Congratulations to the 2019 State Employee of the Year, Mr. Craig Newton! Mr. Newton is employed with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and serves as a Biologist II with the Marine Resources Division.

Mr. Newton has been with DCNR since 2009 and has become one of the Marine Resource Division’s go-to employees. He is well respected by his peers and those who work for him. He has a mild manner and is willing to listen to the challenges that others face and seek solutions. Through the course of his duties, Craig deals with a variety of user groups and handles himself in the utmost professional manner. He has gone above and beyond in several aspects of his work. His current list of duties includes: Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) Coordinator, Invasive Species Program Coordinator, Artificial Reef Program Coordinator, Adopt-a-Reef Program Coordinator, Shrimp Biologist, Marine Recreational Information Program Coordinator in Mobile County, and Laboratory Supervisor in Mobile County, just to name a few!

In the last year, Mr. Newton spent a tremendous amount of time working on the Alabama Artificial Reef Zone and managing a $12.5 million grant associated with artificial reef construction and monitoring. This reef zone is arguably the largest of its kind in the world.

Mr. Newton has been instrumental in several other reef programs that have resulted in benefits to the State. He coordinated with oil and natural gas companies for the reffing of three offshore gas/oil platforms through Alabama’s “Rigs-to-Reefs” Program. The State received payment for half of the cost savings realized by the company. This resulted in a win-win situation for the State, as the projects netted $3.4 million in revenue for DCNR, while maintaining structure in the water that serves as important deep-water habitat. Mr. Newton also revitalized the “Roads-to-Reef” Program, partnering with road-building construction companies to re-purpose excess clean materials for artificial reef creation. Recent meetings and communications with ALDOT officials have yielded the use of 16 miles of concrete barriers from the I-10 Bayway bridge project for incorporation into the artificial reef program.

Mr. Newton also oversees a similar program called “Materials of Opportunity” that uses recycled concrete from construction sites or production facilities to create or enhance artificial reefs. This prevents thousands of tons of material from being disposed of in area landfills and allows DCNR to create and enhance reefs with minimal financial investment from the State. Those sites will serve Alabama’s inshore anglers by providing critical increased fishery habitat for fish species that are very popular with anglers. In addition to these duties, he also coordinated donations from local conservation groups to be utilized in spearfishing tournaments for the purpose of removing invasive lionfish. His continued coordination with tournament partners for 2019 helped to identify nearly $40,000 in donated prize money.

According to his supervisors, these accomplishments are only a portion of what Mr. Newton does for the State of Alabama and DCNR. Mr. Newton is a dedicated public servant and deserves the honor of State Employee of the Year. Thank you for serving the State of Alabama!
In 1939, Governor Frank Dixon recommended a number of organizational and administrative improvements in State government. At that time, State government was composed of numerous independent boards, bureaus, commissions, and agencies. Personnel matters were handled by the Governor. Governor Dixon’s recommendations laid out plans for the consolidation of related functions into larger departments. Multiple legislative bills were introduced that year, resulting in the creation of six new departments: Revenue, Highway, Finance, Corrections, Pardons and Paroles, and Personnel. The citizens of the State of Alabama passed a constitutional amendment authorizing a Merit System for State employees that same year. One could argue that the changes made in 1939 constituted the birth of State government as we know it today, although Alabama has seen tremendous growth in population and the number of State employees and departments in the past 80 years. State Personnel’s first Annual Report in 1941 shows around 5,000 employees, compared to approximately 29,000 today.

Since 1939, the Merit System has been crucial in identifying, hiring, and retaining skilled employees for the State of Alabama. The Merit System ensures fairness to all and provides job protection for employees who have gained status in their positions, unlike most jobs in the private sector. Eighty years ago, Alabamians made a significant choice in creating the Merit System, and it has been an essential tool for State government since its inception.

Right: A cartoon featured in the Birmingham Post, making a wisecrack about State government “Before” and “After” the implementation of the Merit System in 1939.

Advantages of the State Deferred Compensation Plan!

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- Guaranteed retirement income option available
- All qualified plan rollovers are allowed, except Roth IRA
- Roth contributions are accepted

As with any financial decision, you are encouraged to discuss moving money between accounts, including rollovers, with a financial advisor and to consider costs, risks, investment options and limitations prior to investing.

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Meet Ronny Pouncey, the State’s longest serving Merit System employee! Mr. Pouncey began his career in 1964 with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), known then as the Highway Department. Fifty-five years later, he is still working for the same department and possesses an unsurpassed amount of “institutional knowledge.”

Q: Do you recall your first day on the job? Do you remember your starting salary?
A: Yes, I do recall my first day with the Highway Department on March 2, 1964. I was employed in the Mapping Section of the Surveying and Mapping Division and my assigned duties were inking over pencil data on bridge cards utilizing a rapidograph pen. My starting salary was $186.00 per month. Due to promotions, merit raises and COLAs, my salary has increased nearly 50 times more than my starting salary! I am currently in the classification of ALDOT Enterprise Information Administrator.

