



Q1 2026 NEWSLETTER

Volume 63, No. 1

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

- CELEBRATING A CAREER OF SERVICE:
HONORING RUSS THOMAS
- MOCK INTERVIEWS GIVE INSIGHTS TO
STUDENTS
- WCAG 2.1 ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

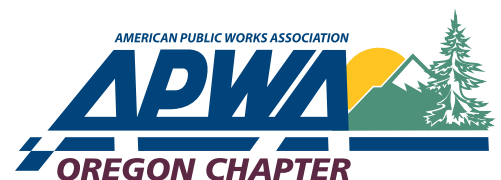


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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



*Shannon Williams, PE
Principal Engineer, Keller
Associates
2026 Oregon Chapter President*

Hello Fellow American Public Works Association Members!

Can you believe we're already nearly four months into 2026?

Time has a way of picking up speed—especially when there's a lot of good work (and a little fun) along the way. Here's a quick look at what your Oregon Chapter Board of Directors has been up to over the past few months.

In December, we welcomed Jennifer Garbely, Milwaukie City Engineer, to the Board, and we said farewell to Tim Blackwood of Pali Associates. Tim has been a steady and dedicated presence in APWA for years, and his contributions will truly be missed. At the same time, Doug Singer with the City of Eugene stepped into the Past President role, and Chase Welborn of Keller Associates moved into the President-Elect position. Our remaining Board members continue in their roles (you can find the full roster here: <https://oregon.apwa.org/leadership>).

I'm incredibly grateful to both Tim and Doug for their leadership and mentorship. And while Tim may be "retired" from the Board, we're not quite letting him disappear into the wilderness just yet—he's generously agreed to help lead renewed advocacy efforts in partnership with ACEC and ASCE. Stay tuned for more on that (and a call for volunteers) later this year. We've also appointed Doug as an Alternate Delegate, strengthening Oregon's voice in the Council of Chapters. He recently attended the 2026 Winter Meeting in Canada—so if you see him, ask what's ahead at the National level and how we can be part of it.

The Board has also wrapped up strategic planning, aligning our goals and priorities with APWA National's strategic plan. The updated plan will be posted on our website later this month, and I encourage you to take a look and share your thoughts. It's a living document and a roadmap guiding our work throughout 2026.

In January and February, I met with Committee Chairs to share the Strategic Plan, gather input, and kick off development of 2026 work plans. As both a Chapter member and a National committee chair, I've seen firsthand how valuable these plans can be. They help

keep efforts aligned, focused, and—let's be honest—there's real satisfaction in checking things off a list. You'll start seeing more of this work take shape at the Spring Conference.

We're also continuing to build connections with the APWA Washington Chapter. In April, we'll hold our Board meeting in Vancouver, Washington, alongside their Spring Conference. It's a great opportunity to exchange ideas, strengthen relationships, and expand collaboration across chapters. We'll also be welcoming several Washington Board members to our Spring Conference in Seaside. It's all about learning from each other—everything from scheduling strategies to big-picture initiatives.

Seaside Spring Conference 2026

Our Spring Conference is just around the corner—May 18–21, 2026, in Seaside, Oregon (details here: [Spring Conference 2026](#)). This year's theme, Waves of Progress – Building Resilient Communities, sets the tone for a strong lineup of education and networking, with a few new twists. We're especially excited to introduce our Fun Run/Walk. And yes, we've been listening. Based on your feedback, we've made several updates to improve the overall conference experience.

We're honored to host several distinguished guests, including Dominic Longabardi, APWA Past President, and Tina Nelson, Region IX Director. We'll also welcome Washington Chapter President Jim Rioux (City of Olympia), Lauren Behm (Landau), and Jeff Brauns (Pace Engineers). When you see them, be sure to say hello and make them feel at home. Seaside is calling, and we're ready to answer.



National Public Works Week 2026



National Public Works Week runs May 17–23, 2026, with the theme “Rooted in Service, Powered by Community.” It’s a great reminder of the impact public works professionals have every day. We’ve submitted a proclamation request to the Governor’s office and are awaiting a response. In the meantime, we’d love to hear how your agency or community is celebrating—please share your stories.

Russ Thomas Retirement

Finally, I can’t close my first President’s message without recognizing the retirement of one of Oregon public works’ greats: Russ Thomas. After 46 years with the City of Newberg, Russ has officially stepped into retirement—



but not too far. He’ll continue serving as one of our Chapter Delegates. Russ has been instrumental in shaping public works across the state, and his leadership opened doors for many of us, including me. His encouragement to step up, give back, and serve has made a lasting impact—and for that, I’m deeply grateful.

