

# News & Views

★ Texas Rehabilitation Commission ★ A Human Energy Agency ★

Volume 10, Number 3

March 1988

## Project Independence Opens First Class

In the age of high-tech, computer-oriented jobs, it may sound like just another training class for computer programmers.

But, it's not. This one is a unique opportunity for people with disabilities in Houston to get some of those well-paying, computer programming jobs.

Project Independence opened its doors to 12 students February 29 on the Houston Community College campus.

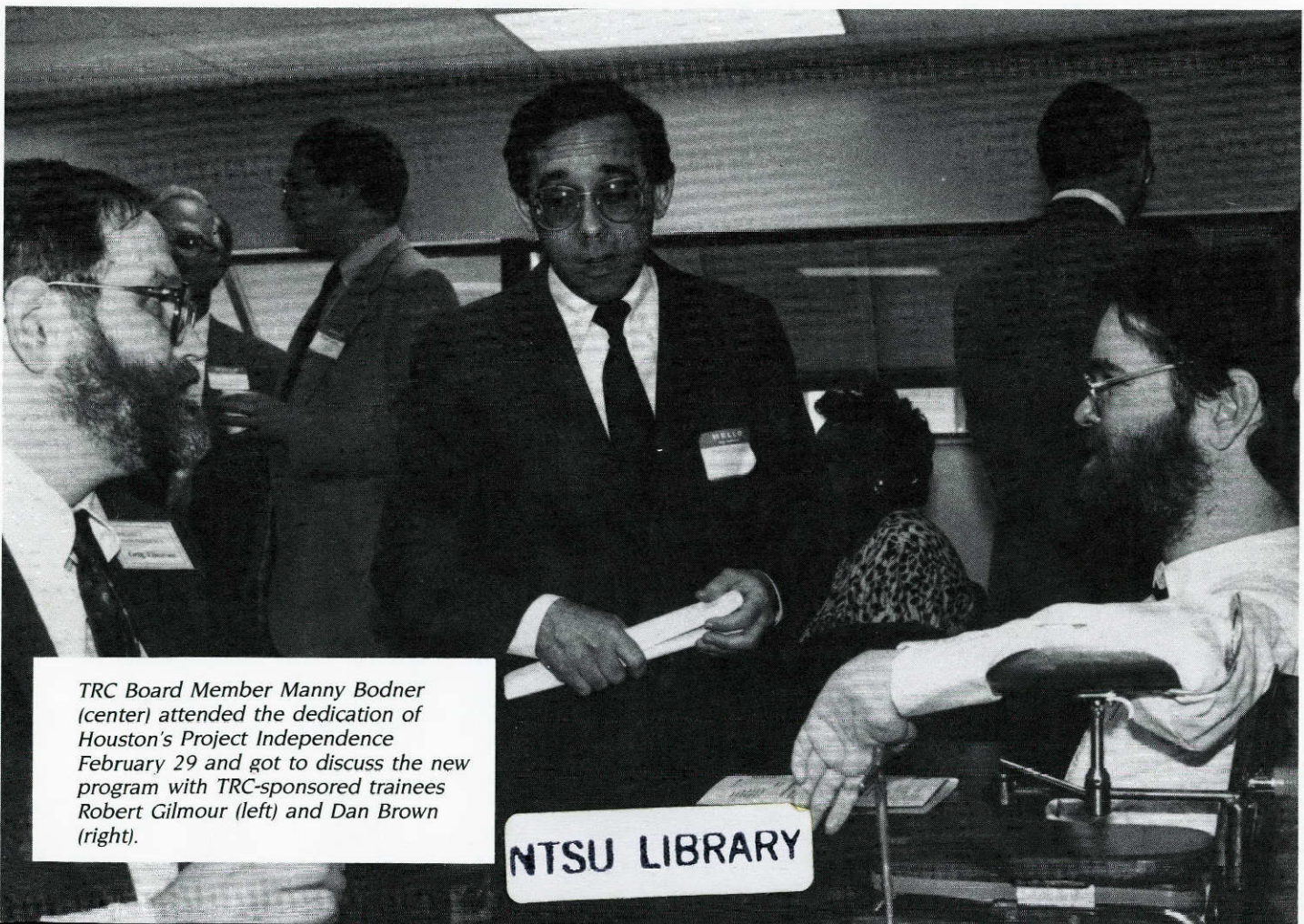
“  
It's one of our  
top programs . . . ”

It represents the careful coordination of Texas Rehabilitation Commission and Houston business and community resources, under the direction of the IBM Corporation, to create the latest of 33 such projects

nationwide which have placed well over 2,000 people with disabilities into the computer programming profession.

