

County Develops Public/Private Partnerships

Using public/private partnerships to meet maintenance demands

By Deodat Budhu

The Orange County, FL, Department of Public Works Roads and Drainage Division promotes the safety and welfare of residents by providing infrastructure maintenance for the unincorporated county. This includes sidewalk and roadway repairs, street resurfacing, canal and retention pond upkeep, tree removal, pothole repair, right-of-way mowing, and other maintenance activities.

With a population of over 800,000 people, an area of 1,000 sq mi, together with more than two million visitors a year, our rights-of-way can be inundated with litter. People throwing trash out of their cars and debris blowing off trucks on the highway pollute the environment and litter our beautiful streets.

Expanding development and a growing population make it challenging for the roads and drainage division to maintain the county infrastructure in a timely manner. To meet the public's demand for higher levels of service with a dwin-

dling budget and a lack of adequate manpower, Orange County developed several programs of private/public partnership to successfully bridge the gap between the demands of county maintenance and the resources of the Orange County Roads and Drainage Division.

Adopt-A-Highway

The Adopt-A-Highway Program was created as an ongoing campaign to keep highways and rights-of-way free of litter and debris with the help of volunteers. This program is open to anyone who would like to help Orange County look better. Local organizations that have adopted a highway clean their section six times a year. You have probably seen signs or occasionally seen people on the side of the road helping out the communities in which they live and work. They take responsibility for a piece of public land and keep it looking clean.

Besides the good feeling that comes with giving something back to their community, the organization or company gets publicity from the signs marking their piece of the landscape, and thousands of people connect that organization's name with good work every time they drive by. The best part is, it costs nothing but a little of the group's time.

Adopting a highway involves choosing the area the organization would like to adopt, filling out the agreement form, and returning it to the

Orange County Roads and Drainage Division. When the request is approved, the traffic sign shop will make and install the signs proclaiming custodianship of the road chosen. The group must attend a safety meeting. Now the organization is ready to start helping make Orange County a more beautiful place.

Each sponsor is responsible for a minimum of half a mile of road, committing to removing litter from their stretch of road six times a year. Every eight weeks, the sponsor coordinates the time their group will be tidying up their stretch of street with the closest Orange County road maintenance facility. They meet volunteers at the site with empty bags, reflective vests, and traffic control signs. When the work is done, they pick everything up. We have more than 90 active organizations in the program, encompassing a total of 78 county road miles.

Another area of partnership is with local law enforcement. The Orange County Roads and Drainage Division co-sponsors an Inmate Road Crew Program with the Orange County Corrections Division, as a way to supplement work done by county crews. This program is designed to allocate ten crews of five inmates each to address public works and community projects daily, and allows the inmates an opportunity to learn skills such as lawn maintenance. The roads and drainage division provides equipment, vehicles, and trailers, and Orange County Corrections provides the drivers, labor, and supervision.

Orange County uses inmate labor on ten road crews to perform a variety of work, including edging, mowing, trimming, weeding, and canal bank reshaping. To address any public concerns,



Highways adopted by local organizations are cleaned of roadside litter and debris six times a year.

inmate crews are never assigned to work near schools or areas where they may have an opportunity to approach people other than their supervisors or other inmates.

During emergency situations, such as forest fires, inmates may be pulled from their routine duty assignments to assist the firefighters, pulling hoses and relieving them when possible. Emergency safety training is provided before this reassignment of duty.

Presently, inmate crews provide labor for the beautification of our surroundings and save community tax dollars. At Orange County, one day is taken off an inmate's sentence for every five days served. This time earned may be revoked for inappropriate behavior at any time. Since the program's inception, the net benefits are on average more than twice the costs of the program, thereby greatly benefiting the community.

Community Service

Another area of partnership is the Alternative Community Service (ACS) Program. Public works staff works in

conjunction with the Orange County Sheriff's Office supervising the weekend Alternative Community Service workers and accurately reporting the time each worker spends on the job. The ACS program was started shortly after courts began offering community service as an alternative to serving jail time. Since then, the program has changed little.

The people that choose the ACS program have been convicted of minor criminal offenses not serious enough to demand incarceration or have been cited with contempt of court. They are given a set number of hours to perform within a certain number of days. An individual who chooses ACS with Orange County Public Works has two choices for complying with court mandated community service. They may choose to perform their service on weekends, or during the weekday, working alongside other employees during a standard shift day.

People who choose to perform their community service on weekends come to the main complex on Saturdays and Sundays, reporting by 7:30 a.m. They

are transported to the maintenance unit scheduled to have the ACS and work eight hours, including transportation. They perform a variety of tasks, including litter pick up on our rights-of-way, edging, trimming, reshaping ditches, and laying sod.

There is no set number of individuals who will show up for an ACS assignment; generally, ACS crews are between ten and 15 workers. If workers show up on a Saturday and/or Sunday and the weather will not allow participation, their names are turned in with eight hours of participation.

Weekend community service is restricted to male ACS workers only. Women may only perform community service with Orange County Public Works during weekday shifts.

When considering public/private partnerships, remember to include money or man hours saved to illustrate the concrete effectiveness of these types of programs. GE

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