Hart Baker named Deputy Secretary for Intermodal and Freight Programs

By Bob Kudelka

Hart Baker, a former Marine Captain and trial lawyer, has been named Deputy Secretary of the new Division of Intermodal and Freight Programs at SCDOT.

"Hart Baker's invaluable experience and leadership make him a good fit to lead this new Division to better serve South Carolina," said Transportation Secretary H.B. Limehouse Jr. "I am very pleased to announce he is our Deputy Secretary of the new Division of Intermodal and Freight Programs."

The Division was created when Act 206 was signed into law on June 15, reconstituting the Division of Mass Transit as the Division of Intermodal and Freight Programs.

The Act also established two offices within the new Division: The Office of Railroads and the Office of Public Transit.

The Office of Railroads is mainly responsible for preserving railroad rights-of-way for future use and coordinating the preparation of a state railroad corridor preservation and revitalization plan; coordinating high-speed and intercity passenger rail planning and development; planning, developing, maintaining, and coordinating a comprehensive state rail plan for passenger and freight railroads and infrastructure services with other modes of transportation to help facilitate effective and efficient interstate and intrastate movement of people and freight; and applying for and receiving state, federal, or other funds for passenger and freight rail service and infrastructure needs, high-speed and intercity passenger rail planning and development, and rail corridor preservation and revitalization programs.

The Office of Public Transit "must develop and coordinate a general public transit program and policy for the State in order to encourage the efficient development, implementation, operation, evaluation, and monitoring of transit systems, both public and private," according to Act 206. "The office is authorized to apply for and receive federal, state, and other funds for passenger public transit systems on the department's behalf.

Baker said he was excited about overseeing the new Division.

"The Legislative plan is to develop a statewide synthesis, or fit, between all modes of transportation as they relate to personal transit and freight transit," Baker said. "We are hopeful that with additional federal monies allotted to this effort nationwide, it will not only be a dream, it will be a deliverable item. We are striving to develop a functional fit between the two (transit and rail), because that is what intermodal transportation is."

Baker was born in Montgomery, Ala., and grew up in Orlando, where he played football and basketball in high school.

He graduated from The Citadel in 1961 and joined the Marine Corps. After 3½ years, Baker had risen to the rank of Captain. He had the difficult decision whether to make the Marines his career or pursue his other dream of becoming a lawyer.

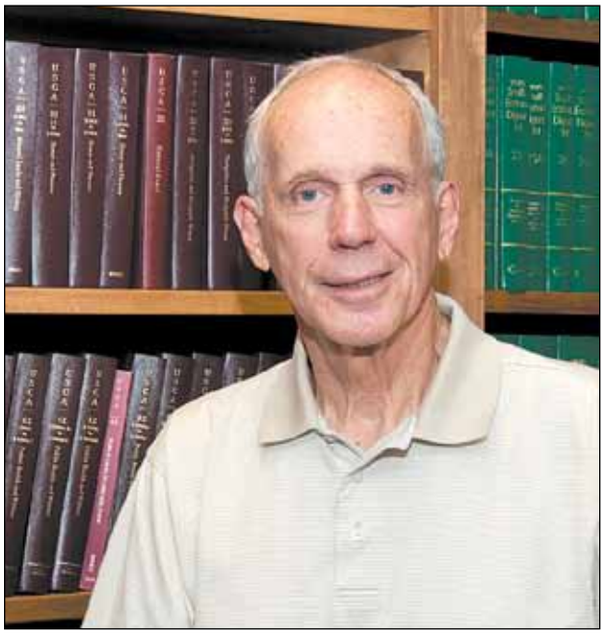
The Marines, he said, is "the best laboratory in the world for learning teamwork – all for one, one for all – and is built on leadership."

Inspired by his literary hero, Atticus Finch in "To Kill a Mockingbird," Baker chose the legal profession. (Baker named his Labrador retriever "Scout" after Finch's daughter in the novel.)

"The legal profession is a calling if you accept it the way it should be accepted. You will have the opportunity to make a difference, not just in small ways but in big ways," Baker said. "That, of course, appealed to me."

Baker graduated from the University of Florida Law School in 1967 and became a Board Certified civil trial lawyer based in Orlando.

He received many awards during his legal career but the one he prizes the most is Guardian Ad Litem of the Year. Baker spent many hours volunteering as pro bono legal representative of children in cases of child abuse, divorce and abandonment.



Hart Baker
Deputy Secretary for Intermodal and Freight Programs

"It was eye opening, often times shocking and absolutely legally necessary," Baker said.

After 28 years practicing law in Florida, Baker in 1997 joined SCDOT as Chief Counsel in the Legal Division, where he also has held the position of Associate Chief Counsel.

He said he looks forward to the challenges ahead.

"I think the greatest asset I have in my job is the quality of people that I will be working with," Baker said. "Every day, as I drive to work, I am in praise of the quality and professionalism of the employees of the South Carolina Department of Transportation. I think we are one of South Carolina's richest resources."

Baker lives in Chapin with his wife, Sallie. In his spare time, he enjoys trout fishing and painting.

Glennith Johnson named Associate Contract Counsel

By Bob Kudelka

Glennith Johnson has been named Associate Contract Counsel, responsible for coordinating with SCDOT management and staff in the facilitation of complex agreements, contracts, policies and procedures.

"I'm excited about this new opportunity at SCDOT," said Johnson, who has been with the Department for 19 years. "I was a contracting officer for 28 years in the military, where I had the authority to execute contracts up to $1 million. I'm going to put that experience to good use."

A Sumter native, Johnson graduated from USC Law School in 1985. After law school, Johnson used his law degree during six years in the Air Force. He gained valuable experience negotiating contracts on multi-million dollar missile programs with large weapons makers such as General Dynamics and McDonald Douglas, as well as negotiating with Saudi Arabia as the Chief Air Force liaison officer during the Gulf War.

Johnson was one of two contract officers out of 112 to earn a Bronze Star for his service during the Gulf War.

His career in the military continued with the Air Force Reserves, where he reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Johnson joined SCDOT in 1991 as Assistant Chief Counsel and later became Supervisor of the Legal Office Support Staff. He has held positions including Deputy Secretary for Mass Transit.

He is looking forward to using his negotiating skills once he begins his new position.

"One of the most important things a lawyer has to have is the ability to negotiate," Johnson said. "Even after the other side presents their case and up until the jury deliberates, you're still negotiating to try to get the best settlement for your client."

Johnson and Denine, his wife of 25 years, live in Columbia with their four children, Dominique, Brianna, Christian and Gabrielle. Johnson's extended family includes his oldest daughter, Krysta and her two children, Amir and Amoni.

Glennith Johnson