

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For more information: Tim Potter

620-860-7389; mobile: 620-727-2278; Tim.Potter@ks.gov

After four decades with KDOT, Watts has a story to tell

In 40 years of working for KDOT, Gene Watts has experienced a memorable thing or two – like the man who abruptly told him: “I got a dead body in the back of my car.”

More on that later. The reason for this account is to note that May marks his 40th year of dedicated service to the state transportation agency.

Watts is Area Superintendent in the Pratt office, where he’s been since 2004. He’s also worked for KDOT shops in Winfield, Wellington and Medicine Lodge.

He’s always been in maintenance, so he’s had to get up in the middle of the night for accidents, storms, floods, snow, wildfires. “You got to have good work ethic and like what you’re doing,” he says. “You got to care about the safety of the traveling public. It’s part of your job. You got to get up and go,” he says, emphasizing that last word.

His voice rolls smoothly in a calm, matter-of-fact drawl -- the voice of a no-nonsense Old West character.

About the dead body: It was maybe his first year with KDOT. He was plowing snow early one morning near Winfield, with a co-worker. They stopped to check on a motorist stuck in the snow. Just the three of them talking, snow falling, in a remote spot.

Until a fourth person suddenly tapped on him and asked: “Can I get to Cedar Vale from here? I got a dead body in the back of my car, and I’ve got to get to Cedar Vale.”

The inquiring man must have seen “the look in my eyes,” Watts recalls. The man quickly explained that he was a funeral director. Only then did Watts realize that the man had driven up in a hearse.

Watts is a valued employee. Pratt Area Engineer Scott Mullen says: “Gene has been a great mentor to all of the supervisors in the Area. Since he became Superintendent, all six of the

subarea supervisors have changed” because of retirements. “His experience and guidance have allowed these changes to be almost seamless.”

Watts lives outside of Pratt with his wife, Leanne. When he’s not supervising KDOT maintenance, he does farm work. “I don’t have a lot of spare time,” he says.

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