



great lakes REPORTER

A Publication of American Public Works Association - Michigan Chapter • Vol 127 • No. 2 • Summer 2025

—
**2025 GREAT LAKES
EXPO RECAP**

—
**BEYOND THE ORANGE
CONES: CHALLENGING OUR
ASSUMPTIONS**

—
2025 PROJECTS OF THE YEAR



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In this Issue...

- 4 PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**
- 6 RECAPPING THE 2025 GREAT LAKES EXPO**
John Thompson receives Harold M. Hultquist Award
- 13 APWA NOMINATIONS**
- 14 BRANCH EVENT ROUND-UP**
- 16 BEYOND THE ORANGE CONES:
CHALLENGING OUR PUBLIC WORKS
ASSUMPTIONS**
- 19 SPOT & FLEET SAVE THE DATE**
- 21 2025 PROJECT OF THE YEAR AWARDS**
- 26 CHAPTER PARTNERS**
- 29 CALENDAR OF EVENTS**
- 30 THANK YOU ADVERTISERS**

Cover photo: APWA Michigan Chapter



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Jennifer Lawson, City of Ann Arbor

Dear APWA-Michigan friends –

I cannot express to you how excited and honored I am to lead such a wonderful organization of amazing people – you all truly are amazing. We definitely have some of the best public servants in the country!

As we kick off the upcoming year for APWA-Michigan, I am excited to share a significant milestone in the continued growth and evolution of our organization. After careful consideration, planning, and discussion, I am pleased to announce the implementation of a Strategic Plan that will guide our efforts over the next several years.

This plan is designed with a clear vision: to strengthen our membership, amplify our advocacy efforts, and deepen our collaboration with professional organizations across the state. It reflects our collective commitment to ensuring that our organization remains a powerful, effective, and relevant force in our field.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

We aim to expand our reach and impact by attracting new members while also enhancing the value we provide to current members. This includes improving communication channels and providing new opportunities for engagement. I personally encourage each of you to attend at least one of your branch events this quarter – and introduce yourself to one new person!

ADVOCACY

Advocacy remains a cornerstone of our mission. Our strategic plan calls for increased engagement with policy makers, proactive communication on issues that affect our profession, and the development of resources and tools that empower members to be

strong advocates in their communities and workplaces. These tools will be made available to all members, as we work to strengthen the presence of APWA.

COLLABORATION

We recognize the power of partnership. By fostering meaningful relationships with other professional organizations throughout the state, we can amplify our impact, share knowledge, and develop unified strategies to tackle shared challenges.

UPCOMING INITIATIVES

To put this plan into action, we will be rolling out a series of events and opportunities, including:

- Targeted trainings and professional development workshops
- One-day retreats focused on leadership development and strategic planning
- Regional networking events and cross-organization panels

These initiatives will be designed not only to build individual capacity, but also to strengthen our collective voice and enhance the value of membership for all. We look forward to sharing more details in the coming months and encourage you to get involved as these new programs and opportunities take shape. Your voice, expertise, and participation are critical to our shared success. If you have any questions, or would like more information, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at jlawson@a2gov.org. Cheers!!!



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RECAPPING THE 2025 GREAT LAKES EXPO

KEYNOTE: HERMAN MOORE

Herman Moore, an NFL All-Pro Wide Receiver and Detroit Lions Legend, was the keynote speaker at GLX 2025.

He reminisced about his days with the Detroit Lions (and some attendees sported Lions gear). But more so, he focused on this foundation, The Herman Moore Tackle for Life Foundation, which provides essential life skills and experiences for successful individual growth and development. Programs include sports camps, health and nutrition education workshops, comprehensive fitness and mental health programs, career development, and entrepreneurship.

Moore talked about grit, and other keys to success. For example, he asked the audience how they adapt and stay focused when plans change, people change and pressure rises. And, perhaps most importantly, Moore asked, “What does leadership look like when it’s not in the spotlight?”

Herman Moore held a panel discussion following his keynote. Pictured: Larry Hummel, Region 5 director; Moore; Jennifer Lawson, president of MI-APWA and Brandy Siedlaczek, immediate past president.