A sister project in Dallas, the three-year-old Computer Programmer Training for the Physically Challenged (also TRC sponsored), has been extremely successful, boasting a placement rate among trainee graduates of almost 100 percent.

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TRC Board Member Manny Bodner (center) attended the dedication of Houston's Project Independence February 29 and got to discuss the new program with TRC-sponsored trainees Robert Gilmour (left) and Dan Brown (right).



*As a surgical technologist, Malla Wessel spends a lot of time in the surgical supply room preparing for surgery at the Odessa County Hospital.*

## **Things are Looking Up for Malla**

**She took  
control of  
her life.**

**It showed  
in her  
confidence!**

Malla Wessel's grit and TRC assistance helped turn her life around with a job as a surgical technologist.

Along with her unusual name, she has an unusual heart problem. But, these aren't the only unusual things about 31-year-old Wessel.

Eighteen months ago, she came to TRC with severe chest pains resulting from a congenital heart dysfunction. A divorced mother of two small children, Wessel was trying to support herself by cleaning houses and doing hairdressing.

But her heart problem would not allow her to stand long enough to do either one.

When TRC helped to arrange for corrective heart surgery, things began to take a turn for the better.

After her surgery, Wessel wanted to pursue an interest in surgical technology through the one-year

program at Odessa College. Her counselor challenged her on the appropriateness of this request.

What about her child-care situation? Her inability to support herself? The tough requirements of the training? She gathered her resources and entered the program.

She sailed through on sheer determination, winning the academic excellence award for the highest grade point average and was given the clinical excellence award by the Odessa County Hospital staff who trained her.

She took control of her life. It showed in her confidence!

Wessel passed the certification test for surgical technologist with honors

and plans to return to school to become a registered nurse. She enjoys her work and her co-workers enjoy her.

She refers to her TRC counselor, David Hooper, as "my buddy," a common West Texas expression. "I don't think I would have had the courage to do all this without TRC help," Wessel says. "I'm just glad it was there for me."

"I don't care what this job pays or how many problems you have doing it," says Hooper. "One client like Malla makes it all worth it!"

## FEDERAL

- President Reagan has nominated Susan Suter, director of the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation, for the position of Rehabilitation Services Administration commissioner. She is currently under contract until such time as a Federal Bureau of Investigation report is finalized, the White House has made the announcement and the Senate has given its consent.
- The Social Security Administration made formal in February a three-year-old practice that allows poor AIDS victims to receive immediate financial assistance from the government. Final regulations published in the *Federal Register* allow low-income people to receive Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid up to three months before formally being declared disabled from AIDS. About 3,200 people with AIDS have qualified for SSI since the interim rules for AIDS assistance were established in 1985. Medicaid has projected an AIDS budget of more than \$650 million in FY 1988.
- The Rehabilitation Services Administration announced in February that it will release to each state rehabilitation agency its full FY 1988 allotment for the State Supported Employment Services Program, under Title VI, Part C of the Rehabilitation Act. The total appropriation for the program for FY 1988 is \$25.9 million.
- Lex Frieden has resigned as executive director of the National Council on the Handicapped effective June 1. Frieden is past chairperson of the Texas Rehabilitation Commission Consumer Advisory Committee and has worked extensively in Texas to promote independent living for people with disabilities. The council is accepting applications for a replacement. Application deadline is April 15. For more information, contact Ethel D. Briggs at (202) 267-3846 (voice) or (202) 267-3232 (TDD).

## MILESTONES

FEBRUARY 1988

### Region I

20 years: Darlene E. Boykin

### Region II

15 years: Earnestine Williams

### Region IV

10 years: Adela Q. Brick

### Region VI

10 years: Debra Kay Lambricht  
15 years: Ronald W. Anderson  
20 years: Mae F. Goffney

### DDD

10 years: Betty R. McKinney  
Malaya Halfm Wilson  
15 years: Bruce R. Rollman  
Robert S. Sebesta  
William R. Johnson  
Major P. Craddock  
Ellen Kay Chee  
Isaac J. Ramirez  
Kaye Costin  
John F. Wright  
Richard F. Dykstra  
20 years: Delia Villarreal

### Central Office

10 years: Linda Sue Cage

## Board Ends Meeting with Unfinished Business

It was a case of too much material and too little time to cover it.

