

trc today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission

Employees of the Year



In Central Office ceremonies, winners from three categories were named. In the photo, winner Janis Fisher, MSS, is surrounded by fellow Region I employees, Mary Valentini, regional director, Donna Sell, RST in the Lubbock Field Office, and Cynthia Collins, counselor in the Wichita Falls Field Office. Also in the picture is Commissioner Arrell and Joellen Flores Simmons, deputy commissioner for Rehabilitation Services.



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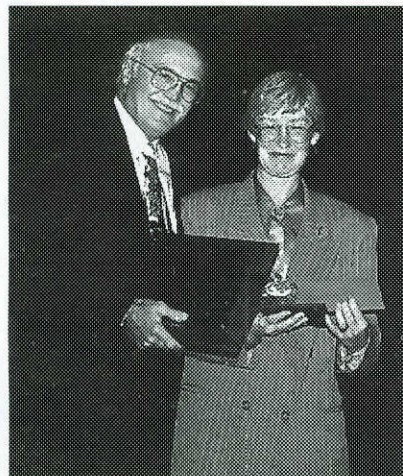
Employees Shine!

Emloyees of the Year for 1995 are Paul Hopson, San Antonio Northeast Field Office; Janis Fisher, Wichita Falls Field Office and Sue McBeth, Texas A&M Field Office. The winners received a \$1,000 bond and engraved plaque at a ceremony in the Brown Heatly Building on Oct. 2.

Paul Hopson, AST, has become an indispensable jack-of-all-trades for his office in the two years he has been employed with the agency. On his own, he purchases and reads information applicable to hardware and software to better understand all aspects of the agency computer technology. He gives one-on-one assistance with that technology and strives to eliminate problems by contacting regional, central office and manufacturers support staff. During the last year, he has also been very active in special projects.

Janis Fisher, MSS, is a professional in the truest sense of the word. She has a very effective communication style, keeps a cool head in times of crisis and continues to improve these skills with management training. Janis mentored new RSTs and other co-workers that helped greatly during a transition period for the office. She developed Counselor Budget and Travel in Lotus and has received many calls of thanks from employees in other field offices who are using these programs.

A few words to describe Counselor Sue McBeth are hardworking, helpful, knowledgeable, skillful, patient, kind, loyal, dedicated and unbiased. Over the past year, she has accomplished many goals and has established positive working relationships with peers, vendors and community leaders. She is highly respected in all areas of her job, especially in working with severely disabled clients.



Left to Right: Joellen Simmons presents AST Paul Hopson with his winning plaque. Commissioner Arrell gives Counselor Sue McBeth her \$1,000 bond and plaque. MSS Janis Fisher says a few words in acceptance of her winning award.

Kassebaum Sails Through Senate

It was a rough ride for everyone. But, to almost everyone's relief, the issue of job consolidation and how Vocational Rehabilitation fits into it is almost over. The Kassebaum Job Training Consolidation Act (S 143) passed overwhelmingly in the Senate by a vote of 95-2.

For those of you swept up by the controversy of HR 1617, here's a refresher course on S 143: The Kassebaum Bill has been the workforce training bill of choice for most everyone in the rehab community for quite sometime now. The bill, as it pertains to VR, will require

some fairly minor changes in Title I of the Rehabilitation Act. These changes are expected to strengthen the links between VR and the generic workforce

Does this name sound familiar? The only Texas delegate to make it to the Joint Conference Committee is Rep. Gene Green, D-TX. As you might recall, Green championed VR's cause during heated debate of HR 1617.

training programs. But, VR remains a distinct program, with its own dedicated funding.

The bill also directs one-stop

consolidated training systems to set benchmarks for serving people with disabilities. These programs have not typically served people with disabilities. Rehabilitation professionals see the availability of these job training services through the one-stop centers as a positive step and a way to make VR funds go further.

Now it is on to a joint House/Senate conference committee on workforce training consolidation. Members of both the House and the Senate have been named to the Conference Committee and final decisions about the future of

VR will happen soon, if they haven't already happened by the time you read this.