Moore Panel



Jennifer Lawson, President, and Brandy Siedlaczek, Immediate Past President, pose with Herman Moore.



Immediate Past President Brandy Siedlaczek introduces executive board members.



Bryson Lawrence and Austin Downie, recipients of the Young Professionals Sponsorship for GLX 2025. The sponsorship allowed them to attend GLX for free.



YPs EXPERIENCE GLX

Darbey McGahan, E.I.T., ROWE Professional Services Company

This past May, I attended the 2025 APWA Great Lakes Expo at the Grand Traverse Resort and Spa in Acme, MI for the first time.



McGahan

As a young newcomer who has only been working as a municipal civil engineer for two years after graduating college, this was a remarkable experience that opened new perspectives on the world of public works. The event was a hub of knowledge, bringing together professionals from diverse sectors, including municipal engineering, utilities, facilities management, and environmental services, all focused on improving the infrastructure and services that keep communities running smoothly. The training sessions introduced me to new equipment, project management strategies, and real-world case studies highlighting successful public works initiatives. Beyond the technical content, I gained valuable insights into the social, political, and environmental factors that influence infrastructure decisions.

Networking was a huge draw, too. While the expo itself offered great opportunities to connect with other professionals, the conference also featured a variety of social events, from a young professionals meet-up and welcome reception to optional outings like a wine tour, golf, and Vegas Night. These events gave me the chance to meet other young engineers and public works professionals from across the state, all of whom shared a passion for the challenges and rewards of serving their communities. The sense of camaraderie throughout was inspiring.

I left the conference with a wealth of knowledge, gained not only through meaningful connections with experts, but also through forming new friendships and partnerships that I believe will extend well beyond the event. The experience gave me a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper commitment to supporting the development and sustainability of the public works infrastructure that serves us all. I can't wait to attend more APWA events and stay involved with this community!

GLX 2025 RECAP

THOMPSON RECEIVES HULQUIST AWARD

At GLX John Thompson of SAK Construction was honored with the Harold M. Hulquist Award, which is one of the Michigan Chapter's highest honors.

Also known as the Hal Hultquist Award, it recognizes individuals who have demonstrated outstanding service and commitment to the APWA, particularly at the state chapter level. Named in honor of Harold M. Hultquist—an influential figure in APWA history—the award celebrates individuals whose dedication to the organization elevates the profession and inspires others to serve.

The recognition is a result of Thompson's long-standing dedication, leadership, and significant contributions to the mission and growth of



John Thompson thanks the crowd for his recognition.

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APWA in Michigan. For example, he served on the Council of Chapters and as president of the Downriver Branch. He was the longest serving Chapter president through Covid, serving with two terms.

Through his professional role at SAK Construction, Thompson has helped strengthen partnerships between the public and private sectors in Michigan's infrastructure and communities.

In the video presentation at the GLX award ceremony, Thompson was called the "godfather of APWA" and the go-to guy. His colleagues mentioned how Thompson always steps up when needed, whether it's to help raise funds or help build a connection between vendors and members. Thompson was commended for bringing a fresh perspective to APWA.

At the same time, colleagues mentioned Thompson's work hard, play hard philosophy is legendary among APWA.

Don Rohraff, Director of Public Works for the City of Livonia, thanked Thompson for getting him involved in APWA, and keeping him involved. He thanked Thompson for starting the Downriver golf outing scholarship program and for changing boundary lines to help grow membership. Additionally, Thompson was instrumental in starting the Young Professionals.

"John's unwavering commitment to APWA-Michigan has made a lasting impact on our organization," said Jennifer Lawson, President of the APWA-Michigan Chapter. "His leadership, support of Chapter initiatives, and passion for advancing public works make him an exemplary recipient of the Hultquist Award."

John thanked those involved in his recognition.

"I am deeply honored to receive the Hal Hultquist Award," Thompson said. "It has been a privilege to work alongside so many passionate and committed professionals within APWA. I'm grateful to be part of an organization that values collaboration, education, and service to our communities."



John Thompson and his longtime friend and colleague Don Rohraff

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APWA NOMINATIONS

Congratulations to Bryan Pickworth, analyst for the City of Farmington Hills, and Marcus McNamara, principal at OHM Advisors, on their appointments to APWA leadership positions.

