



# great lakes REPORTER

A Publication of American Public Works Association - Michigan Chapter • Vol 126 • No. 2 • Summer/Fall 2024

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## REELIN' THEM IN

*Third Annual Scott Fishing  
Tournament adds scholarship*

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## LEW BENDER HONORED WITH LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

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# great lakes REPORTER

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Cover photo: Kristen McCue



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Brandy Siedlaczek, City of Southfield

I am extremely excited and humbled to be writing this message to you all as your new APWA Michigan Chapter President. It has been a busy and productive spring and summer so far and I'm excited to add the role as Chapter President to my list of responsibilities. I have been involved with this organization for over a decade now and can tell you that the leadership at the chapter and branch levels – past and present – is a group of very dedicated individuals with a passion for what they do. Leadership has strived to make this organization what it is today, and I am very proud to be a part of it.

Coming back from a very successful Great Lakes Expo this past May I feel reinvigorated and ready to take on my new role. It was the most well-attended Expo to date, which shows our membership is strong and active. I hope many of you were able to attend and take advantage of the excellent educational sessions and networking events during the conference and came back refreshed and ready to take advantage of what you learned. Hopefully you met a few new people while you were there, too. The National Public Works Expo (PWX) in Atlanta is right around the corner and I hope we will have a good contingent of our Michigan membership attending to represent our chapter. PWX is a great opportunity to network with your peers across the nation and learn what others are doing in the public works field. I've been able to attend a few PWX conferences in the past and can tell you they are well worth the trip.

This next year should be an exciting one and I'm happy to be leading the way. I'm hoping to grow our membership by reaching out to communities that haven't been active in our organization. I'm hoping you can help me, as well, by inviting neighbors and colleagues to get involved. I'm looking forward to supporting and working with our Young Professionals group; they are doing an amazing job and I want our organization to continue supporting them. I see many future APWA leaders in that group! We are also looking

at updating our strategic plan, which will shape the vision for the future of our organization and I'm excited to be a part of that process.

We have many exciting opportunities for our members this coming year. We have multiple excellent training opportunities that I hope you will consider taking advantage of. If you haven't already attended Michigan Public Service Institute (MPSI) this should be number one on your list to attend. This always books up every year, so don't wait to get on the list for future sessions. We also have Michigan Advanced Public Service Institute, Roads Scholar Program, Snow Plow Operator Training, and the Snow Plow Rodeo, which are all excellent educational opportunities. There are also many opportunities at the local branch level, including much and learns, training, educational tours, and fun networking events. There is something for everyone so please take advantage of your membership by attending what you can. We are also very excited to be hosting the National APWA Snow Conference in Grand Rapids April 6-9, 2025. We have an amazing team of people who are well underway with planning this national event. I urge you to plan to attend. You won't want to miss it!

I recently came across a quote by Ruth Bader Ginsburg: "Whatever you choose to do, leave tracks. That means don't do it just for yourself. You will want to leave the world a little better for your having lived."

And I thought this was really what our membership does. I truly believe that you are all making a difference in people's lives and in the communities you serve. I'm proud to be a part of making a difference and you should be, too.

I am looking forward to serving you this next year!

~ Brandy Siedlaczek

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# RECAPPING GLX 2024



## Law Bender honored for dedication to public works education

At GLX 2024, Lew Bender, a consultant who researches and teaches classes on management and supervision, received a Lifetime Achievement Award from APWA.

To encapsulate all Bender's accomplishments in a few words is nearly impossible, as he's been working with APWA since 1993.

But what does he enjoy most?

"Lew gets satisfaction from the people and teams that he continues to guide through the many changes, challenges, and demands of working in the public works profession," said Mary Bender, his wife, who facilitates sessions alongside Lew. "He feels great accomplishment when he can help a team to move from good to great."

In addition, Bender "enjoys passing along the lessons he has learned, especially from the people he has grown to know and admire from the institutes and working with Michigan teams," Mary said.

Bender says he was surprised and honored to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award. And, as always, he left GLX energized by the enthusiasm and tenacity of the public works professionals.



Lew teaching at GLX

### ACHIEVEMENTS

- ▶ Taught more than 100 MPSI sessions
- ▶ Worked in hundreds of Michigan communities for over 42 years
- ▶ Taught thousands of students. Currently, teaches 300 students in Michigan and 300 students in Illinois.

