

Engineer, 93, gets award from his peers

Let's spend today "Getting Around."

An oldie but goodie. "Thank you, young man," I declared to Michael A. Gross, who was performing his regular duty of presenting awards at the recent annual banquet of the Pittsburgh Section, American Society of Civil Engineers.

Gross had just handed me the group's first Excellence in Journalism Award, although my treatment of civil engineers has not always been civil.

Now that I've tooted my own horn, let me tell you about Gross. This "young man," who lives in Scott, is 93 years old. His legacy ranges from early employment with the former Pennsylvania Department of Highways (1932-36) and serving as an Army colonel during World War II to employment as a structural engineer for some of Pittsburgh's biggest corporations — the Blaw-Knox Co., Koppers Co. and Dravo Corp.

"He has given unselfishly to many people and especially this organization," said Werner Loehlein, president of the Pittsburgh Chapter of ASCE. To say the least, Gross signed on with the group 70 years ago while he was a University of Pittsburgh engineering student.

After serving in every capacity over the years, and after presenting hundreds of awards to colleagues and youths in science and engineering fairs over the years, Gross had the tables turned on him at the Feb. 22 banquet. ASCE named him recipient of its first Meritorious Service Award.

Kudos, for Mr. Gross, who also deserves a longevity award.

Allegheny County Public Works Director Tom Donatelli, whose restructured department now includes county parks, building and fleet management in addition to engineering, construction and highway bridge maintenance, was honored with the Civil Engineer of the Year Award.

With all of the staff reductions and budget cuts his office has taken, Donatelli also deserves a juggling award.

More oldies but goodies. Yetta

She solicited a dozen signatures on a letter complaining about some broken and uneven slabs of concrete that make a short walk difficult on sidewalks between Riverview Towers, where she lives, and the Port Authority bus stop on Browns Hill Road at the intersection with Old Browns Hill Road.

"If you want, I'll get everybody to sign," she said of 250 other elderly people at Riverview, many of whom still get out to ride the buses. "A couple of people have tripped and fallen. It's very dangerous and we're old. Can you have it repaired as soon as possible?"

Dear Yetta:

Thanks for being concerned about your friends. Let's hope that Guy Costa, the city's new public works director, reads this letter and either makes the minor fixes that the sidewalk requires or forces the property owners to do it. Otherwise, you, I and Riverview Towers director Rena Becker are going to have to buy a few bags of "ready-mix" concrete and do it ourselves.

P.S.: On Monday, city workers picked up litter and swept the area, including around the bus shelter. Hope that helped.

More honors. Mike Dugan of Elizabeth Township and Mark Dowden of McKeesport were among four Port Authority operators recently recognized for helping motorists in the aftermath of serious accidents.

Dugan and Dowden, both volunteer firefighters, were new employees qualifying for their bus driving jobs in November 1999 when they came upon an accident on East Carson Street, near Becks Run Road. They used strength and a spare tire to alleviate pressure on a driver pinned in the overturned van, and entered through a broken rear window to search for a child. Dugan also is a paramedic.

Gibby McNie of Mount Washington and Tanya Walsh of Brighton Heights used extinguishers to help control a fire after a two-car accident on East Street in January and then directed traffic until city emergency personnel arrived.

JOE GRATA:
GETTING
AROUND



Something old is something new. The Port Authority ended service last year and has junked most of the 1940s vintage PCC streetcars in its trolley fleet.

But on March 4, the San Francisco Municipal Railway opened the first light-rail line of the 21st century, using restored PCC cars on the F line extension from Market Street to Fisherman's Wharf to serve residents as well as visitors.

Harold Geissenheimer, who spent 26 years in management positions with the Port Authority and whose business and hobby remain public transit, rode the first car on the F line on opening day. He writes:

"The line is a textbook model of how to build and operate a surface light-rail line. The Muni's PCC cars are in perfect condition and operate as high performance vehicles. Overhead wire is simple and neat and uses street light poles where possible."

Dear Harold:

Thanks for the update. You would think we could have kept our PCC cars running as a tourist attraction and practical local transit serving the Strip District. Of course, we're not San Francisco; we're ahead of the times.

P.S. I know all your friends are going to be asking, "How old is Harold by now?" I've got it in my records, but I won't tell.

Plate du jour. I spotted a car with the personalized Pennsylvania license plate 4 NEICEY crossing the Liberty Bridge last week. She must have a generous aunt and/or uncle?

Send your transportation