Pickworth has been nominated to serve as chair of the Snow Conference Program Review Committee. As chair, Pickworth would ensure volunteers on the committee are actively engaged through facilitation, coordination, communication and leadership.



Pickworth

McNamara has been nominated to serve on the Public Works Project of the Year Committee. APWA says the purpose of the committee is to promote the importance of public works by recognizing outstanding projects. The committee comprises 20 members.



McNamara

“It is important to have volunteers who can inspire innovative ideas and subject matter expertise,” said Vic Bienes, president-elect of APWA.



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BRANCH EVENTS

APWA branches have hosted a variety of events. Below are some of them.

KRESA

The Southwest Branch coordinated a tour of Kalamazoo's new KRESA Career Connect Campus, which is designed to allow Kalamazoo students to explore careers, including some that are nontraditional and technical.

The facility is funded through a \$100 million anonymous gift and the passage of an operating millage in 2019.

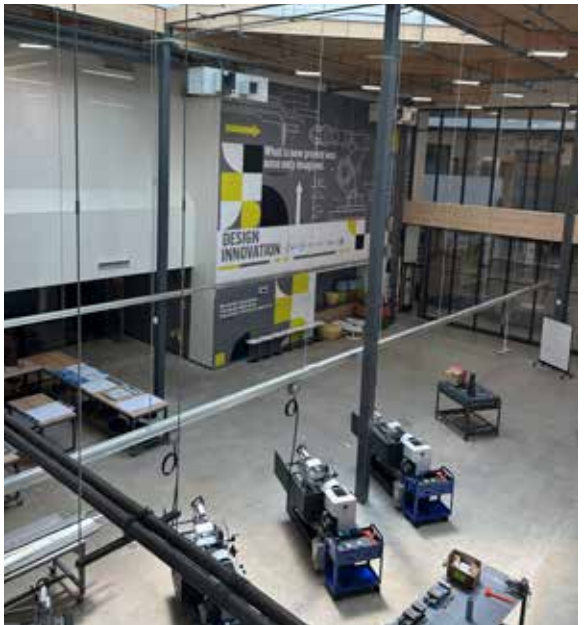
Specifically for public works, students can receive certification in some elements of heavy equipment maintenance. KRESA will also offer courses and certifications in plumbing, electrical and other building trades, in addition to welding. Career clusters include construction; law and public safety; and transportation, distribution and logistics.

KRESA is designed to be student centered and flexible to meet changing industry needs. The facility will allow students to create while becoming employable post-high school.

Teachers, administrators, staff and volunteers will work with students in learning and collaborative spaces.



KRESA is a bright, inviting building that fosters creativity .



KRESA provides collaborative spaces for students to learn.



Tour Group

Eric Scott Fishing Tournament

The Midwest Branch hosted its annual Eric Scott Fishing Tournament in May.

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.

A total of 30 boats competed, both in the morning and the afternoon. This year, Scott's widow and son, along with other family, participated.

Scott 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.

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

Matt Anderson, Water & Sewer Superintendent for the City of Norton Shores, who chairs the event, said he participates in the tournament to honor and remember Scott.

"I do it to honor and remember Eric," Anderson said. "It helps keep that connection as he loved the outdoors and was an avid fisherman. We raise money for a fund the Midwest Branch has started in Eric's memory and honor that provides funding to various initiatives and activities Eric supported (or would have supported)."

The morning winner was Team Havener Tech and the afternoon winner was Team McQueen.



HRC sponsored a team. Pictured are Eric Lipon and Bart Franklin, HRC; Jim Hoekstra, Road Commission of Kalamazoo County; Matt Block, MDOT – Muskegon TSC; and Wayne Jernberg, City of Grand Rapids.

BEYOND THE ORANGE CONES: CHALLENGING OUR PUBLIC WORKS ASSUMPTIONS

By Linnea Rader, Treasurer, MI-APWA

Finance and Human Resources Director, Van Buren County Road Commission

Are you a public works employee flagging traffic who is making someone late for work? A road worker leaning on a shovel? A Township that charges too much in taxes? An employee who just sits at a desk all day?