When not teaching, Lew and Mary live in their home on the Pine River near Luther, Michigan, in the summer and in Tarpon Springs, Florida, in the winter.

"Life is good," they say.

Bender is professor emeritus at Southern Illinois University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Georgia in 1977, his master's degree from Wayne State University in 1973 and his bachelor's degree from Grand Valley State University in 1971.



Lew accepting his award from APWA Michigan President, Dan Sorek

# RECAPPING GLX 2024

## Donald Rohraff receives Harold M. Hultquist Award

**Father. Husband. Grandfather. Volunteer.  
Golfer. Leader.**

Donald Rohraff has worn many hats throughout this lifetime and now he can add award winner to his collection.

In May, Rohraff received the *Harold M. Hultquist Award* for his many years of dedication and service to the Michigan Chapter of APWA and the public works profession.

Hultquist was a longtime secretary/treasurer of the Michigan Chapter of APWA, and through his many contributions was instrumental in growing the organization. In honor of his dedication, each year the executive committee of MI-APWA recognizes a member, or past member, who has displayed the ideals Hultquist so proudly held.



*Don's acceptance speech*

Recipients include past presidents, board members, vendors and suppliers. The recipients are known for their selfless giving of their time, energy and, in many cases, personal finances, to promote the Michigan Chapter.

Rohraff, who is director of public works for the City of Livonia, climbed his way to the top, from a laborer, to operator, to parks foreman, to water and sewer superintendent.

Serving the public works profession for more than 25 years, Rohraff has been a part of the state chapter board of directors since 2013. He's also been an avid supporter of the Downriver Branch.



*Don with APWA board members (l to r) John Thompson, Brandy Siedlaczek, Don, Dan Sorek, and ???*

# GLX 24

*“Don is well deserving of this award and certainly shares the same passion and selflessness for the Michigan Chapter that Hal had.”*

*– John Thompson, SAK Construction*

In addition, Rohraff has represented the Michigan Chapter at national chapter leader events and has served as branch representative on the state board, state chapter vice president, state chapter president elect, state chapter president and two terms as state chapter past president. Rohraff has also participated in the Awards Committee and the Conference Site Selection Committee while also serving on the GLX Conference Planning Committee. In addition, he is currently the Tom Trice Annual Golf Event Committee Chair and is the organizer of the GLX Golf Event.

On a personal side, Rohraff’s friends know him as an athlete, coach, entertainer and “guy who can rock a mustache.”

“We all know Don is a charismatic individual who enjoys life to the fullest,” said John Thomspson, business development manager for SAK Construction. “With life being a series of experiences, Don makes sure he doesn’t waste any portion of his. Personally and professionally, he is a passionate guy who is committed and supportive to whomever he works with. Don is well deserving of this award and certainly shares the same passion and selflessness for the Michigan Chapter that Hal had. Congratulations, Don, but please never wear those Isiah Thomas shorts again!”

Don enjoying his many roles



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: ARE YOU GOOD ENOUGH? IS IT TIME TO CHANGE YOUR RECRUITING MESSAGE?

By Lewis G. Bender, Ph.D., Michigan Public Services Institute (MPSI) Facilitator and Instructor

It doesn't matter whether the public works operation is large or small, urban or rural, or specializing in roads, water, parks, or wastewater. The same complaints resonate across the profession. How can we meet rising demands and attract and retain qualified people? Similarly, public works leaders will also complain that they go through the hiring process hoops, bring someone on board, train them, and, within months, that person leaves.

Public works operations are making all kinds of time and financial investments in “dogs that don't hunt!” Not to mention the demoralization of crews that are attempting to get increasing amounts of work done while they train inexperienced workers who leave within the first year.

Marine Corps Recruitment. Perhaps the recent recruitment experiences of the U.S. Armed Services are instructive. Reports show that the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard have all missed by a significant margin in their recruiting targets. The only branch that continues to meet and even exceed its targets is the U.S. Marine Corps. I'm not sure about the newly formed Space Force. Like the Marines, each service has proud bravery, sacrifice, and service traditions. So, why aren't they meeting their targets, and the Marines exceed theirs?

