Phillip Brooks retires

District 2 DEA retires after 37 years of service

By Pete Poore

Phillip Brooks spent the past 37 years of his career going to work each day at an SCDOT office in Greenwood. The District Engineering Administrator for District 2 retired on June 1, 2010. Brooks grew up in neighboring Saluda County, graduating from Hollywood High School as a member of the senior class of 18 students.

After earning a B.S. degree in Civil Engineering at Clemson University in the spring 1973, he took one week off, and then began working in the Greenwood Construction Office as an Engineer trainee. Why did he choose SCDOT to start his career? "I was recruited by family members while a student at Clemson. I was told the agency was a good place to work, and the idea of being able to stay in the area where I grew up attracted me to the job," said Brooks.

The first project Brooks worked on was the widening of SC 72 between the City of Greenwood and Lake Greenwood. At that time, the young engineer set an early goal of someday earning a promotion to Resident Construction Engineer. That goal was reached in 1975. Later in the mid-1980s, he was promoted to District Construction Engineer. One of the more memorable projects during his years in that job also involved Lake Greenwood.

"We had a project to replace the bridge on SC 72 crossing Lake Greenwood. The contractor was responsible for removing the old bridge piers down to the bottom of the lake so no hazards were left behind for boat traffic. We had reason to believe that not all of the piers had been removed properly," Brooks said. Despite assurances to the contrary from the contractor, his gut was telling him to get more proof.

The contractor didn't know that District Construction Engineer Phillip Brooks was also Phillip Brooks the scuba diver. He donned his gear and took a look for himself. "We found two or three piers that not only had not been removed as far down as they should be, but I was able to stand on one of them and my head came up out of the water," said Brooks. Needless to say the contractor had to bring his equipment and crews back to Lake Greenwood to finish the job.

In the mid-90s, Brooks was promoted to DEA for District 2 by then-State Highway Engineer Don Freeman whom he considers his mentor and close friend. Being a DEA required some skill sets that are not learned in engineering school. "I had to learn the art of compromise. That's the education you don't get in college and that's social engineering." Brooks said he would have gladly traded some Calculus courses in college for some courses in how to work with people instead of learning it on the job.

The Saluda County native said that if he had to do it over again, he would not have to think twice about working at SCDOT. "SCDOT is a good place to work that provides stable and meaningful jobs. I have enjoyed the people I've met and worked with all these years. They are marvelous professionals. I've made lasting friendships with people who are like family," said the retired DEA.

ROB THOMPSON/THE CONNNECTOR

While a Clemson engineering student, Brooks made use of a slide rule. The biggest single innovation in his 37 years at SCDOT was the computer. He also cites GPS devices as a close number two.

At the top of the list of retirement plans for Phillip Brooks is spending more time with family including two-year-old grandson Wyatt and his dad Tracey. Long ago Phillip and his wife Geralyn and their two children Wesley and Carianne spent family vacations visiting other states. The Brooks family spent two weeks at a time in one or two states to get a feel for different parts of the country. There are still a few states out west left to check off the list.

He also has some thoughts about writing a second book on his family's genealogy, a possible book on local history and how World War I impacted his home area of South Carolina. And if there's time left, he plans to continue his interest in Native American artifacts.

On his last day on the job, the outgoing DEA told the staff not to worry, he would be inspecting some roads in District 2 from time-to-time and he would be more than willing to share what he found. Once a DEA, always a DEA.

Christy Hall

Christy Hall named District 2 DEA

By Bob Kudelka

Christy Hall, a 15-year SCDOT veteran, was named District Engineering Administrator for District 2 in June and became the second woman to hold the position of DEA.

Hall succeeded DEA Phillip Brooks, who retired.

"I appreciate the opportunity to give back to the agency," Hall said during her first week on the job. "I'm very proud to be a part of the agency."

Hall grew up in Abbeville and has lived in Greenwood for the past 21 years.

"I'd definitely like to contribute something to my hometown," Hall said. "I enjoy working for the agency and thought it would be a great opportunity to work locally and grow and learn professionally."

Hall said she was proud to be the second woman to hold the position of DEA and received a congratulatory email from the first woman DEA, Jo Ann Woodrum of District 7.

As DEA, Hall supervises 438 people and is responsible for the day to day operations in Anderson, Abbeville, Laurens, Greenwood, McCormick, Newberry, Saluda and Edgefield counties.

Hall described District 2 as mostly rural with a few small cities, including areas such as Greenwood poised to become small metropolitan areas.

"The potential for growth within the District is there," Hall said.

Hall attended Lander University from 1989 to 1992 and transferred to Clemson University, where she graduated with a bachelor of science in civil engineering in 1994.

Hall was attracted to SCDOT through a recruiting program and accepted a job through the agency's Civil Engineer Training Program.

Her first job was in Road Design as a squad member. "They wanted the trainees to get a year's experience before moving out," she said.

In 1997, Hall transferred to Highway Projects, where she was assistant project engineer. The section was revamped into the Program Manager area, where she was assistant program manager for the Midlands region.

In 2001, she became program manager in the Upstate region based in Greenville.

"At one point in time, we were managing about $2 billion worth of work in the Upstate region, including State Infrastructure Bank projects, design build projects and traditional bid projects," she said. Highlights included I-385 widening into downtown Greenville and the widening of I-585 in Spartanburg County.

In late 2006, she became District 3 Construction Engineer, the position she held until her promotion in June.

Hall was spending her first days on the job getting to know the people in her District.

"It's a great group of people, very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their work," Hall said.