OR are you a person who makes these statements regularly?

Spoiler alert...you might be both.

WHY OUR BRAINS LOVE ASSUMPTIONS

Our brains take in something like 11 million pieces of information every second but can only process approximately 50. This means assumptions help us filter out what's important, becoming a mental shortcut to keep our brains from being overloaded.

Our brains are also wired to recognize patterns, using past experiences to fill in gaps about new situations. As humans, we struggle with ambiguity, it makes us uncomfortable. To reduce this feeling, we make assumptions to fill in the unknown rather than seek actual information.

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES: PUBLIC WORKS ASSUMPTIONS IN ACTION

The Traffic Delay Scenario: People see a public works employee flagging traffic, making them late. Our brains assume they're wasting our time instead of wondering why they're there. The reality? There's a sinkhole ahead that developed overnight. Someone drove into it, and crews responded immediately to get the road reopened safely.

The "Lazy" Road Worker: This one is especially near and dear to my heart, so this one drives me CRAZY. People see a road worker leaning on a shovel and assume they're lazy. The reality? They just finished hand digging around a high-powered gas line for three hours and stopped for five minutes to get water and breathe. Drivers have no idea if they're waiting for equipment,

materials, or coordinating safety protocols; they fill in assumed details and get mad.

Township Tax Frustrations:

Residents get their tax bills and assume it's too high without understanding the breakdown. The reality? As residents, they were unhappy that their park had deteriorated, and roads needed improvement. They wanted a splash pad added. The Township held public hearings, surveyed the community, and many even spearheaded the splash pad project, but didn't plan for ongoing maintenance costs.

As employees in public works agencies or consultants or vendors providing services and products to public agencies, you'd think we would all be well versed in these types of assumptions. You would think we would understand all the bits and pieces and be beyond making assumptions ourselves. BUT... do we? Do we still get frustrated in traffic, jump to conclusions about workers' behaviors and roll our eyes at our tax bill?

We might be amazing at managing our assumptions in public works since we are so close to the subject, but do we practice that same mindset when we encounter other types of careers and people? For example, the server who doesn't refill our beverage or respond quickly enough to our needs? Or the person on the other end of the call or email at the internet or electric company when we have difficulties with their services at our home? Are we patient when we are at the doctor's office when they are running late? Or are we making assumptions about them like they do of us?



Rader

MOVING BEYOND ASSUMPTIONS

We are all human. We all operate in the same way. Our brains are taking in that same 11 million pieces of information each second and only processing about 50. So, when you catch yourself making assumptions, try these approaches:

- **Pause before reacting:** Give yourself a moment to recognize when you're filling gaps with assumptions.
- **Ask genuine questions:** Instead of assuming laziness or ignorance, consider what circumstances might explain what you're seeing.
- **Challenge your patterns:** Recognize when past experiences are coloring current interpretations.

CHOOSING CURIOSITY OVER JUDGMENT

Assumptions often feel efficient in the moment, but they come with hidden costs to our community trust and relationships. Approaching situations with curiosity rather than judgment not only leads to better outcomes but reduces the stress that comes from negative assumptions.

Next time you see those orange cones or public works crews, assume the best of intentions. Next time you're communicating with a service provider or sitting at the doctor's office, assume those same positive intentions. Small shifts in how we approach uncertainty can create ripples of positive change throughout our communities.

Want more insights on building stronger workplace relationships and community trust? I share practical leadership strategies twice weekly at www.LeadwithLinnea.com.

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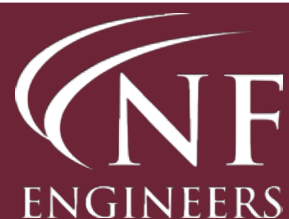


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2025 PROJECT OF THE YEAR AWARDS

At GLX this past May we recognized our 2025 Project of the Year Awards. The APWA Michigan Chapter Public Works Project of the Year Awards were 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 to complete public works projects.



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Consultant: Jones & Henry Engineers

Contractor: RK Davis



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Owner: City of Livonia

Consultant: Hubbell, Roth & Clark, Inc..

Contractor: D'Angelo Brothers, Inc.



