Bland retires, McCarter promoted

District 4 has new District Engineering Administrator

By Bob Kudelka

Stan Bland, left, is retiring as District 4 Engineering Administrator. John McCarter, right, has been named to succeed him.

John McCarter knows he has some big shoes to fill as District 4's new District Engineering Administrator. And it's not just because his predecessor, 6-foot 7- inch Stan Bland, wears a size 14 shoe.

Bland, who retired after 39 years with SCDOT, was a popular DEA who used innovative methods and stressed teamwork while promoting a family atmosphere among the tight-knit district.

While he is excited about becoming DEA, McCarter said it was tough to see Bland retire. The two had worked together for 18 years.

"Stan is a great guy," McCarter said. "It's bittersweet. I'm going to miss working with Stan because we've worked together so long. It's going to be an impact for everybody around here."

McCarter on June 30 took over the supervision of 550 employees in 7 counties of District 4, which is based in Chester County.

"I certainly welcome the challenge and look forward to it," McCarter said, adding that he did not plan major changes.

Teamwork has been a big emphasis in District 4, epitomized by the recent emergency bridge work done on Interstate 77. Two bridges were replaced ahead of schedule with little inconvenience to motorists.

"Making everybody feel they're part of a team is important," McCarter said. "You lead by example, which is a lot easier said than done sometimes, but I've always felt you stand by what you do."

McCarter joined SCDOT in 1990 after graduating from Clemson University with a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering. He began in Road Design under Robert Pratt as part of the Department's civil engineering training program. Six months later, he moved to District 4's Chesterfield Construction office under Bland.

McCarter became Assistant Maintenance Engineer in York County in 1994 and Resident Construction Engineer in Cherokee County in 1997. In 2001, he became Assistant District Construction Engineer and that same year became District Construction Engineer.

McCarter was born and raised in Clover, where he lives with his wife, Marianna, and daughter, Madison.

Born and raised in Edgefield, Bland graduated from Strom Thurmond High School and earned a civil engineering degree from Clemson University.

He joined SCDOT in 1971 in Edgefield and a year later was Assistant to the Resident Construction Engineer, Ray Yonce. In 1974, he became Resident Construction Engineer in McCormick County.

Bland moved to District 4 in 1978 when he became District Construction Engineer under L.B. Cannon, DEA.

The move to Chester was good timing for Bland. The District had perhaps more construction work going on that anywhere in the state because I-77 was under construction in Fairfield, Chester and York counties.

"It was huge at the time," Bland said. "It was a lot of work for a young engineer. "

After 23 years as District Construction Engineer, Bland in 2001 was named DEA for District 4. Like McCarter, he had big shoes to fill as well.

Bland took the place of Chuck Holladay, DEA since 1983 who passed away after 30 years with the Department. Bland and Holladay had been classmates at Clemson and worked together 23 years.

Looking back on his term as DEA, two highlights stand out for Bland. One is how District 4 employees were do-it-yourselfers who renovated offices including the District office, saving money and giving employees improved work areas.

Gone are the days when employees had nowhere to meet but at shops with no air conditioning and tried to hear over the loud drone of fans.

"We've been able to to go each county and upgrade the facilities." Bland said. "I think our capital improvements are an example for the entire state."

In addition, Bland has been honored for an innovative way to repair roads called full depth reclamation, a technique by which failing and worn out road surfaces are repaired by milling the existing asphalt, mixing it with some of the underlying soils and cement and laying it back down to create a new base. By using recycled materials, costs are lower than starting from scratch.

Bland has also been active in the community. To the thousands of school children who have heard his talks over the years, he's known as "Mr. Bland, the Highway Man."

His school visits include messages of highway safety with topics such as hydrology and road construction. He always ends his talks urging children to do well in math, saying SCDOT can use good engineers in the future.

"I think SCDOT is the best state agency there is and I don't have any regrets on coming here," Bland said. "It's an agency everybody depends on because roads play a big part in everybody's lives.

"I'm proud of what we accomplished as a team up here," Bland said. "One thing I've tried to build as a District is a family atmosphere. We work together and also have a good time.

"It's a great place to work. It's a good organization - good people with good ethics. For me, it's been a long career but it's been fun," Bland said. "It goes by quick."

District 4 employees pose with Stan Bland at a fish fry on June 29.