Here’s to a strong and successful 2026. If you’d like to connect, don’t hesitate to reach out at swilliams@kellerassociates.com.



2026 APWA OREGON CHAPTER AWARD NOMINATIONS

The year is off to a great start, and it is time to start thinking about awards to recognize our often under-celebrated projects and people. APWA Oregon would like to hear about:

- *The amazing public works projects that were substantially completed within the last two years*
- *The outstanding young leaders in our community*
- *Effective sustainability practices people are implementing*
- *Everyday heroes*
- *Who is excelling at communications in the Oregon Chapter (Bulldog)*

For you to be honored for your work, we need a nomination form and supporting information. Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words, so please take some pictures to include with your application.

Please note: Applications are due earlier this year.

Guidelines & Nomination Forms: Award Applications

For Inspiration: 2025 Award Winners

Applications Due: Friday, July 31, 2026

Question to Awards Committee Chair:
Jonathon Neumann, PE, Pace Engineers
jonathonn@paceengrs.com

CELEBRATING A CAREER OF SERVICE: HONORING RUSS THOMAS

by Tony Roos, Todd Watkins, and Dan Boss

After more than five decades of public service—and more than 45 years dedicated to the City of Newberg—Russ Thomas is retiring. He leaves a legacy that is impossible to forget. For generations of public works professionals in Oregon and beyond, Russ has been a colleague, mentor, advocate, and tireless champion of the profession. His career exemplifies what it means to serve a community with humility, integrity, and heart.



From the Ground Up: A Public Works Career Like No Other

Russ’s journey in public service began in 1973 with service in the U.S. Navy, where he developed the discipline, leadership, and technical skills that would define his career. In 1979, he joined the City of Newberg—working in the field installing and maintaining water, sewer, stormwater, and street infrastructure. Russ distinguished himself through hard work, curiosity, and an unwavering commitment to learning.

Over the next four decades, Russ worked his way through nearly every level of the Public Works Department, ultimately serving as Public Works Director beginning in 2020. His leadership modernized Newberg’s infrastructure while preserving the small-town ethic.

Leadership Beyond the Job Description

Russ’s influence extends far beyond Newberg. A cornerstone of the Oregon Chapter of the American Public Works Association, he has served as Director, Secretary, President-Elect, President (2017), Immediate Past President, and National Delegate. He is widely known for his mentorship, inclusive leadership, and tireless support of operations and maintenance professionals. Russ’s colleague Todd Watkins of Washington County reflects on his relationship with Russ:

“I had the pleasure of working with Russ while serving on the chapter board which is where our connection first started. He was a tremendous asset to the chapter and demonstrated a true commitment to the public works industry. This was apparent through his work with the chapter and his advocacy in his community. However, beyond the formalities of the board, he soon became a reliable colleague, a knowledgeable professional, but more importantly, a trusted friend.”

One of Russ’s most enduring contributions is his leadership of the Oregon APWA Short Schools and the creation of the Oregon ROADeo—programs that provide hands-on training, recognition, and professional pride for public works field staff.



A Champion for Education and the Next Generation

For nearly two decades, Russ has been synonymous with the Oregon APWA Scholastic Foundation’s iconic “Gizmo” fundraiser. His enthusiasm and dedication helped grow the Foundation to more than \$670,000, funding hundreds of scholarships for students pursuing careers in public works.

Tony Roos, Senior Principal at Kittelson & Associates, has this message for Russ:

"I congratulate Russ on his retirement after 47 years of dedicated service to us citizens of Newberg and the public works profession. Your leadership and generosity meant so much to me personally, both as a valued professional mentor and as a trusted consigliere in the Order of the Golden Knuckle, where you'll forever be the Godfather of Gizmo."



Service Rooted in Community

Russ has volunteered countless hours coaching youth sports, supporting schools, leading community festivals, and improving infrastructure for organizations like the St. Paul Rodeo. Whether mentoring young professionals or helping neighboring communities recover from hardship, Russ consistently stepped forward when help was needed.

A Legacy of Giving to Others

As Russ Thomas enters retirement, the Oregon APWA community celebrates not just the end of an extraordinary career, but the lasting impact of a life dedicated to public service. His example reminds us that public works is about people—and that one individual can make a profound difference.