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

Owner: City of Traverse City

Consultant: Hubbell, Roth & Clark, Inc.

Contractor: Elmer's Crane and Dozer, Inc.



REDEVELOP & RECYCLE: LEGACY PARK

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

Owner: Charter Township of Northville

Consultant: Fleis & VandenBrink

Contractor: Asbestos Abatement, Inc.



GLWA 14 MILE TRANSMISSION MAIN PHASE II

Category: Environment - More than \$25 Million

Owner: Great Lakes Water Authority

Consultant: Brown and Caldwell

Contractor: Ric-Man/Clark Joint Venture



LAKE STREET ROADWAY & UTILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Category: Governmental Cooperation

Owner: Road Commission of Kalamazoo County, City of Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo Township

Consultant: Prein&Newhof

Contractor: Milbocker and Sons, Inc.



VETERAN'S MEMORIAL AT FREEDOM PARK

Category: Historical Restoration/Preservation - Less than \$1 Million

Owner: City of Fenton

Consultant: OHM Advisors

Contractor: DALCO Services, LLC

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P.J. HOFFMASTER STATE PARK DUNE OVERLOOK

Category: Historical Restoration/Preservation - \$1 to \$5 Million

Owner: State of Michigan DNR

Consultant: Prein&Newhof

Contractor: TJM Services



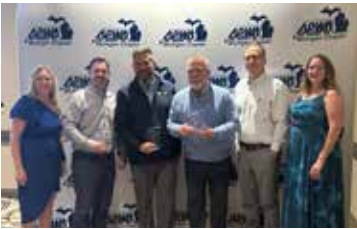
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Category: Quality of Life - Less Than \$1 Million

Owner: City of Birmingham

Consultant: Nowak & Fraus Engineers

Contractor: Jacklyn Contracting, LLC



HEMLOCK PARK IMPROVEMENTS

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

Owner: City of Big Rapids

Consultant: Fleis & VanderBrink

Contractor: Gerber Construction Co., Inc.



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DOWNTOWN INFRASTRUCTURE & STREETScape PROJECT

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

Owner: City of Allegan

Consultant: Abonmarche

Contractor: Milbocker & Sons, Inc.



MILL RACE DAM REMOVAL

Category: Structures - Less than \$1 Million

Owner: City of Litchfield

Consultant: Fleis & VanderBrink

Contractor: RW. Mercer Company



FARMINGTON HILLS MUNICIPAL FUELING STATION

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

Owner: City of Farmington Hills

Consultant: Hubbell, Roth & Clark, Inc.

Contractor: Gerber Construction Co., Inc.



SCHMIDT-HERITAGE PARK

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

Owner: Grand Haven Charter Township

Consultant: Prein&Newhof

Contractor: CopperRock



RCKC NEW INNOVATIVE FACILITY

Category: Structures - Greater than \$25 Million

Owner: Road Commission of Kalamazoo County

Consultant: Fishbeck

Contractor: Walbridge



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COOLEY DRIVE RECONSTRUCTION

Category: Transportation Less Than \$1 Million

Owner: City of Portage

Consultant: Prein&Newhof

Contractor: Rieth-Riley Construction



MICHIKAL STREET

Category: Transportation \$1 to \$5 Million

Owner: City of Kalamazoo

Consultant: Wightman

Contractor: USA Earthworks, LLC



WALDON ROAD PAVING, CLINTONVILLE TO BALDWIN

Category: Transportation \$5 to \$25 Million

Owner: Road Commission of Oakland County

Consultant: Hubbell, Roth & Clark, Inc.

Contractor: Dan's Excavating

NOT PICTURED

INNOVATE MOUND

Category: Transportation Greater Than \$25 Million

Owner: Macomb County Department of Roads

Consultant: HNTB Michigan Inc.

Contractor: Dan's Excavating

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MPSI Fall Session I

September 7-12, 2025
Mt. Pleasant, MI

MPSI Fall Session II

September 21-26, 2025
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Midwest Snow Plow Rodeo & Equipment Show

October 6-8, 2025
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Tom Trice Golf Outing

October 3, 2025
Location TBD

SPOT & Fleet

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