

From Getting Hired to Getting Ahead – Part I

Compiled from Retiree Interviews, Winter 2008

In retrospect, some retirees felt that getting hired at the Bureau of Public Roads had been relatively easy. Getting ahead, however, sometimes took a hand up, and several retirees looked back on the help they received in moving ahead.

Getting hired or promoted in the Federal Government seems like a straightforward proposition. You submit your resume – or the familiar SF 171 of the past – then hope your name makes it onto the Certificate of Eligibles, and that you are close enough to the top to “make the cut.” In some cases, however, retirees reported they have had the benefit of encouragement from others – a hand up the ladder from someone on whom they had already made a favorable impression.

Willis Grafe apparently made a good impression early in his career. He had left the Bureau of Public Roads before completing the training program: “I resigned and went to work for a surveyor out in Washington County (Oregon) and then I went to work for the Corps of Engineers.” He was working “on the design of the Dalles Dam, on the spillway section,” he said, when he received a call from the Region Office, which was then located in the Morgan Building. “They called me up and said, ‘When are you going to come back to work?’” He accepted the offer and they “put me back to work out in the bush. First step was Montana, Glacier Park, then the other projects.”

Ray Westby had spent four years as project engineer on the Heart of the Hills project in the Olympic National Forest when he got a call from **Ro Rogers**, Division Administrator in Washington Division. For some time “the Regional Office used to do the inspecting of federal contracts,” he said, and he was accustomed to someone from Portland inspecting his project. “Somewhere in the late 1950’s they changed that and the division offices took that responsibility,” so when he went to Olympia to become an Area Engineer, inspections became part of his job. “I went in there as an area engineer 1959-1969. We did quite a bit of work in (Rainier) Park and up around Packwood....In fact that new bridge across Snoqualmie Glacier – Federal Highway built that.”

It was while he was in that job that Ray made a favorable impression on another manager. “**John Mors** was the big wheel...in Portland,” he said. Later, “he took over **N. D. Wood’s** place as head of Direct Federal,” a position which was then known as the Director, Office of Federal



Looking north along the east side of “Building C”, 1965. John Bucholtz recalled that when John Mors came to Vancouver, he started making improvements to the facility, including closing off this cross street and building an addition to connect this building to Building D just west of the current Geotech Offices. WFLHD Archives.

Highway Projects, and reported to the Regional Administrator. “We had a job in the park... and they sent (me) a set of advance plans to look over this job,” he said. “So I went out and looked at it; and all I had to do was give it a seal. The road was in terrible shape.” Ray wasn’t ready to sign off, so he called John Mors. ““John,”” I said, ‘this is not going to do the job, this is just going to get us in bad shape with the Park, because we’re just spending their money and not providing anything.’ And John said he wanted to come up there and look for himself. So I went with him up there and he agreed.”



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After that, Mr. Mors asked him to come down to the Region, “supposedly as Construction Engineer for Direct Federal.” But that position was short lived, Ray remembered, because “after about six months, everything moved over here. John still reported to **Mr. Phillips**, who was the Regional Administrator at that time,” but all of the direct federal construction responsibilities were moved to Vancouver. “That would have been 1970 or early ’71,” Ray said, adding that “when I came over here, I didn’t end up in construction, I ended up in preconstruction.”

After John Mors retired in July 1978, **Jim Hall** was selected as his replacement. By that time, a new Regional Administrator was in place, and Jim recalled it was he, “**Lou Lybecker**... who called me and asked me to apply out here. I had no intention of doing that,” he said. “I hadn’t even thought about it.”

Jim noted that there had been only one time in his career that he had applied for a job “that somebody hadn’t already told me I was going to get before I got it.” That job was “head of Direct Federal in Washington, and I don’t know why I did that.” In every other case, “somebody was looking out for me – or looking after themselves and picked me,” he said, or “asked me to apply before I did.”

In some cases, Jim said, he would probably never have applied for the jobs. He had gone to work in the D.C. Division after the training program, working as an Area Engineer and steadily working his way up the ladder to a GS-12. “Washington Office had a job opening. **Dave Gedney** called me and said ‘We’re going to offer you this job, don’t turn it down.’ I would have definitely turned it down. I wasn’t ready to go to the Washington Office.” Soon he was asked to apply for yet another position. “**Wes Mendenhall** came over and said, ‘We’d like you to apply for a job in Region 15. You can be the head of the Gatlinburg office.’ That sounded good, so I applied. I went over to report,” he said, but they had changed their minds. “They said... ‘We’re going to put you in charge of the Demonstration Projects and send **Bud Darvik** to Gatlinburg.’ If I’d have known that, I wouldn’t have applied. But I was there, so I did that job.”

Jim Hall had already made his move to Vancouver when an opening on the BLM Design team provided the means for **John Bucholtz** to get a promotion. “**Dave Heckman** was in charge of the group at that time,” John said, and “the chief designer in the section was going to retire. I was a 9 at the time, running a drafting department, (and) that was an 11 position. I had worked design for ten years prior to taking over the drafting department,” John said. He had also done some work in Ralph’s section doing some design work to help out when another recent hire “wasn’t cutting it. So I was doing part

time. I'd leave the drafting department and go...help him design," including doing field reviews at the Grand Tetons National Park.

Everyone knew he was going to apply for the job, he said. "Ralph Frame knew me...and he wanted me to apply." Then the job disappeared. "They pulled that job. They weren't advertising it....All of a sudden they advertised Chief of the Drafting Department as an 11. They wanted me to stay where I was. They didn't tell me that, but that was it. So I applied for it, and of course I got it." Eventually the other job was put on ad again, John recalled, and "**Norm Trujillo** took over that."

Whether they were being promoted or encouraging others to prepare for and apply for a job, many retirees still have warm memories of their experiences at the Bureau of Public Roads. As John Bucholtz noted, "I put 35 years in here – some people walk away and they never come back. I came back here on a contract for awhile. I suppose if they called me and said we need your help, I'd come back again."

If you have comments on this story or other stories to share, please email Marili Reilly at marili.reilly@fhwa.dot.gov.