That was the TRC Board's quandary when it failed to recommend FY 1990-91 state appropriations requests for the complete list of TRC programs as planned at its February 18-19 meeting.

Wanting to make sure its recommendations were informed and met the needs of Texans with disabilities, the Board probed deeply into each program it considered.

Work continued late into the night of the first day and well into the afternoon of the second day.

The Board's thoroughgoing approach to its task clearly indicated a commitment to providing the best array of services possible to people with disabilities seeking TRC help.

But, such careful consideration of the individual programs, punctuated with questions and discussion, slowed the Board's progress through the agenda.

Since Board members got to only about one-half the programs up for consideration, they voted to complete the recommendation process at a special continuation of this meeting March 26-27.

Further, they decided not to firm up their current recommendations until all programs are considered together in March.

"News & Views" will report on finalized Board-recommended funding requests in the next issue.

# TRC Office Might Be Called Agency "Memory"

You may know them as MEMO mailbox #246, but this two-employee office is more than just a number.

It could, in fact, be termed the official TRC "memory."

If you haven't guessed yet, the office in question is the TRC Records Center which stores and maintains official records (including various Disability Determination documents) crucial to the smooth functioning of this agency.

Bonnie Anderson, supervisor of the Records Center, along with her clerk, Julia Montoya, oversees all TRC records storage at the center.

Theirs is not a high-profile shop, due in part, notes Linda Calbreath, records administrator, to its high efficiency level. "They're easy to overlook because things rarely go wrong out there," she says.

An accuracy rate of almost 100 percent in locating files testifies to that. Bonnie and Julia aren't only accurate, they're fast! Orders from TRC offices for client records are assembled and placed in the mail the same day.

Mainframe and microcomputer access assists the Records Center in tracking and transferring files to and from storage.

One of the most significant responsibilities resting with the Records Center involves storing mainframe backup tapes, including daily mainframe backups, and overseeing off-site disaster recovery systems currently in place.

"If the Central Office were to go up in flames tomorrow," says Calbreath, "we'd be able to start up mainframe operations immediately with the tapes we have out there."

The Records Center cooperates with other agencies, especially the State Library, in storing and providing documents. "Although we keep our own permanent and filmed records, the State Library keeps our records which aren't accessed frequently," says Calbreath.

They also work closely with the State Auditor's Office for approval in destroying any TRC documents which have been stored past the period required by law (three to five years in most instances).

Anderson and Montoya both have eight years with the Commission, all in the Records Center (it used to be called the Central File Warehouse). But, that doesn't mean there aren't still challenges for them.

"We're learning more skills," Montoya points out. "We're communicating more on our computers with field staff."

Anderson adds that they have started to do microfilming at the Records Center. "It's added responsibility, but we enjoy it," she says.

They agree the thing they enjoy most is helping the various TRC offices serve people with disabilities.

There is one drawback for them, however. The drive to work.

"It used to take 10 minutes to get to work," says Anderson, "now it takes longer."

Why? The records storage shop was formerly located by itself, about

six blocks away from the Central Office in mid-Austin. Both Anderson and Montoya live in south Austin—the drive wasn't bad. In January, the Records Center was moved into the new multi-agency warehouse complex in north Austin, along with the TRC warehouse and printshop operations. Now the drive to work is more gruelling.

But, they maintain a good attitude about it and continue to do excellent work.

They are currently helping develop a TRC records management system which will: 1.) eliminate duplicate storage of records, 2.) add paper records and microfilm to the disaster recovery system, and 3.) save on storage space by putting inactive TRC records in one place.

The TRC Records Center can be reached through the mainframe MEMO system or by telephone at (512) 458-7796.



*Much of the TRC Records Center system is automated, but it's still necessary for Julia Montoya, clerk (left), and Bonnie Anderson, supervisor (right), to store some files in boxes.*

What are your legal rights as a person with a disability? Where do builders get information about accessibility? How can you inform your local school board about federal statutes on educational rights of children with disabilities? These questions and many more are answered in a new book, *Disability Rights Guide: Practical Solutions to Problems Affecting People with Disabilities* by Charles D. Goldman. It offers plain talk from a Washington lawyer noted for his knowledge of disability rights. The 171-page manual is available for \$14.95 plus \$2.00 postage from Media Publishing, Dept. GPC, 2440 O Street, Suite 202, Lincoln, Nebraska 68510-1125. Telephone: (402) 474-2676.

