

Better mousetraps abound!

THE FIRST ANNUAL "Build a Better Mousetrap" competition, held September 5 during the Iowa Maintenance Training Expo, attracted several contestants. Six winners were chosen:

- **Quick Snow Fence Roller**, Joe Hodapp, City of Ankeny
- **Limb Lopper**, Mark Fee and Timothy Van Roekel, Marion County
- **Concrete Trailer**, Public Works Department, City of Clive
- **Telescoping Bridge Rail**, Tom Watts and Evan Walker, Des Moines County
- **E.Z. Rack**, Pat Zimmerman, Johnson County
- **Liner Installation Tools**, Culvert and Drainage Crew, Johnson County

The "mousetraps" were judged by five people, two from cities, two from counties, and one from the Iowa DOT, according to the following criteria:

- The innovation serves a purpose and is practical.
- It applies to all levels of government (city, county, and state).
- It saves time or cost in operations.
- Others could likely build a similar device.
- It performs well.
- It shows originality and ingenuity.
- The judge would consider doing it himself.

One of the competition organizers, Duane Smith, associate director for outreach at CTRE, was pleased by the variety of competition submissions. It was clear to him that the contestants "were proud and enthused" about their entries. Smith says the contest will be continued next year. He thinks it could have tremendous participation in the years to come.

Al Olson, public works administrator for the City of Ankeny and organizer of the contest judging (though he was not a judge), sees the competition as a way to encourage innovation among employees and build camaraderie within an organization. He noticed many people watching the "mousetrap" demonstrations and thinks they prompted people to think about other ways of doing things.

Olson anticipates that Ankeny employees, who he says "can put square pegs into round holes," will

have something to enter every year. He hopes other organizations will encourage their employees to participate, too. •

A winning mousetrap: telescoping bridge rail

WHEN FARMERS need to move their wide farm equipment across a bridge, they may unintentionally bend or break bridge rails and signs. Des Moines County maintenance workers Tom Watts and Evan Walker developed a telescoping bridge rail system that permits lowering bridge rails and allows sign or object markerposts to be temporarily removed so farmers can pass without causing any damage.

Square tubing is attached to the bridge with smaller tubing inserted inside. Pins and bolts are used for stops, and light chain is attached to prevent loss. The bridge rails cannot be lifted out of the brackets, only lowered. For the railing, chain is inserted in PVC pipe between the upright posts.

For bridges where this kind of railing system cannot be used or is unnecessary, the post system is used for the signs or object markers at both ends of the bridge.

Watts says the system performs very well and lowers the county's maintenance costs. Farmers are happy that they don't cause any damage to get across a bridge. Vandalism has not been a problem.

For more information about telescoping bridge rails, contact Tom Watts or Evan Walker, Des Moines County Secondary Roads Department, 319-753-8154. •

Posts for signs and object markers can be temporarily removed (right) so farmers can cross the bridge without causing damage. *Photos courtesy of Des Moines County Secondary Roads Department.*



Tom Watts (left) installs a telescoping bridge rail on a Des Moines County bridge on a granular-surfaced road.