In normal play, the rules of conference committee are pretty simple. Conferees can only consider what is actually in each of the bills. And, while there isn't anything concrete to suggest this committee won't go by formal rules, advocates are keeping a close eye on how this unfolds.

The thing to remember is to continue pushing for the S 143 version of the job consolidation. This protects and enhances VR's service delivery system and will give people with disabilities some strong linkages to local career centers.

Planning for the Rest of the Century at TRC

No sooner has the fierce debate over the future of VR concluded in Congress than TRC asked its stakeholders to meet and look forward to changes in TRC services for the next five years.

The effect of the congressional battle for survival was very much on the minds of the participants. Issues of ways to improve rehabilitation, priority funding, use of rehabilitation facilities and consumer choice were topics in the air of heavy discussions.

"We are going to do this right," says Commissioner Arrell. "Our recent showdown in Congress was a wakeup call and we are going to learn from it."

The following is a summary of issues which the consumer advocates and TRC staff reached consensus on:

Regional Diversity Plan - Quotas will not be used. TRC staff and clients will reflect Texas' diverse population.

Debate in Disability Community - TRC should listen to criticisms coming from persons with disabilities and advocates engaged in dialog, demonstrate its effectiveness and continue to improve.

HHSC - The goals of HHSC should be enhanced in relation to people with disabilities. More priority is needed for people with disabilities in HHSC strategic planning.

Workforce Commission - TRC will take a proactive approach to the new Workforce Commission on behalf of clients.

Vocational Rehabilitation - TRC will support reengineering and other methods to improve services to VR clients.

Order of Selection - TRC should pursue funding to avoid going to an order of selection.

ERS and Supported Employment - ERS and supported employment will remain separate. ERS will continue as the long term support after time limited supported employment runs out for a client but TRC will continue emphasizing community integrated employment for ERS clients.

Independent Living and PAS - The State Independent Living Council will resolve issues facing independent living. TRC will pursue more funding for expansion of both independent living center services and personal attendant services statewide.

Transition Services - TRC should continue administering the Transition Program, even with limited resources.

CRS - TRC will continue to support the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services program.

Deaf Blind Multihandicapped - The DB/M advisory committee will handle any expansion of this program.

HUBS - TRC will press the TRC Board's resolution to include people with disabilities as Historically Underutilized Businesses.

DDS - DDS will continue to participate in the Social Security Administration's reengineering effort.

Strategic Directions - TRC will continue to improve employment opportunities for clients.

Consumer Choice - Informed consumer choice will be the foundation of all TRC programs.

"It should be obvious that strategic planning is not just demographic information and number crunching," says Jeff Kaufmann, TRC director of planning. "These issues are across-the-board, practical, and core concerns about meeting the needs of our clients."

TRC will be seeking input from the strategic planning meeting participants to ensure statements in the strategic plan reflect completely the consensus reached. These issues now go to the TRC Board for their approval.



TRC staffers Jeff Kaufmann and Rick Phelan help Judy Sokolow of Advocacy, Inc. word a response to strategic issues.

Changing the Picture

Ten non-profit organizations across Texas have been awarded up to \$25,000 each to establish supported employment system change sites. The projects funded represent diverse geographic areas of the state as well as the needs of persons with different disabilities. Traditionally, persons with mental illness and mental retardation have been those predominantly served in supported employment programs.

The money will not be used for direct client services. Rather, it will explore new ways to deliver supported employment services to persons with severe disabilities whose needs are not currently being met. It will also look at converting existing segregated services into the community.

Selections were based on proposals from non-profit organizations that demonstrated an ability to:

- expand supported employment services to underserved populations including minorities and persons with the most severe disabilities;
- develop, implement and sustain new ways to change supported employment systems; and
- foster interagency collaboration and coordination of resources.

"This is a real opportunity to change a system we know needs changing," says Joellen Flores Simmons, deputy commissioner for Rehabilitation Services. "What is going to make the difference is the tremendous amount of consumer input we are receiving. We expect to learn a great deal by watching how the sites do things differently."

The following are excerpts of letters received by TRC employees:

Mary Culberson, counselor in the Plano Field Office received the following letter from a client:

"I am delighted and happy to tell you that I got a job! I will start as an Administrative Specialist for Cutler-Williams.

