

2006 Forest Service *Engineer of the Year* Winners

The votes are in for the Engineer of the Year awards. The winners will be traveling to Washington DC in April for the U.S. Department of Agriculture 2006 Forest Service *Engineer of the Year* awards ceremony.

Congratulations:

- Sokjae Cho—managerial engineer of the year
- Holly Bentz—technical engineer of the year
- Gary Ekman—engineer technician of the year
- Alan Christian—engineering technology applications employee of the year

A summary of the winners' accomplishments follow:

Sokjae Cho—2006 Managerial Engineer of the Year

Sokjae Cho is the station engineer for the Northeastern Research Station. His managerial skills were quickly applied to a major problem in the Forest Service research community: lack of consistency in program consistency that reduced efficiency. He delved



into developing a new business operations plan for the Northern Research Station. For the plan to be effective, a comprehensive engineering and facility services organization was required. This organization now coordinates engineering, safety and health, fleet operations, and facility maintenance for the 20-State area of the Northern Research Station.

Before Sokjae Cho joined the Forest Service in 2004, he was a project manager for 15 years with the General Services Administration in Philadelphia. Sokjae Cho led large, multidisciplinary, multilevel project teams in the construction and renovation of major capital projects for Federal buildings and Federal courthouses. By the end of his

tenure, he was managing projects of high complexity and scope, costing from \$30 to more than \$200 million. Examples of his projects include renovation of an 800,000 square foot historic courthouse, sprinkler and asbestos abatement in a high-rise Federal office building, a 100,000 square foot Federal courthouse annex, and two field offices (260,000 and 100,000 square feet) for a law enforcement agency.

In 1988, Sokjae Cho earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Drexel University of Philadelphia, PA. Sokjae, his wife, and two teenage sons live in Ambler, PA.

Holly Bentz, 2006 Technical Engineer of the Year

Holly Bentz is the leader for the forest project development team on the Malheur National Forest in John Day, OR. In addition to her leadership duties, over the past 2 years her work has focused on aquatic passage and aquatic restoration. She serves as the John Day Basin Aquatic Restoration Coordinator, coordinating aquatic restoration efforts for portions of four national forests.



In 1989, Holly began her Forest Service career in the cooperative education program. Since then, she has worked on six national forests in three regions, including a brief detail to Texas after Hurricane Rita. Although she began her career working primarily in facilities, she has also worked in structures, program management, and project development. She is a registered professional engineer in the State of Oregon.

Holly and her husband, Patrick, have five children. She's often transporting or coaching kids at one activity or another, including soccer, Sunday school, and Lego League.

Gary Ekman, 2006 Engineer Technician of the Year

(1947–2006)

In 1980 Gary joined the Forest Service at the Kawishiwi Ranger District of the Superior National Forest. A year later, he moved to the forest supervisor's office in Duluth, MN, where he stayed for the next 26 years. In 2001 Gary became a civil engineering technician for the Region 9 Technical Services Team.



Gary consistently showed his exceptional ability in coordination, design and contract preparation on many projects throughout the region. Gary developed a regional standard crew quarters building design. His work on the Ely Tanker Base office in Minnesota became a national prototype. Whether he was working on a bunkhouse for the Ottawa National Forest in Michigan or a multimillion dollar project like the Mark Twain National Forest's Eleven Point Ranger District office in Doniphan, MO, Gary ensured that the work was done with accessibility and safety in mind.

Project work was not the only duty where Gary excelled. He was the primary Superior National Forest liaison with the Federal Prison Camp in Duluth, MN. His role has resulted in an ongoing partnership. Gary worked with various volunteer groups over many weekends to build 14 accessible fishing piers on the Superior National Forest.

In addition, Gary was active with the Lion's Club, Habitat for Humanity, Carlton County Sheriff's Mounted Posse Search and Rescue Squad, Lake Superior College Foundation's board, and with his local church. In 1992 Gary was nominated for a national award in recognition of more than 2,400 hours of community service.

Gary is survived by his wife of 38 years, Patricia; son, Bret Ekman of Brookston, MN; daughter, Suzanne Wolff of Duluth; sister, Bonnie Mohr of Superior; and six grandchildren.

Alan Christian, 2006 Engineering Technology Applications Employee of the Year

Alan Christian, a native of Missoula, MT, works in the Lolo National Forest supervisor's office in Missoula. Previously, he was a transportation planner on the Lolo National Forest's Plains Ranger District.



Alan began his career with the Forest Service years ago when the Okanogan National Forest supervisor's office hired Alan as a transportation planner. Initially, he used paper maps and overlays to produce maps for forest projects, but soon he began using mapping software. He taught himself GIS (geographic information systems) and became the unofficial GIS coordinator and go-to guy on the forest. He assumed responsibility for maintaining the forest's roads and trails GIS layers. He continued to assist peers with CAD processes and other road design software, including hardware and software troubleshooting and electronic data collection. Alan represented the Forest Service on the Okanogan Transportation Planning Board.

Alan studied drafting and mapping for 4 years in high school. After graduation, he worked for the Exxon Mineral Department.

From 1975 through 1978, Alan served in the U.S. Army. While stationed in Stuttgart, Germany, he helped prepare map manuscripts for four NATO REFORGER military exercises. Alan also helped develop a prototype geographic simulation map that was used by the military for tactical combat planning. During his tour, he got married. He and his wife raised two children.

In Germany, Alan became certified in advanced first aid and rescue so he could be a ski patroller in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. He traveled extensively, visiting 11 countries in 21 days. Alan received an Army Commendation Medal for outstanding conduct.

After his discharge, Alan enrolled at the University of Montana in Missoula. During the summers, he worked with the Bureau of Land Management on a crew surveying water retention and pipeline projects in eastern Montana. In 1982, he received a bachelor's degree in geology with a minor in mathematics. He then studied engineering at Montana State University in Bozeman.

Alan did not stay in Montana long, taking a job as an engineer technician at the Fallon Naval Air Station in Nevada where he was responsible for design and survey of facilities and minor construction projects.

His first computer there was an early model Apple on which he cataloged all the facility drawings and processed electronic data collections. He received his first information technology award for his cataloging work. Although he began his design work using a mechanical drafting machine, he soon moved to computer-aided drafting (CAD) and design, becoming an AutoCAD geek.

Alan was heavily involved in youth soccer. He provided snacks to the players, assisted the coach, coached a competitive girl's soccer team for 4 years, was certified to referee high school soccer and state youth recreation, acted as database manager for the Washington State Soccer Association, and served on the soccer board in Okanogan, WA. He helped with the underground sprinkler systems and installation of the outdoor lighting systems for two Olympic-sized soccer fields built with donated community support and resources.