Obviously, there are many factors involving this recruitment question. One factor, however, may be the same as the challenge impacting

public works recruitment: accurate messaging and addressing the needs of this generation of recruits.

Recently, one of the MPSI members shared a story about his son. Apparently, his son knew he wanted to go into the military. His father supported that goal with one caveat: He had to interview each branch before deciding. So, the son interviewed with the Army, Navy, and Air Force recruiters. In each case, their message was: “This is what we can do for you.” When he interviewed with the Marine Recruiter, the message was: “What can you do for us?” His son is now serving as a proud Marine.

How does this have any relevance to you as a public works leader? Let's start with the people you are recruiting. Many of them are:

- ➔ Young with minimal work experience. Unlike their predecessors, they didn't work in their teenage years.
- ➔ Unlike previous generations, they were told they were wonderful (trophies) even when they didn't perform or win.
- ➔ Like all previous young people, they lack deep confidence in themselves. Still, unlike many of their predecessors, they “act” like they are confident.
- ➔ Unlike many of their predecessors, they have never worked with their hands or handled machinery.

*“This is a tough job. We aren't easy. But if you have the right stuff, we will invest in you and make you strong. Are you good enough?”*

So, what is the Marine Corps message to this recruiting class that you need to embrace?

This is a tough job. We aren't easy. But if you have the right stuff, we will invest in you and make you strong. Are you good enough?

In some significant ways, many young people today are not different from past generations. What is different is how we approach them. Previous bosses challenged you. You were expected to perform. And you should be rightfully proud of meeting and exceeding those early expectations.

So, maybe it is time to challenge young people with the truth about public works employment. Maybe it is time to start with: Are you good enough? Are you strong enough...

- ✓ To jump in a hole when it is ten below to restore water to thousands of people.
- ✓ To get in a plow truck in the middle of the night and push snow in the depth of a snowstorm.
- ✓ To deal with clearing a path of downed trees to get other first responders to victims in our community.
- ✓ To go through rigorous testing to ensure that our water is safe and our wastewater is clean

The list could go on.

There are two essential parts to this recruitment philosophy and approach. First, if you – the potential employee – make an informed commitment to this tough job. Second, we will commit to developing and working with you to become stronger and more capable.

## CHANGE THE RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES

To change your recruitment approach,

1. **Team Input.** Have several staff members, including first-line supervisors and team members, interview potential applicants.
2. **Share Questions.** Create a list of questions that different groups could ask. Compare the results after the interviews.
3. **Share Philosophy.** School interviewers in using the “Are you good enough? We will develop you” messages.

4. **Scenario Testing.** Consider using scenario-based testing in which you put applicants in situations and see how they respond. This can also be effective in putting applicants in safe, real-life situations.
5. **Ride-Alongs.** Ride-alongs and one-on-one time with applicants can also be revealing.

Clearly you are not hiring and training you. The employment pool has changed significantly. To effectively develop this pool of new applicants, you need to 1) start where they are (not where you were). And 2) develop a consistent development approach.

Some development suggestions that may be useful include:

1. **Skills Assessment.** Do a skills assessment of the new employee. What are their strengths and weaknesses related to the job?
2. **Benchmark.** Benchmark the development process. Have first-line supervisors, supported by their boss, identify the skills a new employee should attain over their

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## RECRUITING CONTINUED

one-year probation period. This may involve creating four-quarters of different skill development benchmarks for streets and other seasonal public works operations. In the author's experience, this doesn't need to be a long or complex process. The purpose is to get all first-line supervisors on the same page.

3. **Regular Monitoring.** Develop a monthly report feedback process to the new applicant and top leaders on the new employee's progress or lack thereof. If the person needs help in any area, create an approach to help them get past the challenge(s).
4. **Recognition.** Create small points – moments of recognition as the person gains skills and capabilities.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Like current and past members of the armed service, members of the public works community should be very proud of what you do to keep our communities safe. It is time to act like it.

At the beginning of every Michigan Public Service Institute (MPSI), Committee Chairman Tom Trice asks the 150 people in the room: "Everyone in the room who is a first responder, please stand up." When people don't stand, Tom gently admonishes them to realize that all public works members are first responders by federal mandate.

It is time for public works to gain the appreciation and recognition that this challenging profession requires. That starts with changing recruitment and development of new employees.

