

# The INSIDE

# LANE

SPECIAL EDITION

*A newsletter for employees of the Arizona Department of Transportation*

DECEMBER 2024

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 8



**Meet the 2024 ADOT Annual Agency Award winners!**

**PAGES 3-7**

ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



**ARIZONA**  
— DEPARTMENT OF —  
**TRANSPORTATION**

## LEADERSHIP

## MATTERS

LIKE TO IDENTIFY myself personally as a daughter, sister, mom, grandmother, auntie, friend and community volunteer. Then, I identify professionally as someone who wants to help teams get to “YES!” A fun fact about myself – I once tap danced in a production of “42nd Street.”

### What does public service mean to you?

I come from a family of public servants, so it is what I experienced growing up and what I know. My dad was a career Air Force officer. When he retired, he worked for the city of Tucson as the operations director. I have seven siblings, five of them had careers in military service. I have worked for the city of Tucson, Maricopa County and ADOT. It was instilled in me that you need to give back to your community. One of the ways you can do that is to have a career in public service.

### What is “Big things ahead” all about?

ADOT employees believe in purpose-driven work and have a heart for public service. Every employee represents ADOT and embodies our values — easy to work with, collaborative and results focused. I look forward to hearing stories of their pride in public service, whether it is in a video or reading future stories about employees who have family ties within ADOT. Our annual agency award winners are sharing what public service means to them in this issue of The Inside Lane.

The pride we show in our work makes a difference in the communities we serve. It’s why there are “Big things ahead” for all ADOT employees! ■



**Teresa Welborn**  
*Deputy Director/Chief  
Operating Officer*



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## On the cover

ADOT Videographer **Joe Larger** took all of the photos featured in this issue, including the cover images. Top photos, from left: Safety/Innovation award winner **Gavin Bunting**; Customer Service award winner **Riley Joy**; Employee of the Year **Jose Baeza**; and Leader of the Year **Michelle Huckabay**. Bottom photo: the Enforcement and Compliance Division Six Sigma Team of the Year is shown at the ADOT Annual Agency Awards ceremony, held in August.







# Michelle Huckabay

**P**UTS HER team first. Collaborative. Cheerleader. Accountable. These are just a few accolades others have used to describe **Michelle Huckabay**, this year's Leader of the Year.

The Leader of the Year Award recognizes an employee in management who motivates and inspires others around them and is a role model for exemplifying ADOT values.

As the controller in Financial Management Services (FMS), Huckabay manages a large number of team projects with great communication and support for team members. She puts her team first and is always looking for ways to help them.

"I felt very surprised," said Huckabay of winning the award. "There are so many worthy leaders within ADOT that I have gotten a chance to work with over the years, and I honestly didn't feel worthy."

In presenting the award to Huckabay, Director **Jennifer Toth** shared "Teamwork is a big component of Michelle's

work. She consistently looks to build up her team and provide opportunities for increased camaraderie among members. Michelle celebrates her employees and makes sure they receive the recognition they deserve."

Huckabay and her team were tasked by FMS leadership to find new ways to educate customers about such topics as travel, P-Card, chart of account elements/transfers and procurement/payments. She created virtual training sessions called roadshows. Huckabay actually took them on the road, developing relationships with customers face-to-face by meeting them at their businesses. The team received such positive feedback that more roadshows are planned for the future.

Huckabay encourages her team members to improve their skills and take part in professional development. Every year,

## WHAT PUBLIC SERVICE MEANS TO ME

*"Public service is extremely worthwhile. We have a chance to not only pursue an excellent career path, but also to provide excellent customer service to the public, and rebuild faith in government among the public."*



Far left, **Michelle Huckabay** accepts the Leader of the Year award from Director **Jennifer Toth**. Pictured left: Director **Jennifer Toth**, Controller **Michelle Huckabay** and Deputy Director/Chief Financial Officer **Kristine Ward**.

she takes more than 40 hours of continuous education to further her professional and personal development.

Sustainability is an important initiative at FMS, ensuring that processes are less reliant on a single contributor. Huckabay has embodied that effort by making six new processes sustainable and making sure 12 others remain that way.

Nominated by FMS Deputy Assistant Director for Finance and Accounting **Jacob Gable**, Michelle understands customers' needs, identifies problems, improves processes and measures results.

"She motivates her team to do the right thing, commit to excellence and care for one another," Gable said. "She is so deserving of being named Leader of the Year." 🏆

~ Kathy Boyle, Assistant Communications Director for Internal Communications



EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARD

# Jose Baeza



## WHAT PUBLIC SERVICE MEANS TO ME

*"I define public service as an honest duty to the people, through good and uplifting work. It's work that can truly define who you are as a person by showing true care, affection and appreciation for people."*

**J**OSE BAEZA is someone who is always there to help. In his 11 years at ADOT, he has gone out of his way to make a difference through his highly motivated and results-driven work. His efforts have earned him this year's Employee of the Year award.