There's a new forum for artists with disabilities. Resources for Artists with Disabilities, Inc. is a recently-founded, non-profit organization which promotes awareness of artists with physical disabilities and provides them with opportunities to

exhibit their work. Artists wishing to join the group should send slides of their work with a resume or short self-description to Resources for Artists with Disabilities, Inc., 60 East Eighth St., Number 289, New York, NY 10003. Telephone: (212) 460-8510.

A new TRC committee is developing a training program in client and employee administrative appeal hearings. Recent amendments to the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to use impartial hearing officers in such hearings. They must not be, according to proposed regulations specified by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, agency employees. When developed, the training will be given to senior staff members, regional directors, impartial hearing officers, and other interested managers. Details on the Administrative Hearings Training Committee as they occur will follow in upcoming issues of "News & Views."

Don't forget . . . nominations for Outstanding Employee Awards this year must be submitted by May 1988. Exact procedures for the awards program are stipulated in AOPM 13-20. Managers and employees may submit nominations to their regional Outstanding Employee Awards Coordinator. Your Personnel Office has the name of your local coordinator.

The Coalition of Texans with Disabilities has named Alan Meyer, former director of the Houston Center for Independent Living, the new executive director of CTD. Meyer formerly served as treasurer of CTD, executive director of Independent Life Styles (a shared attendant program in Houston) and numerous local committees and task forces dedicated to disability rights and independent living. Stephanie Thomas, former CTD executive director, left CTD at the end of February.

## ***Vocational Rehabilitation in Finland Not Optional***

His title is "Rehabilitation Chief," and he seemed to speak with authority, but there was something unfamiliar about his approach to rehabilitation.

It's not just his name, Tauno Ruuska, that seems strange or the fact that he is from Helsinki, Finland. No, there is something else.

It wasn't until he explained that he is associated with the Insurance Rehabilitation Agency, the only rehabilitation program in Finland, that you knew there is vast contrast in the concepts of rehabilitation in Finland and the U.S.

Here on a grant from the State Department to research U.S.

rehabilitation systems, Ruuska also did some teaching at the University of Texas.

His main interests in America's rehabilitation programs was in the fields of workers compensation, job placement and Social Security Insurance.

The cultural differences in these two national programs becomes obvious when you consider that the U.S. program, in a country symbolized by personal rights, is optional.

By contrast, Finlanders with disabilities are required to be actively involved in a program of vocational rehabilitation.

Their program is funded by taxing motor vehicles, the major cause of disabling conditions, and conducted through private insurance companies.

It is a self-sufficient program yet somewhat sparse compared to rehabilitation programs in the U.S.

Ruuska was surprised to discover the scope of rehabilitation programs in the U.S. He was impressed but realizes the Insurance Rehabilitation Agency in Finland is not able to adopt much of what he saw here due to its fixed-funding situation.

Some of the things he found were puzzling to him.

"I find it interesting," said Ruuska, "that Americans have the luxury to apply for a service which in my country is required because of the needs of a strained labor force and economy."

He seems to question the value America places on its citizens with disabilities as workers.

## Project Independence

continued from page 1

What makes Project Independence, and other such IBM-driven projects around the country, a shoo-in for success is the up front support of the local business community offering upper-level management participation in the Business Advisory Council.

Every project started with a council, including Project Independence, and it has proven to be the single most important ingredient for all of them.

Council representatives help tailor the programmer training philosophy and curriculum around the real-life needs of the local business community.

Project Independence graduates will have not only 10 months of classroom instruction along with two months of hands-on internships in Houston-area businesses, but they will leave with a sound understanding of day-to-day demands on computer programmers.

They will also leave with a pretty good chance of getting a job at one of the 26 BAC-member companies in the Houston area with a salary of around \$20,000 per year.

"It's one of our top programs from the standpoint of percentage of placements," says Commissioner Arrell. The placements along with the salaries, he says, "allow graduates the quality of life we want our people to have."

The Houston project added a couple of twists to its computer training program the Dallas project lacks. HCC is allowing college credit hours for the training. It also chose an instructor with a disability, Will McKee, to teach the class in hopes that his experience with programming under the constraints of disability will help him anticipate and address the unique problems facing these particular students.

