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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Pete Ricketts, Governor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NDOT's Fourth Annual Innovation Challenge Winners Announced: Western Nebraska Districts Win Five Awards

July 17, 2020 (Lincoln, Neb.) — After much anticipation, the winner of the “Innovation of the Year” and three runners-up were announced to Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) employees during the fourth annual Innovation Showcase, held on July 10 in the NDOT Central Headquarters Auditorium in Lincoln. Highway districts in western Nebraska received recognition with five awards, including both first place and runner-up honors. The Showcase recognizes NDOT employees who go above and beyond in their jobs to improve the department and make a positive impact on their communities.

The winning entry, selected by a vote of their peers from 32 projects, was the “Delaminated Concrete Drag,” submitted by Nick Smets, Bill Wright and Harvey Winslow, representing District 4 from Kearney. Each member of the winning team received \$750 each, plus a set of NDOT Innovation coasters. The innovators created a tool from an old rolling golf club stand that can aid in bridge inspections, reducing the time it takes to sound a bridge deck to about a quarter of the time compared to the older method.

Runner-up was the “Sliding Sign Rack,” by Tim Johnson and Derik Ashmore, District 5 in Chappell. Each team member received \$300 plus a set of coasters. This innovation involved creating a rack system for storing signs that is more organized, saves space, and protects the signs from damage.

Third place, “Striping Application,” was submitted by Claire Inbody and Shelley Schulte, Business Technology Support Division (BTSD), and Dallas Hayes, District 1 in Lincoln. Each team member received \$200 plus a set of coasters. Supervisors can use this application to easily plan and organize maintenance activities, saving time and improving efficiency.

Fourth place went to Kyle Liebig, Project Development, and Chris Wiebke, BTSD, for the “Local Projects Mapping Application.” Each team member received \$150 plus a set of coasters. This Local Project Mapping Assistance application makes it possible for other NDOT divisions to view LPA projects to aid planning between state and local projects and avoid potential conflicts.



Four additional winners, placing fifth through eighth, were named as part of the “Elite Eight.” Each winner received \$125 plus Innovation coasters. Winners included: “Binder Pods,” fifth place, submitted by Mike Reynolds – District 3 in Norfolk, Bob Rea and Jody Paul – Materials and Research, and Operations Division; “Silvex Hot Plate,” sixth place, submitted by Joe Morosic, McCook and Harvey Melton, Holdrege – District 7; “ER GIS APP,” seventh place, submitted by Kyle Liebig and Nick Burnham – Project Development, Claire Inbody, Marc Zaiger, Cole Davison and Tylia Penner – BTSD; and “Green Sheet Process Improvement Project,” eighth place, submitted by Lori Ellison-Wiig, Ron Poe, Alison Krohn and Roy Leach – Project Development; Jamie Mikkleson – Roadway Design, and Lisa Mathews – Process Improvement.

Districts in western Nebraska fared well in the competition with five awards, including “Innovation of the Year” – “Delaminated Concrete Drag,” District 4; runner-up – “Sliding Sign Rack,” District 5; and sixth place – “Silvex Hot Plate,” District 7. Two of the seven innovations recognized by the NDOT Director’s Office, selected from the innovations that were not among the Elite Eight, represented western Nebraska, including: “Concrete Clean Out Water System,” submitted by Nicholas Harpold, District 5 in Gering; and “Visa Contract Purchases,” submitted by Tom Sands, David Gates and Liz Salisbury – Operations; Jan Collins and Maggie Repass – District 7 in McCook; Connie Heiser and Linda Soulliere – Controller.

The Innovation Showcase event and announcement of winners was the culmination of more than a month of voting by NDOT employees during the Innovation Challenge, with contestants’ names placed into brackets, face-offs in weekly head-to-head battles, and names whittled down until a winner emerged in the final round of voting. There was a record number of votes placed by NDOT employees.

The stakes were high this year with increased prize money available, thanks to a \$3,000 grant from the Western Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (WASHTO). Each employee who was a part of a winning innovation received an equal share of the prize money.

“This is by far the best year we’ve had for innovations, both in terms of participation and the quality of the submittals,” said NDOT Director Kyle Schneweis. “NDOT employees continue to raise the bar high as they create solutions in their workplaces and make positive contributions to their communities. It reflects well on our team at NDOT.”

Due to COVID-19, precautions were taken for social distancing and wearing masks during the Innovation Showcase. A video of the awards presentation was available to all employees after the event.

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