

Quirky District Pothole Campaign to Make Waves Again

Leonardo di Caprio, drowning? Pothole police officers, roaming around and trying to cancel birthday celebrations for potholes?

These inventive marketing strategies were used to promote the Fort Wayne District’s initial INDOT Spotters campaign. Staffers are set to top themselves when the campaign returns in a few months.



Marketing for the INDOT Spotters campaign included a “Titanic”-themed visual (top photo) and a theme for pothole police officers to deny potholes to hold birthday celebrations (bottom photo).



Originally coined Pothole Spotter but later changed to INDOT Spotters, the campaign called for Fort Wayne District employees to report potholes or other maintenance problems to the district’s Customer Service team. As part of Customer Service’s marketing for the program, emailed reminders to district staff included humorous embedded graphics, such as di Caprio’s Jack Dawson character from “Titanic” holding on for dear life in a pothole, with Kate Winslet’s Rose DeWitt trying to comfort him.

Participation in the program by district employees would accentuate that of the public, which already routinely contacts INDOT’s Transportation Services Call Center to report roadway potholes.

“Our reasoning for spotting potholes before the public does was simple,” said Fort Wayne District Communications and Customer Service Director Toni Mayo. “We wanted to spare our customers all the problems associated with potholes. We thought that with hundreds of district employees working together, on the lookout for potholes and other issues, we could make a difference. And, we did.”

From early February 2019 to early June 2019, 31 employees participated in the campaign, including 16 who reported potholes. In all, INDOT filled 31

potholes and fixed 42 other problems reported by district staff during those four months, including those involving trees, fences, signs, paint, signals, debris, and dead animals.

In the same time span, the public pointed out 266 potholes that we filled during one of the worst weather periods for producing potholes in Indiana in recent memory.

“Thirty-one potholes may not seem like much, but that number represented nearly 12% of the total that the public contacted us about in the entire district,” said Mayo. “We gave our employees a

chance to practice, 'If you see something, say something,' with the end goal to proactively spare motorists the grief caused by potholes."

The 2019 activity was planned for and carried out by Mayo, Resolution Specialist Megan Strickler, and Material Certification Administrator Emily Aurich, who at the time worked for INDOT Customer Service. The district had planned to repeat the program this year, but the suddenness of the COVID-19 pandemic caused that idea to be scrapped.

"In January, we will relaunch the campaign through March," said Mayo. "We will track the potholes, and the employee who spots the most will be given a prize, but mainly a lot of attention."

It will be difficult for Customer Service members in 2021 to top their 2019 cleverness, but they are up for the challenge.

Mayo kicked off the 2019 campaign with an email featuring an illustration of Uncle Sam and a "We want you" request, explaining the INDOT Spotters program.



Toni Mayo



Megan Strickler

Strickler came up with the "Titanic" spoof for the second email a few weeks later. The embedded image in the email accentuated the callout for spotters. At the bottom of the email, below the photo of Winslet and di Caprio, Strickler wrote a disclaimer that "this photo is not from our district, but we know how this movie ends."

"I really enjoyed the opportunity to communicate with the district in a way that serves the taxpayers," said Strickler. "We were able to have a lot of fun at the district while creating safer roadways for motorists. Creating the emails was a way for us to engage coworkers and be creative."

Aurich produced another follow-up email about the campaign, calling district personnel "pothole police officers." Aurich implored employees to deny potholes a birthday by reporting the potholes. She listed reasons why potholes shouldn't be allowed to celebrate birthdays or have cake:

- Nobody wants to drive over the SAME pothole for a YEAR.
- A pothole has done nothing to deserve a birthday celebration.
- Potholes can't eat cake, so you're going to eat it for them.

In explaining the third point, Aurich informed district employees that whoever reports the most roadway concerns at the end of the campaign will receive a celebratory cake.

Weeks later, Fort Wayne District Bridge Inspection Supervisor Josh Biller was, indeed, served cake, as well as presented a certificate for being the top spotter with six reports of roadway concerns.

"Our employees had the option to report the roadway concerns to us through email, phone call, or in person," said Mayo. "The Fort Wayne District wants to make a difference on our roadways, and one thing is for certain, we never want to give a pothole a birthday party! We can't wait to restart the campaign in January and look forward to even more participation."



Josh Biller receives cake from Emily Aurich after winning the inaugural INDOT Spotter campaign.