Deputy Secretary for Engineering Tony Chapman retires from SCDOT

By Pete Poore

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When you enjoy your work, the place where you work and the people with whom you work, 34 years can go by pretty quickly. That's how Tony Chapman describes his time at SCDOT when he retired in April of this year as the first Deputy Secretary for Engineering.

"It's been a great 34 years and I've made a lot of good friends," said the Newberry County native. Chapman began his SCDOT career as a summer employee while a student in the USC College of Engineering. He held several positions in the Districts including District Engineering Administrator for District 1.

His promotion to Director of Maintenance brought him to Headquarters, followed by positions as Deputy State Highway Engineer, State Highway Engineer, Acting Executive Director and finishing up as the Deputy Secretary for Engineering.

"I enjoyed each position that I had at SCDOT. I had good supervisors who gave me the confidence to do my job. Each time I was promoted, I asked myself if I could do the next job. My supervisors and my family always had faith in me and I never hesitated to take on new responsibilities, except once."

The retired Deputy Secretary made no bones about being somewhat uncomfortable about the short time he spent as Acting Executive Director from December 2006 until May 2007. "Those duties put me more into the political arena and less in the engineering world. After four or five months, I had no desire to do that job, and no one welcomed Mr. Limehouse to DOT more than me," said Chapman.

Looking back at his career, Chapman points to some significant accomplishments. One of which is the now-standard practice of adding two feet of paved shoulders on rural roads when they're resurfaced. "I made this standard practice when I was the DEA in District 1. When I became Director of Maintenance, I had to sell the idea that paved shoulders could reduce crashes," he said.

A second accomplishment was obtaining the software from Georgia DOT to establish the HMMS system in Maintenance. Chapman credited current Director Jim Feda for getting the system up and running.

Chapman recalls campaigning for an emphasis on maintenance as opposed to new construction back in the early 2000s. He said he would tell anyone who would listen that South Carolina's large highway system needed repairing more than adding new highways to maintain.

The former SCDOT Deputy Secretary said that he was fortunate in selecting smart and good people when filling positions going back to his early years as an RME. "I recruited good people right out of high school, who are still working for SCDOT as Foremen or Resident Foremen," he said.

His hiring talent also extended to the management level. "As I approached my retirement date, I thought about the people we had in our management positions in my office, the various Engineering Directors and the DEAs. We have the best people in all of those positions," Chapman concluded.

"I guess the proof is that I've been retired since April, and no one yet has called me with a question or asked for an opinion on how to solve a problem. A far as I can see, the transition has been smooth and the Division has not missed a beat," Chapman said.

The former SCDOT employee has taken some time off this summer, but as August approaches, he still has the desire and drive to use his experience and talent, so he's looking at opportunities. And there's another reason that motivates him. "In August my wife Pam will go back to her teaching duties and my youngest will be going to Carolina for the fall semester. I don't want to hang around the house by myself. I'm ready to try something new," Chapman said.

ABOVE: Family members pose with Tony Chapman at his retirement dinner May 18 at Saluda Shoals.

RIGHT: Clem Watson presents Chapman with a '#1' road sign made for him in USC garnet and signed by baseball coach Ray Tanner.

BOTTOM: Retiring SCDOT engineers enjoy their last Engineering Conference on March 24. From left are: Stan Bland, Rick Werts, Chapman, Phillip Brooks and Ed Eargle.