited a sense of public service from her parents.

The brand new college graduate had two job opportunities; one with SCDOT (then the Department of Highways and Public Transportation) and one with the Public Service Commission (PSC). The job at PSC involved frequent overnight travel, so SCDOT won out. "When I started as an entry-level accountant, I was hoping to have children and raise a family within a few years. I thought maybe that I would be a stay-at-home mom and work at home while raising my children," said Rountree.

On one hand, she did tire of the routine that came with that first job; reviewing the same spreadsheets and filing the same monthly reports, all done by hand without benefit of computer technology. But working at SCDOT also sparked an interest in learning about other facets of the agency beyond ledgers and spreadsheets.

The restructuring of the agency that occurred in 1993 resulted in the creation of the Department of Transportation, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and saw the Motor Vehicles Division (MVD) move to the Department of Revenue for its first home outside of SCDOT. Restructuring required more than just moving offices and people. "The restructuring process was very involved. I had an opportunity to serve as a mediator of sorts to make the changes, solve the problems and to make things happen," said Rountree.

Shortly thereafter in 1997, the South Carolina Transportation Infrastructure Bank was created by the General Assembly to fund major projects. The future Deputy Secretary was given the duty to assist the Bank's Board members and to serve as SCDOT's liaison to the SCTIB. "I really enjoyed seeing all of the projects the Bank and SCDOT were able to accomplish that would have never been built without the SCTIB," Rountree said.

The $4.7 billion in projects the Bank has been able to provide during its history has resulted in the construction of the Conway Bypass, the new Cooper River Bridge completed in 2005, the widening of SC 6 that crosses the Lake Murray Dam in Lexington County, the Palmetto Parkway in Aiken County as well as other high-profile projects.

Serving as Deputy Secretary for Finance & Administration also gave her the opportunity to reach beyond the financial matters of the agency and delve into other areas such as the political arena and how legislative issues impact SCDOT. "I have really enjoyed my time here and I have mixed emotions about leaving."

Before the book is closed on Debra Rountree's SCDOT career, one duty she had early in her time at the agency before restructuring took place can now be revealed. That duty was undercover investigator.

An agency investigator suspected that a MVD clerk at a Columbia facility was recording cash transactions at the service counter for amounts larger than what she was charging the customer, and then pocketed the difference.

Rountree volunteered to wear a hidden microphone and was able to be served by the clerk in question. The recording proved that the "undercover agent" had requested a duplicate driver's license. The fee for that service was fifty cents but the clerk charged $10 and pocketed $9.50. The clerk was fired that day. Case closed.

The retired Deputy Secretary is looking forward in the short term to traveling with her husband, Charlie, and spending time with her children and new grandson, Brady.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROB THOMPSON/THE CONNECTOR

Deputy Secretary for Finance and Administration Debra Rountree waves goodbye after 32 years of service at SCDOT. She's looking forward to traveling and spending more time with her family.

At her July 14 retirement celebration, family and friends gathered at the Clarion Town House for heavy hors d'oeuvres. Family, shown from left are: Ashley Ellis, Brady Ellis, Lois Roseborough, Rountree, and Rebecca Long.

Rountree and her father, Boykin Roseborough, pose by a sign made for the occassion.

Charlie and Debra Rountree