

## We Get Compliments

# Of Dead Cats & Orchids

"Throwing dead cats at government agencies is an old and cherished tradition in this country, as I'm sure you're well aware," wrote Ralph O'Reilly of Davisburg in July of 1978. He added:

"So when a government responds promptly and sympathetically to a citizen beef, it's only fair to throw an orchid for a change."

With that, O'Reilly penned a truly beautiful "orchid" complimenting the Road Commission for repairing a driveway culvert as he requested.

O'Reilly was one of several who threw orchids to the Road Commission during 1977 and 1978. Considering the fact that we received 10,512 requests for citizens services, such "orchids" did indeed more than make up for any dead cats thrown our way (which were fewer than in recent years, incidentally).

Here are a few of the "orchids," which we'd like to share with the public as a bouquet on behalf of the 520 Road Commission employees whose efforts made them possible:

● "My heartiest thanks for speedy compliance with my request for weeds to be cut on Cedar Island Road. You have restored my faith in our local government."—Alice E. Schulte of Union Lake, August, 1977.

● "It has been a pleasure to be involved with a governmental entity that is responsive to citizen concerns."—Gerald J. Kuchera of West Bloomfield, April, 1978.

● "We still say no one can match Oakland County for its service and the excellent road signs."—Mr. and Mrs. Edward Januszko of Pontiac Township, February, 1978.

● I want to congratulate the people whose job it is to maintain the roads. You did one heck of a job during the Winter of 1978. As a resident of Brandon Township, I would also like to commend you for the job you have done all year long on our gravel roads."—Roger Krainock of Ortonville, April, 1978.

● "It is most refreshing to work with a governmental agency that seeks a solution to a problem rather than simply saying it can't be done."—Alfred J. Nelson, architect and project administrator with Dayton-Hudson for the Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi.

● "Your people and the other governmental departments which are responsible do a good job of clearing and salting during the Winter months."—Mr. and Mrs. Robert Anderson of Drayton Plains, November, 1977.

From public officials, we received comments like:

● "We work closely with our County Road Commissioners, and have been able to maintain a high degree of professional rapport."—Oakland Township Supervisor Alfred J. Taylor, May, 1978.

● "I must say I am very proud that out of all the local transportation delivery agencies in the nation, the Oakland County Road Commission was the only one invited to testify (before the U. S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Surface Transportation)." — U. S. Representative William S. Bromfield, October, 1977.

From the news media:

● "In the past there was some reason to believe that the Road Commission was so poorly managed that it would be foolish to give it extra money to play with. But that day is long gone. Under Commissioners such as John R. Gnau, William M. Richards and Fred Houghten, the road agency has been thoroughly overhauled. Almost all the managerial recommendations made by consultants in 1974 have been made. Their personal and professional efforts are to be commended, as are those of John Grubba, the road agency's first full-time managing director."—Neil Munro of the Oakland Press, February, 1978.

From professional consultants:

● "We have had significant contacts with road commissions, highway departments and other public agencies in our professional careers. We found, in all levels of the Oakland County Road Commission, a sense of professional responsibility and competence that is both refreshing and encouraging. The Road Commission appears to have a well educated staff with strong capabilities and sound experience. The general competence and sense of professionalism is significantly above average."—Kent B. Joscelyn and Ralph K. Jones of Ann Arbor, July, 1978.



### BOARD OF OAKLAND COUNTY ROAD COMMISSIONERS

WILLIAM M. RICHARDS Vice Chairman    JOHN R. GNAU, JR. Chairman    FRED D. HOUGHTEN Commissioner

Pictured during the weekly policy-setting meeting, the Board of Oakland County Road Commissioners currently is these three businessmen and community leaders. Mr. Gnau is serving his second consecutive term as Road Commission chairman and is a resident of Bloomfield Township where he previously served as a township trustee. Mr. Richards, of Royal Oak, is a former Road Commission chairman who previously chaired the elected Board of Oakland County Commissioners and served as Oakland County Drain Commissioner. Mr. Houghten is also a former County Board chairman and is a resident of Rochester. The Road Commissioners serve six-year terms by appointment of the County Board and are paid \$7,500 annually, with the chairman receiving an additional \$1,000. The Road Commissioners serve as part-time policymakers, appointing a full-time managing director, a county highway engineer and a clerk.

### Chairman's Report:

## We Hear Your Messages

You are telling us, dramatically, to do something about accidents on the roads.

We have gotten your message and we are well underway with a broad, pioneering program to meet the challenge. No longer is our main objective greater mobility. Safety is now our "Number One" priority.

Your calls and letters to our Dept. of Citizens Services about problems on the roads is one way your concerns reach our attention.

When you participated in public hearings on our budget, on our construction program or on individual projects, we heard you.

The alarming rate at which you are involved in highway crashes speaks loudly. You are telling us we are going to be held responsible, by your lawsuits which cite road conditions as a liability factor in those crashes.

Our liability insurance carriers emphasize the point, by demanding premium payments in excess of \$1 million annually.

Road Commissioners Bill Richards, Fred Houghten and myself became convinced in late 1977 that a concerted effort is needed to be directed at safety of the highway environment. Efforts nationwide to provide safer cars and safer drivers have been underway for years with limited results. We decided to try an ambitious concept: one that had been thought of before but never tried in the United States. It's called "Highway Risk Management: A Comprehensive Approach to Highway Safety."

It means, among other things, identifying road hazards and prioritizing them on the basis of

severity and availability of resources to respond to them. That's a bigger task than it may at first seem. Considerable data is available, but not enough.

Reason indicates need for a systematic management approach, but no such system is available off the shelf. Money, a fundamental resource, is in short supply.

A first step is to get a handle on specific hazards from any source available. We devote a special team and managers at every level to the task of identifying and prioritizing. Through new policies, management decisions and employee commitment throughout our agency we attack those we can the best we can.

For example, we have stepped up funding of pothole and edge rut repairs by 70 percent (devoting a million dollars annually to each) because of early findings.

With the help of consultants who have long given thought to the need for systematic highway safety risk management we are mobilizing our agency from the top down.

We are attempting to obtain special federal funding by demonstrating how our program can be applied throughout the nation.

We have just begun this War on Highway Carnage. It's a war we're not likely to win completely. But we hope to show significant gains in a few short years that will mean fewer accidents on our roads.

You can continue to help, by keeping your opinions flowing to us.

JOHN R. GNAU, JR.  
Chairman  
Board of Oakland County  
Road Commissioners



DURING THE PUBLIC HEARING on the Road Commission's 1978 budget and construction program, Road Commissioner Fred D. Houghten (second from right) talks with (from left) Novi City Manager Edward Kriewall, Novi Mayor Romaine Roethel and Oakland County Commissioner Dennis Murphy.