

Prater advances to regional-level transportation cabinet ‘roadeo’

By Devin Kidd
Staff Writer

Jake Prater, Floyd County resident and road foreman for the Transportation Cabinet (District 12), recently placed in multiple categories at the cabinet's state “roadeo,” a skills competition which tests crews in technical operations.

“It’s an equipment skills contest, with competitions including backhoes, skid steers, snow plows and more,” Prater said. “They set up a course for each piece of equipment and you’ve got to go through and do different things.”

After qualifying in the district “roadeo” at Archer Park, Prater had the opportunity to compete in the state-level competition in Lexington.

“I competed in the backhoe and motor grader competition,” he said.

Prater said the competitions were “tedious.”

“With the backhoe, they put spoons on the bucket, and we had to pick up golf balls out of sand, then put them in a canister,” he said. “With the grader, there was a platform with 1 inch pipe stuck up that had tennis balls at different heights. As we went through, we had to knock off the tennis balls without knocking the stand over.”

He went on to say that this was his second time competing in the state competition, but his first time in the motor grader challenge. Prater got second place in the motor grader challenge, while finishing fourth in the backhoe challenge.

Prater said his second-place finish got him a spot in the regional-national competition. According to records, this makes him the first-ever repre-

sentative from District 12 to advance to the regional competition.

Prater said he’s excited to represent District 12 in the competition, as he’ll be going up against operators from 13 other states and doing what he loves.

“Since I was old enough to talk, walk and crawl, equipment is what I’ve been about,” he said. “When I was little, my neighbor had equipment, and when I wasn’t at school, I was on it with him. I got my feet wet, and picked things up as I went. I can do it from daylight to dark; it doesn’t bother me a bit. I really enjoy it.”

His love for running equipment took him to North Carolina late last year in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

“I stayed down there for three weeks; it was insane,” he said. “We worked 23 16-hour days straight. I’d go back tomorrow.”

Prater said he often hears people talk about running equipment, as if there’s no work involved for the operator.

“They often say ‘you’re sitting in air conditioning and heat,’” he said. “That’s not true; your brain is constantly working and planning your next move. People think it’s easy; they should try doing it eight to 12 hours a day.”

Prater said he’s been with the state department at Allen for almost 12 years, with nine of those years operating equipment. Above all, he said he urges the young and old to give equipment and the transportation cabinet a try if interested.

“People don’t see everything to do with the highway department, and there’s people wanting workers,” he said. “If there’s someone young, or



Submitted photo

Jake Prater of Langley recently placed second in the motor grader competition of the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet’s “Roadeo”. Prater will move on to the regional competition in September, competing against operators from 13 other states.

older, interested, I love teaching people. I’ll back equipment operators until I die, that’s what builds the world.”

The regional competition will take place in September at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington. Regional winners will then go on to the national competition, which will also take place at the horse park at a later date.

WATER

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to make money, we just want to break even.”

Additionally, Roberts said there was a \$6 surcharge at one time to cover new meters. While that surcharge has ended, he said the PSC has added a new

\$6.83 surcharge to replace old and dilapidated lines.

“Basically, we’ll have a 23 percent rate increase, plus another \$1 difference in the surcharges,” Roberts said. “So, with the average bill being 45 dollars, we’d be looking at a \$12.75 increase per

customer.”

Roberts elaborated, saying the increase is to cover operational expenses, while the surcharge is needed due to a 50 percent water loss.

“That water loss is costing a lot of money; we’re treating that water, and it’s going out wherever,” he said.

“The \$6.83 is for Southern Water to find, identify and replace the places in our area that are causing water loss. That money has to be specifically used for that purpose. We’ll prioritize where our worst water loss is, and attack that first.”

Roberts said it isn’t the board’s wish to enact the raise, but instead, it’s a necessity.

“We want people to understand: it’s either raise the rates or turn the water off,” he said. “This isn’t padding bank accounts or giving raises; the chemical costs, labor costs and more are up post-COVID. The Public Service Commission is who governs this; they looked at the years’ worth of data that we submitted. We calculated, and submitted it two years ago, when we asked for a 15.25 percent raise. They used that same data to come up with

the 23 percent raise.”

Roberts said the rate increase and surcharge will be appropriated for five years.

“So, we have 60 months to tackle this water loss issue,” he said. “We don’t want to raise rates, but this is so the water district can survive. We’re just complying with the PSC’s recommendations.”

The board said they are waiting on the official order from PSC, at which time they’ll begin a 30-day public notice and notify all customers.

“August would be the earliest it would begin, but we’re looking more toward September or October,” Roberts said. “If this isn’t enacted within three to four months, there’s no cushion to operate on. We don’t take pleasure in doing this, but we have to.”

Roberts added that in 2027, the district will

have to do another form of this with the PSC, using 2026 data.

“So, if we’re successful with this, we may cut it to 18 percent, for example,” he said. “They dictate what we can do, and we sit here knowing that it’s a blessing for us and the people using this water that PSC did such an in-depth study.”

County Judge-Executive Robbie Williams added that if the water company were to go bankrupt, they’d have to sell to a for-profit entity, which he said is a much worse alternative.

“I promise, these average water bills would be much higher if that were the case” he added. “We want this to stay a viable entity that is ran by a local board rather than an entity who has to answer to shareholders.”

OFFICERS

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heavy, but the joy of knowing these officers brought us here today, in addition to supporting their families, what they mean to this community and that they’ll

never be forgotten.”

Sheriff John Hunt said the incident seems as though it just happened.

“It doesn’t seem like it’s been three years; I know when we talk about it, it’s like it was yesterday,” he said. “The memories of Ralph, William, Commander Chaffins and Drago always come up in stories. Thank you to everyone who gave it all that day; some obviously gave the ultimate sacrifice, but every one of you that showed up gave a piece of you that day to make a difference.”

Prestonsburg Police Chief Ross Shurtleff said that above all, the officers and Drago can never be forgotten.

“I swore that as long as I’m in a decision-making capacity, the legacy left behind by not only these three

men, but a legend in police service dogs, wouldn’t be forgotten,” he said. “The camaraderie that was forged, and the unity that this picture represents, started three years ago.”

Shurtleff went on to say that the mural will be cleaned regularly, and replaced if needed. Additionally, he said police/ sheriff cars have the fallen officers, as well as Drago’s, names on them, and that future officers, council members, mayors and more will know to clean the mural and memorials regularly.

Law enforcement, family and friends went to the cemetery to place wreaths on the grave sites, in addition to placing two wreaths on the bridge at the Ky. 114/ Arnold Avenue intersection.

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