

Owen Hayes Bridge, Ballplay, AL

The bridge crosses the famous Dry Creek of Ballplay and connects the residents to the rest of the world. There have been several bridges constructed over the creek over the past hundred years with the last falling into disrepair. Under the leadership of the Etowah County Commission, it was decided in 2018 that they intended to have the existing structure removed and a new state of the art bridge would be constructed in its' place to serve the local residents for generations to come. The Bridge Builders of Alabama, LLC were selected as the contractor for the endeavor and construction began in April 2019. The bridge was completed and opened quietly to the public in September 2019. Numerous vehicles began traveling over the bridge daily and it became apparent to many that it was one of the finest bridges that they had ever seen and they were thankful to the wisdom of The Etowah County Commission for choosing to replace the bridge and to the expert craftsmanship of The Bridge Builders of Alabama, LLC.

The bridge is an eye-popping 1,920 inches long and is wide enough for two vehicles to pass safely. Inspectors rate bridge decks and support structures on a scale of 0 to 9 for deterioration and remedial action. A rating of 9 means the bridge is in "excellent" condition and a rating of 4 or below means the bridge is classified as structurally deficient and in need of repair. There is speculation by some that due to the superior nature of this structure that it could possibly receive a score of 10. Due to the age, it isn't currently eligible to be added to the National Register of Historic Places it is felt by some that when sufficient time passes it will most likely be given serious consideration.

It was felt by many in the community that the bridge wasn't receiving the credit that it rightly deserved so a vast group of concerned citizens of Etowah and Cherokee County decided to name the bridge to help raise awareness of the greatness of the structure. After long deliberation, the group narrowed the list of candidates down to three. President Trump, former President Obama and Mr. Owen Hayes. After several votes, it was unanimous that the bridge should be named after Owen Hayes. The group stated that the resumes of President Trump and President Obama were impressive but they fell short of the list of accomplishments that Mr. Hayes is accumulating. Hayes, somewhat of a local celebrity, is a follower of Jesus Christ, a loyal family member, and friend and a lifelong resident of the Ballplay area. His accolades include being an accomplished musician being named "2019 drummer of the year" by the *Shinbone Ridge Gazette* and being listed to the exclusive "Who's Who of Ballplay" list by the *Kershaw Times*. His interest and love in the bridge's progress is another reason he was selected over the other two finalists. He was able to give regular updates on the anticipated opening and became lovingly known as "The Paul Revere of Ballplay" during this time. Not one time did President Obama or President Trump give any update on the bridge to the community.

On Sunday, November 17th, 2019 the bridge became the Owen Hayes Bridge and the increased interest has been nothing short of extraordinary. Due to the rising popularity and people wanting to visit, Google Maps recently added it to their site as a landmark. The bridge has drawn rave reviews from as far as Virginia with people planning vacations around visiting the site. There have already been visitors travel from as far as Peru to cross the bridge and a group is planning to travel from Uganda to cross it in 2020. The bridge has a perfect 5-star review average outpacing other famous bridges such as the

Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and the Brooklyn Bridge in New York with both struggling to maintain a 4.8-star average.

It is believed that Dry Creek was formed at or shortly after the Earth was spoken into existence. Since mankind has lived in the community it has been a constant struggle to safely cross the creek. Thanks to the Owen Hayes Bridge residents can cross the creek safely forevermore.