

Central Office Employee Engagement Day Debuts

Nobody dropped down on one knee, popped the question, or slipped a ring on someone’s finger. But for more than 190 Central Office employees, engagement was top of mind on Sept. 6.

2023 AGENCY GOAL SPOTLIGHT
Enhance Internal Services

The inaugural Central Office Employee Engagement Day, at Fort Harrison State Park’s Garrison Inn in Indianapolis, was a huge success. Staff members mingled, learned more about one another, met new contacts, played games, shared lunch together, and left the four-hour event feeling closer than ever to their workmates and more cohesive as an overall group.

“This was a much-needed event for Central Office,” said Contract Administration Compliance Investigator Joan Widdifield, a 35-year INDOT employee. “This put us all together in the same room, and as Commissioner Mike Smith says, ‘We’re better together.’ I enjoyed conversing with coworkers who I have known for years and meeting new ones, including someone on their second day at INDOT.”

Inspired by the employee appreciation events in the districts each fall, Deputy Commissioner of Capital Program Management Lyndsay Quist spearheaded the inaugural Central Office event, but she had lots of help. Deputy Commissioner of People Services Angela Roosa, Executive Administrative Assistant Jenny Ziemer, and dozens of other volunteers planned and worked hard to make this a success.



Commissioner Mike Smith (far right) and some of the volunteers: Michelle Rogers (from left), Kerrie Leonard, Leigh Robison, Dan Dye, Lyndsay Quist, Angela Roosa, and Jenny Ziemer.

Upon entering the Garrison, employees could spin a prize wheel to win water bottles, hardhat-shaped stress balls, and more. Then, they could bid on several gift baskets, donated by Central Office departments and executive staff, during a silent auction. All proceeds went to the Central Office Employee Benefit Fund for next year’s event.

Jim Lesh (from left) and DJ Shaw win the euchre event.



A single-elimination euchre tournament took place in the Garrison’s ballroom. With skill and luck, Bridge Design Team Leader Jim Lesh and Bridge Engineer DJ Shaw emerged victorious in the friendly competition, which was organized by Construction Field Engineer John Ritter. Employees not competing in the tournament played other card games.

A golf scramble between four foursomes in the park’s Fort Golf Course resulted in four achievements: a first-place finish for Engineering Services’ Jon Paauwe, Utilities & Railroad’s Rodger Keller, Hydraulics’ Alex Schwinghamer, and Management Information Systems’ Brad Crowe; a second-place finish for

Innovation and Process Improvements' Andy Brelage, Transportation Planning's Brandon Burgoa, Construction's Roland Fegan, and Local Grant Administration's Michael Cales; a longest-drive distinction for Innovation and Process Improvement's Todd May; and closest-to-the-pin award for Finance's Tracey Fuller. Right-of-Way Services Managing Director Jim Stark and Fegan organized the event.

"I'd say that Jon was the MVP of our team, but we would have had fun even if we hadn't won," said Keller.

Site Assessment & Management Team Lead Peter Washburn said: "I want to thank the organizers for a great time. I'd love to participate in the next golf scramble but only if Traffic Safety's Tom Ford isn't on my team again. We had too many laughs and distractions! Just kidding, of course."



Six employees tried their hand at fishing in a pond on the Fort Harrison State Park premises. Ecology and Waterway Permitting Office (EWPO) Seymour District Specialist Jacob Burskey (*photo, left*) caught the largest fish, a 12½-inch largemouth bass. EWPO Permit Specialist Taylor Davis (*photo, right*) checked in with the most fish caught at seven. The fishing team-building exercise was organized by Managing Director of Engineering Mark Bailey.



"It feels great to be at the top of the INDOT fishing rodeo podium. This is the culmination of almost 40 years of blood, sweat, and tears. I'd like to thank my wife, Ashley, for continuing to support me for the past 20 years in all my fishing trips and seemingly senseless gear purchases. We finally made it, honey! We're champions!" said Burskey in tongue-on-cheek style.

Gift cards for event winners were provided by the executive team. Lunch highlights included large hamburgers and thick lemon bars.

Smith spoke passionately to the crowd after lunch.

"This is a day that has been a long time coming," said Smith. "You all do important work. You're delivering, making people's lives better, and I want to sincerely thank you for all that you do."

Smith outlined the [agency's goals](#) and updated the crowd on how we're achieving them. He encouraged attendees to interact with one another.

"Find at least three or four people in the room who you don't normally interact with on a regular basis, and get to know them," said Smith. "Those are the types of relationships that you never knew you needed until you need them."

Mission accomplished, according to Widdifield.

"Those at my lunch table had conversations about food, restaurants, vacations, agency goals, our job roles, and so much more," she said. "The Central Office Employee Engagement Day was a big success."

For more photos, click [here](#).



After Deputy Commissioner of Operations J.D. Brooks (left) said a few words, Commissioner Mike Smith talks to the crowd.