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Mousetrap Baton Passed to Easton

Benjamin Franklin once said the only things certain in life are death and taxes. That's only because old Ben didn't get a chance to see Lehigh Valley public works professionals repeated placement in Pennsylvania's Build a Better Mouse Competition.

For the fifth time in seven years, a Lehigh Valley municipal crew – this time from the City of Easton – is being recognized statewide for its initiative, ingenuity and frugality.

Easton's public works crew members Duane Woolverton and Bob Piperato channeled their inner McGyver to pull together an old stop sign post, car jack and a hook to create a device that can easily lift inlet grates – some of them weighing as much as 1,000 pounds. The contraption, costing \$150 in labor and scrap parts, keeps crews from needing a backhoe to remove inlet grates during seasonal cleaning, said Easton Public Works Director Dave Hopkins.

Easton's submission placed second among entries from across the state.

"Both of these guys are former farmers, so of course they're geniuses at taking scrap laying around the garage and turning it into something that really works," Hopkins said. "They literally welded together a bunch of scrap and came up with a device that lifts the heaviest grates. Amazing."

The winning team, from East Brandywine Township, Chester County, used \$50 in scrap lumber, wheels and bolts to build a storage rack for road crew salt spreaders. East Brandywine's will be Pennsylvania's submission in the national competitions.

PennDOT's Local Technical Assistance Program began the competition in 2013 in search of public works and road crew workers who have found innovative ways to solve problems. It didn't take long for Lehigh Valley crews to take up the challenge. Nazareth Borough's system that allows brine to be spread from a pickup truck won in 2013, Upper Nazareth Township's road saw hitch won in 2014, Whitehall Township's salt shed curtain won in 2017 and Bath Borough placed second in 2018 with its sewer grate hoist. The 2013 Nazareth entry even went on to place second nationwide – the highest of any Lehigh Valley submission, said Lou Ferretti, program manager for the state's Local Technical Assistance Program, which runs began the Mousetrap competition nine years ago.

"Not sure why, but there's always something from that region that makes the list," Ferretti said.

Hopkins knows why.

"It's gathered a sort of cult following in this region," Hopkins said. "These guys want to win."

For those industrious municipal crews looking to extend the region's legacy of invention, the time is now. PennDOT's LTAP is taking submissions for the 2020 Build a Better Mousetrap Competition. Entrants can apply at

http://www.dot7.state.pa.us/BPR_PDF_FILES/Documents/LTAP/2020_Build_Better_Mouse_Trap.pdf

Deadline for entrees is March 6, 2020. Anyone with questions can email them to ltap@psats.org, or call Karen Atkinson at 717-763-0930 ext. 156.

But be warned because Hopkins is serving notice.

“These guys already have their entry for 2020,” Hopkins said. “I won’t say what it is, but it’s going to win.”