"I have you to thank for my career success. You helped me research and decide what work would best suit my personality. You were always supportive, and positive about my success, even when I had doubts. You found the perfect educational and placement facilities to get me where I want to be.

"I hope all TRC counselors do their job as well as you do. Truly, you've helped me through my darkest hours, and I'll always be grateful."

Commissioner Arrell received this letter regarding DDS Unit 10's Disability Examiner Mark Cognetti:

"For several months I have been trying to get my Social Security Disability and your Mr. Mark Cognetti has not only been extremely helpful but actually concerned! This is so rare nowadays I felt it only fair for his supervisor to know that among many people today who neither know what they are doing nor care about the quality of their work Mr. Cognetti seems to excel at both. On top of that he actually talks to me like an intelligent human being rather than a number on a file that has to be dealt with and passed on."

Making a Difference

All of us have our own ways to unwind after a hard day's work. Margery Mackey chooses to spend her time making a difference in her community.

"God has been so good to me and I've been so blessed," says Mackey. "So I want to help people who cannot help themselves. It's where you put your priorities. If you like to watch TV, I don't have any problem with that. But I would rather be at the State Hospital or tutoring. It's much more satisfying for me and it's such a small thing for me to do."

Mackey has received four awards this year alone for her volunteer efforts which include being a tutor for the *At Risk* Program, introducing new artists to young children at the Carver Museum, being a board member

for the Volunteer Service Council and helping out with special projects at the State Hospital. She is also a member of other organizations that are too numerous to name.

All this extra work doesn't detract from her performance on the job. As an examiner in Unit 50, she consistently meets and exceeds all her performance standards. Her supervisor, Linda Monk, says that Mackey is a valued employee in the unit and projects a very positive image outside the agency as well. "She is always upbeat, enthusiastic and willing to help," says Monk.

Mackey says that she got things the hard way but that she also got help along the way. Now she wants to give that help back to others who need it. "Doing this is not going to keep me from doing other things I

want to do," says Mackey, "and they really need my help. Who will take care of our future generations if we don't."



Margery with husband A. L. Mackey receiving an award at City Council.

Across the State

Welcome Aboard

Barbie Hackney, system support specialist
Corky Nunley, duplicating machine operator
Lias Steen, director of programs
Kenneth Shaw, counselor
Melinda Lavoy, administrative technician
Charlotte Conner, RST
Jana Woodard, RST
Abel Loreda, counselor
Tina Martin, PST
Gloria Reynolds, counselor
Linda Mahoney, counselor
Rebecca Elliott, RST
Kymberly Rushing, RST
Minerva Bertolino, examiner
Melanie Fetty, examiner
Thomas Froeschl, examiner
Santa Garcia, examiner
Bruce Gates, examiner
Jane Jett, examiner
Raelyn Leifeste, examiner
Shari Maynard, examiner
Alan McCorkle, examiner
Mary Pick, examiner
Leo Snell, examiner
Gregory Stitt, examiner

Retirements

Doris Wells

Kudos

Luana Warden is the new area manager for the San Antonio West Field Office.

Ann Ohlson is the new area manager for the San Antonio Northeast Field Office.

Cindy Wright is the administrative secretary for the Rehabilitation Services Office.

Curtis Behrends is the new Warehouse superintendent.