"It felt good to get the award and see everyone appreciate the work I do," Baeza said.

Baeza is a transportation construction technician in the Infrastructure Delivery and Operations Division. His role involves addressing litter and debris concerns in the Central District and West Valley. That includes interacting with people experiencing homelessness who may be seeking shelter in ADOT's Right of Way. He is respectful to those he encounters and works to help them find resources.



His kindness and generosity earned him praise from the city of Phoenix when he came across a mother and her 4-year-old daughter on the streets on a hot summer day. He contacted a city of Phoenix neighborhood specialist to let her know about the family in need. The mother and daughter were soon out of the heat and safe in a shelter.

It's just one of many examples of Baeza going above his typical job duties to help people. He continuously manages



Pictured above, standing up from left to right: Transportation Construction Technician (TCT) 4 **Luis Baeza**, Kenia Baeza (Jose's wife), Central District Administrator **Randy Everett**, TCT 4 **Jose Baeza**, IDO Division Director **Steve Boschen**, Director **Jennifer Toth**, Transportation Engineering Specialist **Brian Eschliman**, Environmental Program Administrator **Alexis Zaring** and Engineering Administrator **Raul Amavisca**. Seated from left to right: Highway Operations Technician 1 **Jesus Cortez**, TCT 4 **Chris Melberg**, TCT 4 **David Montoya** and TCT 4 **Ken Hunt**.

Pictured left (left to right): Central District Administrator **Randy Everett**, **Jose Baeza**, Director **Jennifer Toth** and IDO Division Director **Steve Boschen**.

difficult issues with an ease and good spirit that impacts those around him.

That impact was evident at this year's Annual Agency Awards ceremony where he had his own cheering squad. Several of his co-workers and family members attended the event to support him and his work.

"Jose goes above and beyond to maintain the safety and procedures of the litter contractors, new employees and the individuals he encounters in the public," said Environmental Program Administrator **Alexis Zaring**, who nominated Baeza for the award. "I appreciate his continued effort to improve this program and provide for the needs of his team." ■

~ Ashley Richards, Senior Communications Specialist

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# Six Sigma Team:



**T**HE CROSS-FUNCTIONAL Six Sigma team is composed of experts in budgeting, facility management, recruitment and hiring, data, policy and port leadership. The team members' collaboration and innovations to ports of entry around the state earned them the 2024 Team of the Year Award.

The ten-person team was tasked with analyzing Enforcement and Compliance Division (ECD) operations data to create a flexible, well-informed approach to hiring and deploying team members at ports of entry to increase operational hours, ensure team safety and protect the safety of Arizona's public and transportation infrastructure.

"The Six Sigma team was given a lot of flexibility to get creative and really use all of the data that is collected monthly by the division. This team was made up of a lot of 'go-getters' and to be a part of that collaboration was a great experience," said Program Administrator **Marina Garrison**. "The goal of course was to open more ports with the staff that we had, but also start hiring more strategically and placing those new resources in the areas with the greatest need. It was a heavy lift and one that we will reflect back on for years to come as we continue to try and improve our processes."

Using the data, the team developed a digital dashboard of all ports of entry and their staffing. The dashboard provided valuable insights, empowering the team to establish

**Rebecca Banfill, Lori Benedict, Rene Brugman, Kathleen Copeland, Marina Garrison, James Minton, Wendy Sanchez and Helen Sutherland, Capt. Jason Sloan and Capt. Kathy Kontz**

baseline port staffing and operational models. Using the models, the team was able to open closed ports and ensure all commercial vehicles were compliant with state and federal regulations, deterring vehicles that were overweight or unsafe.

The team was able to open six ports of entry that had been closed and increase nine ports' hours by 56% to 450 hours per week, resulting in a 90% increase in violation enforcements and a 28% increase in weight violation enforcements. The team's analysis enabled them to work with leadership to establish a seven-member mobile VIN team dedicated to providing services to rural areas around the state.

The team's digital dashboard continues to provide guidance, allowing ECD to flexibly adapt to changing port volume and move team members to adequately meet public and commercial enforcement needs at ports.

"It was a great project, a great win for ECD and a great win for ADOT big-picture," said



Standing up from left to right: Deputy Director of MVD and Compliance **Wayde Webb**, Program Administrator **Marina Garrison**, Quality Management Administrator **Rebecca Banfill**, ECD Capt. **Jason Sloan**, Administrative Services Officer **Helen Sutherland** and ECD Director **Daniel Lugo**.