Q: Describe your career path over the past 55 years. What motivates you to keep working for the State?
A: I was employed as an Engineering Assistant I and worked in the Planning and Programming Bureau for two years before accepting a promotion with the 7th Division in Troy as an Engineering Assistant II in 1966. After working on a construction project for two years, I accepted a promotion to a Cartographic Drafter position in 1968 and returned to the Surveying and Mapping Division of the Planning and Programming Bureau. Although the Bureau’s name has changed over the years, I have been in the same area of responsibility the entire time, except for the two years in the Troy Area. Since I have always been involved in the various phases of county and state mapping, along with roadway inventory data collection, and involved with special projects with other bureaus and regions/areas/districts, this has always been a part of my life that I thoroughly love and enjoy. I have had several bosses over the years whom I respected and enjoyed working with. Their appreciation for my work ethic and dedication has been instrumental to me and has added to the driving force for me to continue working. Staff members and other ALDOT co-workers have always been cordial and great to work with.

Q: What advice can you give to people who are just starting in their careers?
A: I would advise employees starting out in their career, with aspirations to advance, to prioritize their goals and ambitions, work diligently with pride and be most productive in their assigned area of responsibilities; and never feed off others who are pessimistic and have a bad attitude. If, in the early stages of their career, they feel they are not in an area of responsibility they are content with and enjoy, I would recommend pursuing some other type of work they qualify for in the department that they feel they could perform better in, enjoy and be more productive in the performance of the duties.

Q: In your opinion, what’s the biggest change in State government since you started in 1964?
A: The biggest change I have seen in State government has been the conversion of manual programs to the computer environment. The evolution of technology in the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Global Positioning System (GPS) world has made the collection, processing and management of data so much easier and expedient. The employee benefits have changed over the years and I’ve noticed that certain employees have left the workforce and accepted higher paying jobs in the private sector.

Q: How do you unwind and relax when you’re not working?
A: When I’m away from work, I spend time in the country working on land and property I own, and most importantly, spending time with my two daughters and grandkids. My daily commute to and from work is an hour each way, and my drive is prime time for relaxing, as it allows me to unwind and rehash some of the events throughout each day that are work and personal related.

Employees’ Suggestion Incentive Program REMINDER

Don’t forget to submit your cost-saving ideas to the Employees’ Suggestion Incentive Board for the opportunity to earn a CASH AWARD up to $5,000! You can find the rules and submission form on the State Personnel Department website, www.personnel.alabama.gov, under the “Employees” button, then “Online Options.” Please remember that your completed submission form must include approval from your appointing authority in order for your suggestion to be considered for an award.
The Alabama Merit System law created the Personnel Department to be administered by a Personnel Director who answers to an independent board. The Board currently consists of five members who serve staggered six-year terms. Two members are appointed by the Governor, one by the Lieutenant Governor, one by the Speaker of the House, and one member is an elected classified State employee who is subject to all merit system rules and regulations.

By law, the Board is required to meet once each month. Its principal functions are to:
* adopt and amend rules and regulations;
* adopt and modify classification and pay plans;
* hear the appeals of employees who have been dismissed;
* represent public interest in the improvement of personnel administration in state service; and
* advise and assist the Personnel Director.

The State Personnel Board is scheduled to meet June 28, 2019, at 2:00 p.m. in the Board Room on the 3rd Floor of the Folsom Administrative Building in Montgomery. The meeting is open to the public.

State Employee Featured Recipe

**BELINDA’S SOUTHERN POSSUM PIE**

**INGREDIENTS:**
- 2 (3 ounce) packages cream cheese, softened
- 3/4 cup confectioners’ sugar
- 1 (9 inch) graham cracker crust
- 1/4 cup chopped pecans
- 1/3 cup instant chocolate pudding
- 1/4 cup instant vanilla pudding
- 2 cups cold milk
- 3/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup heavy cream, whipped
- 30 pecan halves

**DIRECTIONS:**
- Beat the softened cream cheese and confectioners’ sugar until smooth. Spread the mixture into the bottom of the graham cracker crust. Sprinkle the chopped pecans over the mixture.
- Stir together the chocolate and vanilla pudding mixes. Pour in the milk and vanilla extract; beat on low speed for 2 minutes. Spoon into the pie pan. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.
- Top with the prepared whipped cream and pecan halves.

***CALLING NEW EMPLOYEES! State Personnel, the State Employees’ Insurance Board (SEIB), and the Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA) have joined together to provide valuable information to State employees. The next meeting of the 2019 New Employee Conference will be held on August 27th in Tuscaloosa. This event is geared toward new State employees within their first two years of employment, but all State employees are welcome to attend. Conference attendees will learn about the benefits offered to State employees from representatives with State Personnel, the RSA, the SEIB, and Empower Retirement.***