Dan Boss has this message to share about working with Russ:

"Over the past few decades with Oregon APWA, I've had the privilege of working alongside Russ. From his work with the Short School and 'Mr. Gizmo' fundraising efforts to his service on the chapter board, as President, and now as National Delegate, it's been an honor to work with him."



WCAG 2.1 ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

by Marion Sutor Barnes, City of Eugene and Communications Committee

Chances are you've heard people in your agencies talking about the need to ensure content on your agency website meets accessibility requirements. Indeed, many departments are all-hands-on-deck as the deadline approaches. So, what's all the hubbub about?

The federal government is requiring many public agencies to make their websites and mobile apps easier for people with disabilities to use. These updates must follow the WCAG 2.1 Level AA accessibility standards, and large state and local governments have until late April 2026 to get it done.

Accessibility standards help make online content work for everyone, including things like adding text descriptions to images, making sure visuals have enough contrast, and helping people move through a webpage using only a keyboard. It also means videos need captions, forms should be easy to understand, and page layouts are navigable by screen readers.

Previously, most accessibility changes were a response to complaints from the public. Now, the Department of Justice is making these digital accessibility rules required by law. Agencies have to plan ahead and make their sites fully accessible—or face federal investigations or legal trouble.

For months or even years, agencies have been reviewing their websites, apps, and documents to see what needs fixing and making the updates. Additionally, updating staff training and making sure new technology purchases meet accessibility standards are also important.

If someone on your agency team reaches out for assistance with website updates, give them a hand! After all, they are on deadline.

MOCK INTERVIEWS GIVE OSU STUDENTS INSIGHTS INTO CAREER PATHS

by Kurtis Pipkin, Young Professionals Committee and HHRP Project Engineer

After nearly a year of coordination with Oregon State University (OSU), the APWA Young Professionals (YP) group successfully launched a new program aimed at connecting students with professional resources and opportunities that are available through APWA. The goal is to regularly visit campus to share information with students about APWA, including scholarships, technical tours, job opportunities, and the many benefits of membership.

In late January, APWA YP partnered with the Institute of Transportation Engineers and the American Society of Civil Engineers to host a Mock Interview and Resume Workshop at OSU—an opportunity students had specifically requested from these groups.

The event was a great success. Nearly 20 students attended the APWA presentation, with many more participating in the interview and resume workshop. The presentation was delivered by Shannon Williams, Keisuke Harry, and Kurtis Pipkin, 2322 with significant support in preparation from Ashley Cantlon. We aim to continue to build this partnership and bring heightened awareness to the resources and opportunities APWA provides to young people and recent graduates.



WHERE IS OUR WORKFORCE?

by Ashely Cantlon, Workforce Development Committee and City of Gresham



Workforce Development Committee at ASCE E-Week

As we look ahead at what is likely to be a significant shortage in our workforce, some members of our chapter started to brainstorm ways that APWA could help. After gathering to discuss the main concerns surrounding this issue, asking questions like “where will our next generation of engineers, surveyors, and operations staff come from?” and “how will we develop and retain staff to carry on the great work that we do each day?”, we began to formulate a plan for more deliberate action that could be supported within the capacity of our chapter and its resources. Thus began the journey of what has now become the Workforce Development Committee.

The Workforce Development Committee was officially recognized by the Chapter Board in January 2026 and has been moving forward at full steam. Our mission is to support APWA Oregon’s strategic goal of providing outreach to improve connections among members, agencies, service providers, and local communities in the context of workforce development needs. Committee co-chairs Jody Yates and Ashley Cantlon have been working with the committee to identify specific actions that we as a chapter can take to support its goals and complement efforts being carried out by other chapter committees.

Our committee will primarily support student outreach, committee collaboration, and the development of promotional materials to facilitate communication about careers in public works. We will also explore ways to support workforce retention through highlighting and advertising our chapter’s well-established educational and training programs.

You may have seen a chapter email blast recently asking for materials (photos, videos, etc.) that we can use to create a library of promotional content for Public Works. Our goal is to highlight a full cross section of careers in public works, including engineering, surveying, planning, operations, trades, sciences, etc., so that we can provide broad and diverse outreach content tailored to our audiences.

Student Outreach

We’ve been tracking a number of events in the Portland and Salem regions where we can connect with students of all ages and (hopefully) plant a seed of interest that may grow into curiosity when considering what they want to do when they grow up. Many students (and adults) don’t know what public works is! This fact has allowed our representatives an opportunity to engage in conversations about the world of public works, and why it’s so important to keep our communities running.