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## **SNOW CONFERENCE:** **CALL FOR PROPOSALS**

Michigan will host the 2025 North American Snow Conference **April 6-9, 2025**, in Grand Rapids. And APWA is accepting presentations for the event.

With more than 40 educational sessions, technical tours and networking, APWA is looking for knowledgeable presenters who can bring new perspectives, best practices and innovative twists to winter maintenance, workforce development and fleet/operations. The conference will offer more than 40 sessions among six tracks: information management for winter operations; innovative solutions for snow and ice control; leadership and workforce solutions; materials application – snow and ice control; winter fleet operations and equipment management; and winter maintenance planning and operations.

Formats will range from 20 minutes to 50 minutes and, new for 2025, there will be a poster presentation option.

Proposals may be submitted online via the link below or the QR code at right.

<https://bit.ly/snowconf2025>

Please consider submitting your stories for selection to either present and/or be a panelist to share your stories.

If you have any questions, please reach out to any of the APWA state planning committee or the members of the Education and Planning subcommittee listed below:

### **Duane Poole**

Bloomfield Township, Road Foreman  
DPoole@bloomfieldtwp.org  
(248) 594-2812

### **Paul Matthews**

City of Ann Arbor, Interim Public Works Manager  
PMatthews@a2gov.org  
(734) 794-6350, Ext. 43386

### **George Smith**

Kent County Road Commission, Employee Safety Superintendent  
gsmith@kentcountyroads.net

### **Bryan Pickworth**

City of Farmington Hills, Projects & Safety Coordinator  
BPickworth@fhgov.com  
(248) 231-8565



# REELIN' THEM IN MEMORIAL FISHING SCHOLARSHIP AIMS TO BUILD NEXT GENERATION OF PUBLIC WORKS PROFESSIONALS

By Kristen McCue, GCSI Association Services

As the sun came up on a beautiful May morning, 15 charter fishing charter boats hit the waves of Lake Michigan, hoping to bring home the biggest catch of the day.

Throughout the day, Grand Haven was abuzz with the excitement of fishermen participating in the third annual Eric Scott Fishing Tournament.

The event is named after Eric Scott, who, along with his daughter, passed away in 2019. An avid outdoorsman who loved to fish, Scott served as APWA Midwest Michigan Branch president and worked for Muskegon County Road Commission.

In total, 30 boats and 180 people fished, with the Spicer Group, Inc. boat taking first place. The tournament raised \$7,000 for a scholarship fund in Scott's honor. In May, the first scholarships, totaling \$1,200 were given to students who participated in the 2023 water career camp\* – a partnership between Grand Rapids Community College and the City of Grand Rapids.

With a passion for public works, Scott would be proud to see vendors and municipalities coming together to raise money for the future of the industry.



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He understood the value of hard work, having started off as a truck driver, working his way up to foreman, eventually serving as a maintenance superintendent.

Scott was heavily involved with MPSI and helped build the Public Works Academy at Grand Rapids Community College.

“We were seeing a decline in public works in general and we needed to do something about it,” said John Gorney, Public Works Director for the City of Grand Rapids, about the academy. “We wanted to promote public works and wanted to create some sort of pathway because the reality is, the majority of people coming into public works don’t set out with that path in mind.”

The first class launched in 2018 and since its inception the academy has graduated 65 people, 55 of whom have gone into public works jobs.

As a former issue of Great Lakes Reporter stated, “If there was one thing that Eric was better at than anything else, it would be building relationships. We can all learn so much from the example he set for us and should carry on this memory with that in mind.”

*\*Editor’s Note: For more information on the City of Grand Rapids’ Water Career Camp, please read the Summer 2023 (Vol. 125 No. 2,) Edition of Great Lakes Reporter.*



*John Gorney and ??? on one of the boats*



*The 2024 tournament winning team*



*This May, officials from Grand Rapids Community College and the City of Grand Rapids presented \$1,200 in scholarship funds to students who attended the 2023 water career camp.*

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# MEET THE YP:

## Tyler Kearly, Project Engineer, Municipal Group – ROWE



Kearly

**How long have you been at ROWE?**

*I have been at ROWE since graduating from Michigan Tech, which was about 5 years ago.*

**What do you like most about your job?**

*I really love designing in the CADD software, Civil 3D. It is an amazing program with so many areas to master. Even after using it for 5 years, I'm constantly learning new tricks and improving, which has always kept me engaged in my work.*