Seated from left to right: Administrative Services Officer **Wendy Sanchez**, Program Administrator **Rene Brugman**, Director **Jennifer Toth**, Program Administrator **Lori Benedict** and Policy Manager **Kathleen Copeland**.

Enforcement and Services Bureau Maj. **Andrew Orozco**. 🇲🇽

~ Megan Thomas, Senior Communications Specialist

## WHAT PUBLIC SERVICE MEANS TO ME

**"Public service to me is about doing something that makes me happy and gives me an opportunity to serve others, both internally and externally, while also having a positive impact on the organization and the customers that we serve."**

— **Marina Garrison**



# Riley Joy

**R**ILEY JOY'S initiative and commitment to problem-solving have not only improved the ADOT customer experience, those qualities also earned him a 2024 ADOT Agency Award.

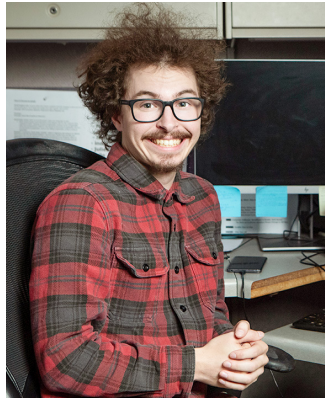
Joy received the Customer Service Award, which annually recognizes an employee who has gone above and beyond to provide outstanding service. According to his nominators, Joy cares about ADOT's customers and has become a subject-matter expert to provide even better service.

Since joining the Motor Vehicle Division's Contact Center in 2022, Joy's creativity and technical skills assisted with the redesign and implementation of new features, making it easy for customers to navigate the site and find useful information.

Another example of Joy's ingenuity happened last October when he was asked to be a part of the Call Reduction team with a motor carrier focus. The federal laws for motor carriers are complicated and work in conjunction with strict regulations. Assisting these customers with registrations and compliance is complex.

In order to better help these customers, Joy studied all aspects of motor carrier regulations. He created standard work and flow charts to help other call center employees. He learned so much about the laws and processes that he became a subject-matter expert who other employees could go to for help. Joy even started a pilot program to reduce phone call and customer request backlogs. It was so successful that the Motor Carrier Unit caught up on all calls within a week and all backlogged customer requests within two weeks. Motor Carrier customers now get immediate assistance because of his initiative.

"His dedication to all of the projects and teams as a subject-matter expert proved to be invaluable," said **Denise Ohnesorgen** in the nomination. "He was asked to be a part of the Call Reduction team with Motor Carrier focus. It is here that he is the voice of the customer,



## WHAT PUBLIC SERVICE MEANS TO ME

**"Public service is good, honest work."**

**- Riley Joy**



Customer Service Award winner **Riley Joy** (center) is joined by (left to right) Customer Service Unit Supervisor **Gerardo Rodriguez**, Customer Service Section Supervisor **Natasha Watkins**, Senior Customer Service Manager **Denise Ohnesorgen** and ADOT Director **Jennifer Toth**.

advocating for customer experience while providing insightful feedback on how we as an agency have the opportunity to collaborate and improve internal processes and self service, thus improving the experience for our frontline employees as well."

Joy is very modest about the win, and says he really just focuses on treating the caller on the other end of the line as a person — not just a number in the system.

"I wish this was a team award," said Joy, adding his customer service tip for others. "Stick to policy and remember that you're always assisting a human being." ■

~ Angela DeWelles, Senior Communications Specialist



# Gavin Bunting

**H**IGHWAY OPERATION'S Page Technician Supervisor **Gavin Bunting** is constantly looking for ways to innovate.

From catching salt barn runoff to use as highway salt brine to providing hedge trimmers to his team for clearing hard-to-reach areas under guardrails without back strain, Bunting's brought many ideas to reality in 18 years with ADOT. His latest idea to use Automated Flagging Assistance



◀ Safety and Innovation Award-winner Highway Operations Technician Supervisor **Gavin Bunting** (center) poses with Director **Jennifer Toth** (center), Highway Operations Superintendent **Thomas Eckler** (left) and IDO Division Director **Steve Boschen** (right).

Devices (AFADs) to enhance safety has earned him the 2024 Safety and Innovation Award.

"He's always putting the work before himself," said Highway Operations Superintendent **Thomas Eckler**. "He's definitely committed to the people of the state of Arizona, trying to improve things and make the highway better and safer for everybody who's out there traveling."

