Fischer named state county engineer of the year

By Peter Bodley

Doug Fischer, Anoka County highway engineer since 2002, has been named 2015 Minnesota County Engineer of the Year.

Fischer was chosen by the Minnesota County Engineers Association to receive the award at its 70th annual convention Jan. 20-23 at Cragun’s Resort and Hotel in Brainerd.

Aitkin County Engineer John Welle, president of the association, was at the Anoka County Board’s Feb. 17 meeting to again present the award to Fischer with members of the county Highway Department in the audience.

According to Welle, the 70-year-old state association has representatives from all 87 counties in the state, both county engineers and other staff members.

Besides being president of the association in 2011, Fischer has shown tremendous leadership through his membership on many association committees, Welle said. “He has brought forward so many ideas and has been a tireless worker for the association,” he said. “He has done it all.”

He added, “Doug is prepared to roll up his sleeves to get things done in the trenches and make things better for not only Anoka County but all the counties in the state.”

County Board members praised Fischer.

“This is a tremendous honor for Doug,” said Commissioner Scott Schulte, who chairs the board’s Transportation Committee.

“I commend Doug for his expertise, commitment and leadership,” he said.

According to Commissioner Jim Kordiak, Fischer does a fine job for the county and exhibits strong leadership. “People don’t follow you unless you lead the effort,” Kordiak said.

Board Chairperson Rhonda Sivarajah said she was extremely proud of Fischer. “The award is for a job well done,” she said.

Commissioner Mike Gamache, new to the County Board after serving many years as Andover mayor, said Fischer does a “fine job” working with the public on county highway projects like Bunker Lake Boulevard in Andover over the years.

Besides his leadership, Commissioner Robyn West praised Fischer for his integrity.

Coming from a city council to the County Board, Commissioner Matt Look said he has been impressed by Fischer’s ability “to work with everyone” and find solutions.

Fischer thanked Welle and the board members for their kind words, but he said the award should be made to someone else: the team that supports the county engineer.
“This is a staff award for a team effort,” Fischer said. “The award belongs to all of us.”

He added, “I have been so blessed in my career to have been surrounded by great professionals, mentors, peers and teammates.”

Fischer grew up in Massillon in northeast Ohio, and both his father and grandfather were civil engineers. He earned a full football scholarship to Iowa State University, Ames, where he lettered all four years as a linebacker while receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering in 1985.

Fischer began his civil engineer career as a structural designer with the consulting firm of Black & Veatch at its Overland Park, Kansas, office and then at a construction site in Fort Worth, Texas.

He returned to Ohio to join a consulting firm in Cleveland, then he moved to Minneapolis for personal reasons to join BRW, now URS, according to Fischer.

It was while he was with BRW that he became familiar with Anoka County through his involvement in several projects in the county and in 1991 he took the opportunity to go to work for the county as a design engineer and was later promoted to assistant county engineer.

Fischer has been with the county since then except for a spell with the Washington County Highway Department from 1998 to 2001 where he was deputy director for the transportation division.

However, Fischer continued to live in Anoka County with his family and in October 2001, he was asked to come back to the county as director of highways. A year later he was appointed county highway engineer by the County Board when Jon Olson was promoted to division manager for public services.

State law requires county boards to appoint county engineers for four-year terms and Fischer was appointed to his fourth term in May 2014.

Fischer’s duties increased in 2013. When Olson announced his retirement, the board eliminated the public works division manager and split those duties between Fischer, who became division manager for transportation, and Parks and Recreation Director John VonDeLinde, who was named division manager for parks and community services.

In his role as a division manager, Fischer is responsible for not only the Highway Department, but also the transit office, the county surveyor’s office and the GIS department.

Fischer lives in Blaine with his wife, Karrie. They have four children and two grandchildren.