**When you're having a tough day at the office, what cheers you up?**

*Stepping out to walk around the block and enjoy some sun. Also, goofing around with coworkers, just a little bit.*

**What's one thing you'd like people to know about the work you do?**

*How much really goes into a road design. I don't think many people outside of public works realize the complexities of the roads we drive on every day, such as how they drain or that there are huge utilities below the surface.*

**When not at work, what do you enjoy doing?**

*Gardening, home renovations, listening to music, hunting/fishing.*

**If you were a color, which would it be, and why?**

*Definitely green. I'd always prefer being in nature.*

**What's one thing about you most people don't know?**

*I play guitar and sing folk music.*



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# JOIN THE MIDWEST MICHIGAN SNOWPLOW ROADEO AND EQUIPMENT SHOW ON OCTOBER 9!

The event will take place at Kentwood Public Works, 5068 Breton Road SE, Kentwood, MI 49508.

Kicking off at 8 a.m., the snowplow competition will feature an obstacle course designed to simulate actual snowplowing operations where drivers are timed and scored for accuracy, safety and speed. Lunch will be provided.

Also on the agenda for the day:

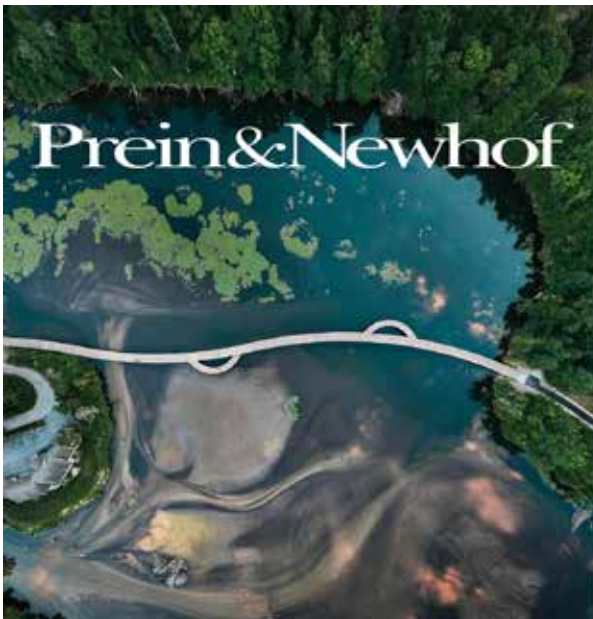
- Education sessions
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- Celebrity Competition
- Pride of the Fleet Competition
- Innovative Idea Showcase
- Equipment Show

Use the QR code to register. Registration forms must be completed and returned by **September 27, 2024**. Registration is required to participate.

Registration and payment should be returned to:

*Grand Rapids Public Works  
c/o Midwest Michigan APWA Snowplow Rodeo  
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Questions may be directed to [APWARodeo@outlook.com](mailto:APWARodeo@outlook.com).



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# 2024 PROJECT OF THE YEAR AWARDS

At GLX this past May we recognized our 2024 Project of the Year Awards. The APWA Michigan Chapter Public Works Project of the Year Award was established to promote excellence in the management and administration of public works projects by recognizing the alliance between the managing agency, the consultant/architect/engineer, and the contractor who, working together, complete public works projects.



## WHISPERING WILLOWS GOLF COURSE - CHANNEL IMPROVEMENTS

Category: Emergency Response - Less than \$1 Million

Owner: City of Livonia

Consultant: Hubbell, Roth & Clark, Inc.

Contractor: Sole Underground, LLC



## MACOMB INTERCEPTOR DRAIN "SPIRAL WOUND" REHABILITATION

Category: Emergency Response - \$1 Million to \$5 Million

Owner: Macomb County Public Works Office

Consultant: Anderson, Eckstein & Westrick, Inc.

Contractor: SAK Construction



## 2023 RUBBER MODIFIED CHIP SEAL TRIAL

CATEGORY: ENVIRONMENT - LESS THAN \$1 MILLION

Owner: Road Commission of Kalamazoo County

Contractor: Entech Inc.



## HENRY FORD ESTATE DAM FISHWAY PROJECT

Category: Environment - \$1 Million to \$5 Million

Owner: Wayne County Parks

Consultant: Environmental Consulting & Technology, Inc.