Bunting's eight-person team in Page has the most lane miles in their district, with it taking more than an hour each direction to travel their three main routes. Bunting himself lives in a trailer in the yard due to distance, going home on weekends. He leads from the front, regularly going out on site, holding team picnics and providing his team time to tackle improvement passion-projects.

It was Bunting's time in the field that sparked his idea. Inattentive drivers were posing a risk for his team.

"It's a continual challenge," Bunting said. "I've had close encounters myself as well as team members. We had one team member that had a minor injury due to somebody blowing past the flagger. We're in such a rural area, unfortunately people don't read the signs — they're just cruising, enjoying the scenery and not paying attention to the road."

Bunting developed a plan to use AFADs to increase driver awareness and reduce team members' exposure to traffic and the elements. He placed a team member in the center of work zones (where they could observe closure points and crew members) to remotely operate AFADs' red and orange lights and stop arms in opposite lanes up to a mile apart, freeing a crew member and improving safety for all.

The use of AFADs was a resounding success, with approximately 25,000 vehicles passing through incident-free. The public, international visitors and the Arizona Department of Public Safety shared their love of the system with Bunting.

"I emphasized to them this award isn't just mine, it's a reflection on all of us," said Bunting. "I give credit to my team. It may be one of my crazy ideas, but they have been super supportive." ■

~ Megan Thomas, Senior Communications Specialist



## WHAT PUBLIC SERVICE MEANS TO ME

*"I've always enjoyed helping others and helping those in need, from stopping to help change a tire to our emergency scene work. I've enjoyed being able to help. My dad was a police officer for a lot of years and public service is something that's been in the family."*



# ADOT JUMBLE

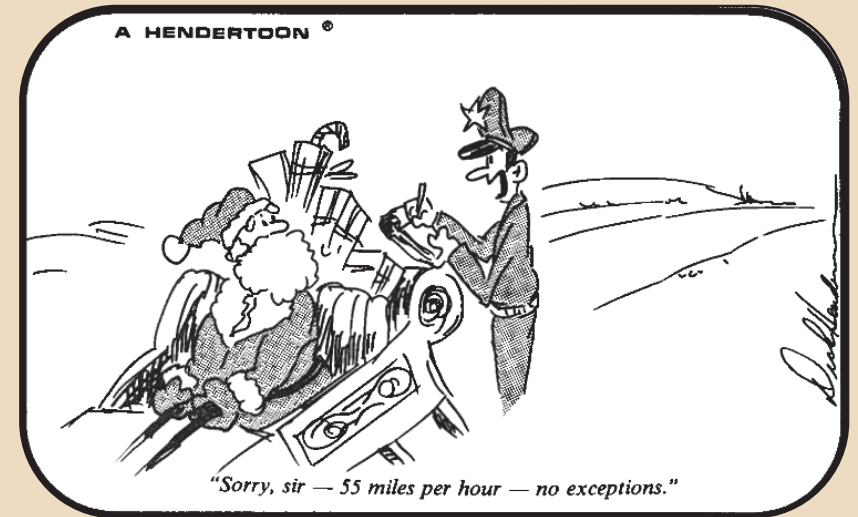
**Directions:** Unscramble each of the clue words, then arrange the circled letters to form the answer. Email your answers to [InsideLane@azdot.gov](mailto:InsideLane@azdot.gov) by **Jan. 9**. Everyone who solves the puzzle will be entered into a drawing for a prize. We'll reveal the answers on the [ADOTNet homepage](#). Good luck! 🍀

1) ERZIOCEGN   \_  \_ \_  \_ \_

2) RLSUETS   \_ \_  \_ \_

3) CSFDUEO  \_ \_ \_ \_

4) PYEXMLIFE \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  \_



This cartoon is vintage! It appeared in the [December 1976 issue of Newsbeat](#), ADOT's employee newsletter of the day. "Hendertoons" appeared in employee newsletters throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

*When you're riding with Santa on his sleigh, you better hold on \_ \_ \_ " \_ \_ \_ " \_ \_ \_ .*

**Innovation Marketplace**

Innovation: The renewal of a product, or a service by applying new processes, introducing new techniques, or establishing successful ideas to create new value.

Submit an Innovation

For Upline Leaders

Innovation Form  Highlight Request Form

An innovation is the renewal of a product or service by applying new processes, introducing new techniques or establishing successful ideas to create new value.

Employees are encouraged to submit innovations that are shareable in the [Innovation Marketplace](#). Contact your [Lean Coach](#) if you have questions.

*At ADOT, solving problems is what we do. Keep submitting quality innovations to the new and improved Innovation Marketplace!*

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