

# MINER DETAILS

Volume 3 Issue 1 MINERS' HEALTH, SAFETY & TRAINING JANUARY 1998

## BRIDGING THE COMMUNICATION GAP

### From The Director's Office

We have completed 1997 with the lowest fatality rate in the history of West Virginia. The state had six mining fatalities, four surface and two underground, in 1997. Previously, 1988 was the record low with nine fatal mine accidents. During the twenty years that I have worked for the state, I have heard comments made several times that we will never have a fatal-free year. In analyzing each of these six accidents, I believe we easily could have gone the year without a fatality. In each of these accidents, a safety thought or a safe work practice could have prevented the fatality.

I think our continued approach of making safety contacts with every miner can truly achieve a fatal-free year. I want to stress the importance of these contacts emphasizing the need to work safely and not allow complacency to take the place of safe work habits. We need to do everything possible to show the miners we care that they return home safely each day. Ultimately, it is their decision whether they are going to work safely. However, with constant reinforcement from us, I think we can continue to have a positive impact on the miners' safety and have that fatal-free year in 1998. In closing, I would like to congratulate the coal miners, the companies, and the regulatory agencies, both state and federal, who all played an important role in this record low fatality rate. Thanks for a job well done.

**Ron Harris, Director**

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### Extra! Extra!

#### Employees Of The Year

On January 6, 1998, Director Ron Harris invited the winners of the 1997 Employee of the Year and their supervisors to attend an informal ceremony for the presentation of their awards. Director Harris presented the winners with a plaque and a clock.

The winners were nominated and selected from three categories; Administrative, Supervisor, and Inspector/Instructor.

Sandy Ray, a secretary in the Region 3 Danville office, was selected from the Administrative category.

Wayne Wingrove, underground inspector in the Region 4 Oak Hill office, was selected from the Inspector/Instructor category.

From the Supervisor category, Roger Powell, Inspector-at-Large of the Region 1 Fairmont office, was selected.

Congratulations to the 1997 Employee of Year winners.

### Agency

#### Accomplishments

##### PC Upgrades

A PC upgrade required for the automated certification card system that went into effect in early January 1998 has been completed. Each regional office had at least one of its PCs upgraded. These upgrades included adding a 200 MHz processor, 32mb of RAM, a 2.5 gigabyte hard drive, 12 speed CD-ROM and a 17 inch monitor. MSHA states grant program money was made available to pay for these upgrades. By upgrading instead of purchasing new machines we estimated cost savings of between \$500 and \$800 per unit. The upgrades were completed in-house. John Scott and Leon Bailey in the Welch office made the upgrades. John recently completed a class in PC upgrades and a class in PC repair. He has been a great help solving several PC problems in the Welch and Oak Hill Regions.

#### For Your Information

##### Safety Awards Program

The Mountaineer Guardian Award program has been a joint effort of MHS&T and the WV Mining and Reclamation Association. Over the years, hundreds of awards have been presented to West Virginia mines. This awards program was recently revised. The old system simply gave awards to mines as they met production goals (based on employment size) without having a fatal accident. The new system looks at additional criteria such as a company's safety record and safety programs. Also for the first time, nominations were made

from each regional office, with twenty-four mines or facilities selected to receive awards. Quarry operations and coal handling facilities were included. Efforts were made to include large and small operations. Awards were presented at the WV Mining and Reclamation Associations' Mining Symposium January 15, 1998 during a special awards luncheon. Arch of West Virginia, Ruffner Mine received the Barton B. Lay Jr. Milestones of Safety Award.

### Miner Certification Records

MHS&T would like to take this opportunity to thank all those employees who worked many hours entering old miner certifications into the computer. These records are vital to the operation of the new automated system.

## Did You Know?

### Leave Time

There are advantages to using annual leave instead of sick leave in those instances where you might need time off for family or personal illness. An employee can carry only a certain amount of annual leave into the next calendar year, but the amount of sick leave carried forward is unlimited. Keeping a lower annual leave balance reduces the chance of losing excess annual leave especially when there are unexpected year-end days off granted by the governor's office.

Accumulated annual and/or sick leave may be used at retirement to increase retirement benefits or to continue PEIA insurance coverage, but not both. Every ten days of accrued annual and/or sick leave equals one additional month of service for an increase in retirement pay. Each two days of annual or sick leave buys one month of single (individual) health coverage for employees enrolled in PEIA before July 1, 1988, but buys only one-half a month of single health coverage for those enrolled

after that date. Three days annual and/or sick leave buys one month of family health coverage, (or one-half month if enrolled after July 1, 1988). Accumulated annual and/or sick leave will be very valuable to the employee at time of retirement. Use leave wisely!

### Accident Investigation Kit

A kit is available in each regional office for use by inspectors during accident investigations.

The kit should contain calipers, a grade finder, flashlights, measuring tapes of varying lengths, folding carpenter rules, VCR tapes, and a packet of the necessary data collection forms used during investigations, all enclosed in a sturdy weather resistant case. Of value during any accident investigation, it is indeed most helpful following surface accidents or incidents involving trucks or heavy equipment.



## Up Close and Personal

The Director has named John Larry to serve in the capacity of Assistant Inspector-at-Large of the Region 1 Fairmont Office. This appointment became effective January 1, 1998. Congratulations!

### Leisure Time

Beginning with this issue of *Miner Details*, we will include some interesting leisure time activities of our employees. Lewis Vannatter and James Bird work in the Oak Hill regional office. Lewis enjoys spending time with his children and grandchildren. He likes to hunt and attends antique shows,

and can often be seen at the flea market.

James Bird likes to hunt all game and also fishes for trout. Jim enjoys doing wood projects and camping.

Joe Atha works in the Danville regional office. Joe enjoys trout fishing, cameras, and snow skiing. He also builds street rods.

Diane Belcher works in the Welch regional office. Diane collects silhouette pictures and spends time cross-stitching, gardening, reading, and trying new recipes. She also enjoys a variety of crafts and outdoor activities.

## New In 1998!

Look for these changes in the coming year:

Changes in our IPA program are in place and have been initiated.

More emphasis on contractors' comprehensive safety programs in relation to job-specific work being performed.

Development of an eight-hour training program for contractors.

Proposed training requirements for contract truck drivers.

## Humor in the Mines

A few years ago a wild but well-liked mine foreman had a roof fall in his southern WV coal mine. He wanted to get the fall cleaned up promptly so he trammed a large diesel-powered bulldozer to the section and began the clean-up. In the process, a federal mine inspector walked in and caught him red handed. Needless to say, he had no excuses.



**DON'T FORGET WEST  
VIRGINIA WINTER SPORTS.**