

Tennessee Department of Transportation

The Civil Rights Division celebrates Black History Month by recognizing some of our employees.

Employee Spotlight: Joan M. Haynes



TDOT Technician Supervisor
Right of Way Division, Headquarters

Joined TDOT Family March 1984

Tell us about a moment in Black History that influenced or shaped your career and life.

When I saw the movie, “Hidden Figures” in August of 2016, starring Taraji P. Henson (Katherine Johnson), Octavia Spencer (Melba Roy), and Janelle Monáe (Mary W. Jackson), it changed my perception of my life. I was in the process of going to school and guiding my daughter through high school. My parents were requiring more attention as well. It was a challenging time. Hidden Figures showed me integrity under fire. It showed me NASA’s motto, “*Failure is not an option*” in action. This encouraged me and gave me the focus I required to push on. It was like my Heavenly father was telling me, “*Don’t give up, you can do this, you can finish this one race, you have the perseverance to graduate, if you just keep at it.*” I graduated in 2021 with an Associates in Civil Engineering. Every time I get tired, Hidden Figures plays in my head and encourages me to keep moving forward.

Which of the TDOT Values (Stewardship, Integrity, Safety, Consistency, Development, Innovation, Collaboration & Family) resonates with you and give an example.

All the core values of TDOT resonate with me but I focused more on development. While in school, developing good study habits and staying focused on my overall goal of graduating helped evolve my working knowledge of the Civil Engineering field. As a result of this acquired knowledge my career has been enhanced as I apply what I’ve learned in my everyday work tasks. For example, using the Excel database broadened my range of knowledge regarding diagrams, insertion of drawings, and mathematical equations. Development inspires me to continue learning new skills every day to enhance my job performance.

Why is celebrating Black History Month important?

Black History Month is important because it provides knowledge of who and what we are. Black History Month helps to guide us on how to develop and be innovative in our daily tasks and views. We have been able to learn from the wisdom of trailblazing African Americans both past and present. We can view what others have created, helping us to use our imaginations to improve upon our current environments. Each year we learn about new contributions and what each trailblazer did to better our world. This information is presented during Black History Month to motivate and inspire each of us to give a little more. Black history was once hidden from the public and brought to light in February which can inspire our children to say, “*I am somebody.*”

Black History Month helps me to realize that my dreams can come true. Our ancestral foundation which has been shaped by such people as Martin Luther King, Ida B. Wells, Dorothy Irene Height, Roy Wilkins, Andrew Young, Barbara Charline Jordon, Horace Julian Bond, John Robert Lewis, Heather Booth, Victor J. Glover, Bessie Coleman, and Constance Baker Motley and many others, we can see the path that has been paved. I feel honored to know that they lived and blessed this world as well as carving out a path for myself and others to follow. I hope that I can also be a trailblazer on some level and inspire at least one person.