This year, we’ve already sponsored booths at three student events. Our first was for ASCE E-Week, which brings together prospective engineering students from high schools around the region to learn more about the different disciplines in engineering, as well as the pathways for becoming an engineer.

Second was the NSBE Youth Infrastructure Fair, which brought together students ranging from five years old through seniors in high school, some who knew exactly what they wanted to do when they grew up, and some who had no idea. Four of our workforce development members attended, including Lauren McKinney-Wise representing GIS mapping and planning, Lisa Strader with ADA program management, Stacey Lauer representing operations, and Ashley Cantlon with engineering. It was great to have such a variety of public works representation to speak to their experience in the industry, and hopefully inspire a few students to think about how they might become involved.

The third event we attended was the Portland Workforce Alliance Youth Careers Expo, which brought in over 6,000 students from the greater metro region, some from as far away as Hood River. The event was held at Portland’s Convention Center where exhibitors were set up in a large hall, and represented industries ranging from engineering and technology to education, health care, and design and construction.

Four representatives, including Keisuke Harry, Cori Wiessner, Matt Henry, and Ashley Cantlon stood at the APWA booth, each offering different backgrounds and demonstrating various career pathways available in public works.

These events provided us with the opportunity to educate students about great careers that they could have either working as a private consultant on public projects, or working directly for a public agency. If you are interested in volunteering to stand at our booth during one or more of these types of events, please contact **Jane Vail to be added to our email list: jane.vail@walliseng.net.**

With more people willing and able to attend these events, we can cover more territory and represent APWA to the fullest throughout the state.



Workforce Development Committee at NSBE Youth Infrastructure Fair

Committee Collaboration

The Workforce Development committee has collaborated with the Leadership and Management, Op/Engine, and YP committees to discuss how we can support each of their goals. Each committee provides some component of outreach, whether it

be networking or educational, and the Workforce Development committee offers support to those efforts. We have active participation from each of these committees in our student engagement efforts, which has been crucial to representing public works from many different backgrounds and experiences.

If you are working with a committee, and have ideas about how the Workforce Development committee could support your goals, please contact us; we'd love to hear from you!

Workforce Retention

Collaboration with APWA education and training programs, such as conferences and short schools supports another important objective in Workforce Development, which is workforce retention. While our immediate efforts have been more focused on student outreach and committee coordination, we see another opportunity to support workforce development by finding ways to keep people from leaving the industry.

For instance, due to limited budgets, continuing education and networking can sometimes be reserved for those in engineering or upper-management roles who need professional development hours to keep up a license or who prefer to gather information to take back to their teams. There is a lot of value, however, in investing in an employee's growth through training, regardless of licensure requirements (or lack thereof), and benefits can be untold. If a person feels that they are being nurtured and challenged or being assigned the types of work that they most enjoy, they are likely to be more engaged and productive.

A long-term goal of the Workforce Development Committee is to find ways to best support the great educational programs and efforts that are already being implemented within our chapter.

If any of you would like to learn more about this new committee and potentially become involved, please contact **Ashley Cantlon (Ashley.cantlon@greshamoregon.gov)** or **Jody Yates (jody.yates@portlandoregon.gov)** for more information.

Oregon APWA Listings



Looking to fill a position?

Look at what Oregon APWA offers:

Free listings for public works jobs in the Pacific Northwest.

Wide range of positions in the public and private sectors.

More information online or email oregonapwa@gmail.com.

BALANCING NATURE AND INFRASTRUCTURE: BEAVER MANAGEMENT INSIGHTS

by Ashley Cantlon, Op/Engine Committee and City of Gresham

Our Op/Engine Committee recently coordinated with the City of Gresham to host a tour of areas within city boundaries where beaver activity has become more prevalent. Tour guides Katie Holzer, Karen Bromley, Jesse Seals, and Mike Wallace led 14 participants to three different locations, demonstrating how beaver management strategies can vary depending on site conditions, infrastructure, and overall goals.

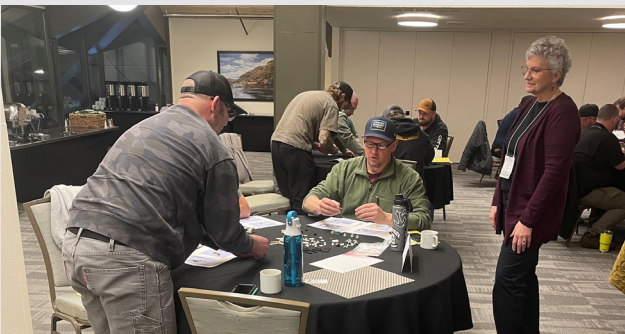
Managing beaver activity can be challenging, costly, time-consuming, and at times dangerous, particularly when water from backed-up dams reaches roadways and other critical infrastructure. The tour provided valuable insight into approaches that have worked well over time, as well as strategies that have been less effective, along with the lessons learned through that experience. Thank you to our tour guides and to everyone who participated in the tour!