Contractor: Z Contractor Inc.



## CLEAN WATER RECOVERY FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Category: Environment - \$5 Million to \$25 Million

Owner: City of Manistee

Consultant: Spicer Group, Inc.

Contractor: Grand River Construction Co.

## CHAPTER AWARDS CONTINUED



### WATER RESOURCE RECOVERY FACILITY BIODIGESTION WITH COMBINED HEAT AND POWER

Category: Environment - \$25 Million to \$75 Million

Owner: City of Grand Rapids

Consultant: Tetra Tech

Contractor: The Christman Company



### HAITHCO PARK SPLASH PAD

Category: Quality of Life - Less than \$1 Million

Owner: Saginaw County Parks

Consultant: Spicer Group, Inc.

Contractor: Wobig Construction Company



### FARMINGTON ROAD STREETScape

Category: Quality of Life - \$1 Million to \$5 Million

Owner: City of Farmington

Consultant: OHM Advisors

Contractor: Warren Contractors & Development



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### UPTOWN BAY CITY (PHASE I AND PHASE II)

Category: Quality of Life - \$5 Million to \$25 Million

Owner: City of Bay City

Consultant: Rowe Professional Services Company

Contractor: Shaheen Development



### FREELAND ROAD BRIDGE - SIDEWALK & LIGHTING

Category: Structures - Less than \$1 Million

Owner: Tittabawassee Township

Consultant: Spicer Group, Inc.

Contractor: Shaw Contracting Co.



### KENT COUNTY ROAD COMMISSION'S NEW CENTRAL COMPLEX

Category: Structures - \$25 Million to \$75 Million

Owner: Kent County Road Commission

Consultant: Hobbs + Black Architects | Nowak & Fraus Engineers

Contractor: Owen-Ames-Kimball Co.



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## CHAPTER AWARDS CONTINUED



### WEST COMMERCE ROAD UNDERPASS IMPROVEMENTS

**Category: Transportation - Less than \$1 Million**

Owner: Milford Downtown Development Authority | Village of Millford

Consultant: OHM Advisors

Contractor: Artisan Contracting of MI



### SOUTH MAIN STREET WATER MAIN AND ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

**Category: Transportation - \$1 Million to \$5 Million**

Owner: City of Ann Arbor

Consultant: Wade Trim

Contractor: Bailey Excavating



### ROCHESTER ROAD RESURFACING & TRAFFIC CALMING

**Category: Transportation - \$1 Million to \$5 Million**

Owner: City of Royal Oak

Consultant: Fleis & VandenBrink Engineering

Contractor: Pro-Line Asphalt



### South Old Woodward Avenue Reconstruction (Phase 3)

**Category: Transportation - \$5 Million to \$25 Million**

Owner: City of Birmingham

Consultant: Nowak & Fraus Engineers

Contractor: Angelo lafrate Construction Company



### UNION STREET BRIDGE REHABILITATION PROJECT

**Category: Structures One Million to Five Million Dollars**

Owner: City of Battle Creek

Consultant: OHM Advisors

Contractor: Davis Construction Inc.

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# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### **MPSI Fall Session**

September 22-27  
Mt. Pleasant, MI

### **Midwest Branch Snowplow Rodeo & Equipment Show**

October 9  
Kentwood, MI

### **Road Scholar Program**

October 23-27  
Mt. Pleasant, MI

### **SPOT & Fleet Training**

November 7  
Livonia, MI

### **North American Snow Conference**

April 6-9  
Grand Rapids, MI

### **2025 Great Lakes Expo**

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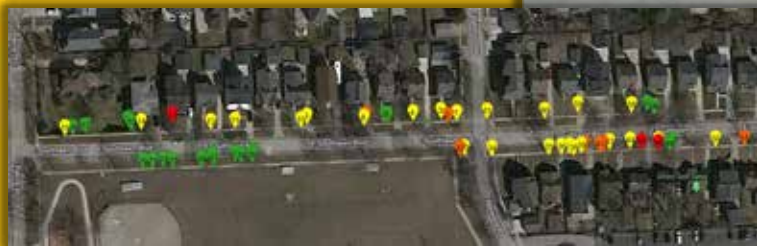


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