Deaths

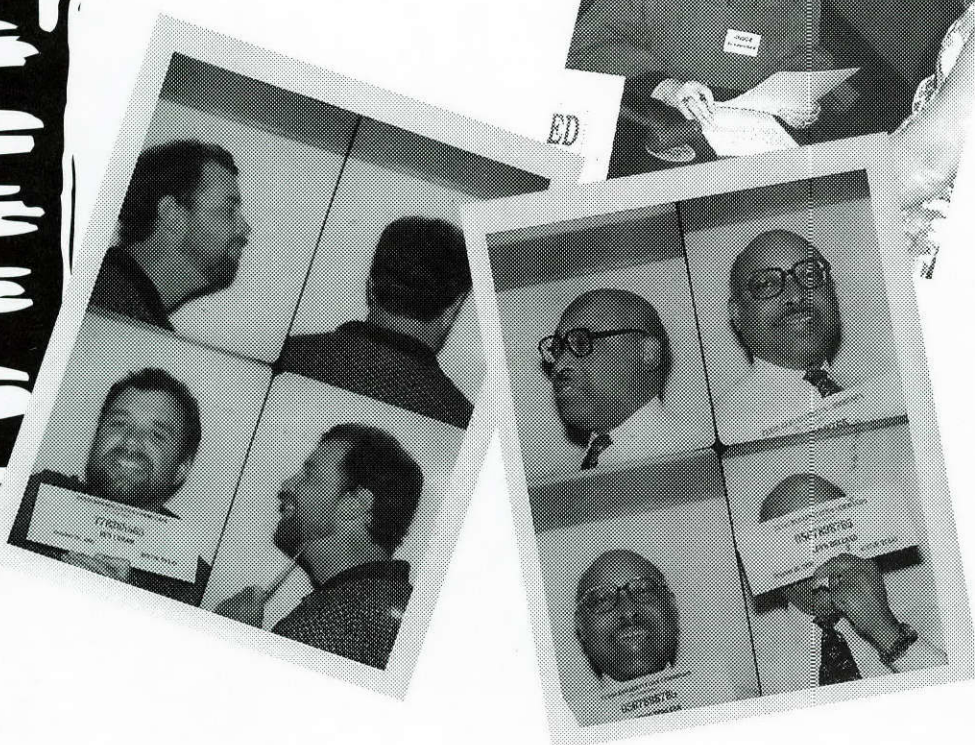
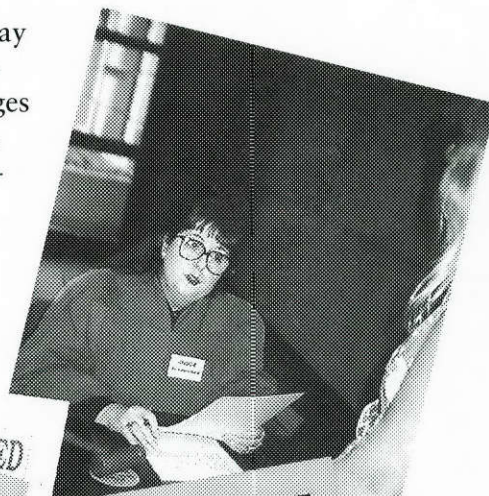
Karl Brauer, program specialist for DDS
Carol L. Hyatt, former RST in South Austin FO.

TRC's Most Wanted

Close to 100 Central Office employees were arrested recently as part of the annual TRC Holiday Fund campaign.

Crimes included failure to stop and smell the roses; impersonating a country western singer, attending too many meetings; excessive grumpiness; unsuccessful gambling; driving like a bat out of hell, eating too much Chinese food and copying Charles Manson's hair style.

Many tried to cajole their way out of the harsh 15-minute sentence behind bars but TRC judges were merciless and expeditious. In about three hours of sentencing, over \$450 was raised.



Top Right: Judge Georgeanna Czepiel, secretary in Rehabilitation Services, sentencing one of TRC's Most Wanted. Mugshots: Left: Bud Croom, purchaser Right: Leon Holland, deputy commissioner for Administrative Services

Rehab Professionals Seeking Recognition

Recent activities in Congress to consolidate job training programs have raised an important question ... are rehabilitation professionals properly recognized for what they do? Many don't think so.

Rehabilitation professionals from the public and private sector are working together to seek legal recognition for those who have the education, skills and experience necessary to provide quality services to persons with disabilities. A Joint Task Force of counselors from the Texas Rehabilitation Association and the Texas Association of Rehabilitation Professionals in the Private Sector will press for licensing in Texas.

TRC counselors wanting to lend their support can contact Mary Zerson (713) 480-2919 for information for more help.



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Address Correction Requested

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State Service Awards - November

10 Years

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Susan Perez

Yvette Pichardo

Laura Marquez

Mary R. Martinez

20 Years

Paulette Nall

Terry Smith

Jim Tom Nichols

25 Years

Robert Ballew

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