The Op/Engine Committee looks forward to hosting more events this year as we continue pursuing our goal of bridging the gap between engineers and operations and maintenance staff. Keep an eye out for more announcements in the coming months.



BUILDING STRONGER LEADERS IN PUBLIC WORKS: NWPWI ESSENTIALS COURSE RECAP

by Jessica Carpenter, APWA Event Management



In early March, 40 public works professionals came together in beautiful Hood River, Oregon, for the Public Works Essentials course—part of the Northwest Public Works Institute (NWPWI) leadership program.

Throughout the four-day course, participants built connections while strengthening their skills in leadership, collaboration, and day-to-day operations. Instructors Delora Kerber, John Lewis, and Jenifer Willer brought valuable real-world perspective, helping to create an engaging and memorable experience for all involved.

The week also marked an exciting milestone, as four participants completed the full three-course NWPWI leadership series. Their achievement reflects a meaningful investment in both personal growth and the future of public works.

Thank you to everyone who participated and contributed to a successful week. Opportunities like this continue to build strong leaders and support thriving communities across the region.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Please continue to check our website and social media channels for upcoming events, registration details, sponsorship opportunities, and more!




**Advancing women
Advancing transportation**

APWA & WTS JOINT PORTLAND LUNCHEON
 Wednesday, April 22, 2026
 11:30 AM – 12:00 PM Lunch
 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM Presentation

The Importance of Accessible Infrastructure
 PRESENTED BY:
 Lisa B. Strader | City of Portland
 ADA Coordinator | Ramps by Request Program Manager
 Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

Lisa Strader, PBOT's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator, regularly connects with community members with disabilities about transportation infrastructure. While ADA design guidance exists for sidewalks, pedestrian signals, transit stops, and of course, curb ramps, among other elements, people with disabilities share stories and photos of infrastructure that may be compliant, but doesn't work well for the people who need it the most. Join us as Lisa shares examples as well as suggestions for how to design both compliant and user-focused infrastructure.

LOCATION
 Room 108 at The Portland Building, 1120 SW 5th Avenue Portland, OR 97204

Lunch from Ingallina's
 COST: \$20.00
 ONLINE PAYMENT ONLY
[CLICK HERE](#) to RSVP by Noon, April 15th, 2026
 (https://oregon.apwa.org >> Upcoming Events)
 Lunch includes a sandwich, salad, chips, and a drink



Street Maintenance and Collection Systems





Spring Short School April 7-9, 2026

Waves of Progress
 Building Resilient Communities



AMERICAN PUBLIC WORKS ASSOCIATION
SPRING CONFERENCE
 SEASIDE, OREGON • MAY 18-21, 2026

**2026 GREATER OREGON
 TRANSPORTATION CONFERENCE**
 FRIDAY, MAY 29TH, 2026
 OSU - CORVALLIS, OR

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS IS NOW OPEN!

- ABSTRACTS SHOULD BE NO LONGER THAN 300 WORDS.
- PLEASE INCLUDE THE TITLE OF YOUR PRESENTATION, A BRIEF OVERVIEW, AND KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR ATTENDEES.
- SUBMISSIONS SHOULD HIGHLIGHT THE SIGNIFICANCE AND RELEVANCE OF YOUR TOPIC TO THE TRANSPORTATION ENGINEERING COMMUNITY.
- SUBMISSIONS ARE DUE BY MARCH 25TH, 2026.

SELECTED PRESENTERS WILL BE NOTIFIED BY APRIL 8TH, 2026, AND FURTHER DETAILS ON PRESENTATION FORMATS AND CONFERENCE LOGISTICS WILL FOLLOW.

SUBMIT HERE

ORGANIZED BY:
 Oregon State University


 ASCE OREGON SECTION
 Willamette Valley Younger Member Group

ROOTED IN
Service
 POWERED BY
Community

**NATIONAL PUBLIC
 WORKS WEEK**
 MAY 17-23, 2026



PWX 2026
 August 30–September 2, 2026
 George R. Brown Convention Center
 Houston, Texas