## Dallas Programmer Class Starts Third Year

You might say the third year is the charm. But, each year of the El Centro College Computer Programmer Training for the Physically Challenged seems to have been charmed.

This Dallas-based, Texas Rehabilitation Commission-sponsored training project starts its third year of classes in July with a great track record. Twenty-three of the program's 28 graduates have jobs as programmers with an average income of over \$20,000 a year.

Dallas has the distinction of being the first Texas city to interest the IBM Corporation in helping develop a community-based program specifically designed to train people with disabilities for jobs in the field of computer programming.

Support for the Dallas project from local businesses making up the Business Advisory Council is essential to the program's success. Many of these businesses have hired graduates into programmer positions.

One of the first, two years ago, was Todd Cox, valedictorian of the first El Centro programmer training and TRC-sponsored trainee. After graduating, he was immediately offered an entry-level position at M-Tech, a Dallas computer support firm.

"It's tailor-made for the physically challenged," says Cox. "It provides a chance to show the world we can be productive."

The El Centro Computer Programmer Training for the Physically Challenged will run from July 5, 1988 to April 30, 1989. Registration deadline is June 1, 1988. For more information and a referral packet, call Deborah Wood, El Centro College, at (214) 746-2413.

Jan Skinner, area manager in the Houston Central Field Office, has been the primary TRC liaison to Project Independence, lining up candidates for the project, screening them for TRC sponsorship and helping screen them for computer aptitude.

Ten of this first class of 12 could not have participated in Project Independence without TRC's help.

Community-wide recognition for the project came during dedication ceremonies when a representative from Mayor Kathy Whitmire's office read a proclamation declaring February 29 Computer Programmer Training for the Physically Handicapped Day in Houston.

For more information about Project Independence, contact Dr. James Engle, vice-president of the Houston Community College System, at (713) 868-0727.

## SSA Honors DDD Employees

Congratulations to TRC Disability Determination employees Sandra McKinley, clerical supervisor, and Becky McNicol, case consultant.

They've each received special recognition from the Social Security Administration Regional Office in Dallas for being selected 1987 TRC Outstanding Employees of the Year from DDD.

McNicol was chosen for salary groups 12-20, McKinley for salary groups 2-11.

McKinley also won Top Employee of the Year honors for 1987 in her salary group.

Noel Wall, regional commissioner for SSA, recognized both employees' accomplishments in ceremonies at the Dallas office March 7.

The trip included an orientation and a tour of the regional office.

"They got a chance to see regional office operations first hand," says Les Albrecht, assistant deputy commissioner for program operations. "I think they really enjoyed the tour."

Here is a portion of a letter sent to Jerry Crain, area manager in the San Antonio North Field Office, by Mr. and Mrs. William Smedler:

"This letter is sent as a commendation to your staff of counselors, and other employees, on their courtesy and immediate attention to clients served by your office. As a counselor for our grandson, Mr. Aris Lopez not only became knowledgeable of his background, he was sensitive to the issues involved. He was unobtrusive in a meaningful way to help our grandson rehabilitate himself. He is a counselor you should be proud of. We wish him well."

## Transitions

**Leigh Ann Meissner**, former counselor in the Houston West Field Office, has moved into the program specialist position for the Medical Services Program at the Central Office effective March 1. She will be liaison to Regions II, III and VI.

**Rudy Martinez**, former counselor in the Dallas Northwest Field Office, has been promoted to area manager as of January 1.

Region III opened another field office on the Texas A & M campus February 1. The new counselor at the Texas A & M Health Center Field Office is **Sue McBeth**. Her primary responsibility is serving all courtesy cases at the campus. The Texas A & M Student Center Field Office remains open served by Counselor John Greening.

**Cary Westhause**, executive director of the Texas Advisory Board of Occupational Therapy, stepped down from her post at the Commission March 11. She has been TABOT director since its inception four years ago.

**Kaye Beneke**, public information director, was promoted to assistant deputy commissioner for consumer affairs effective March 1. Her former position as director goes to **Randy Jennings**, former assistant public information director.

**Sammy M. Ray**, of the Department of Marine Biology at the Texas A&M University at Galveston, recently sent this letter to **Arnold Barrera**, area manager in the Pasadena Field Office:

"This year, our Sea Camps were expanded to include hearing impaired youngsters, and two deaf children attended. Because the Sea Camp operation is relatively new, sufficient funds had not been generated to pay interpreters. When Doug Dittfurth informed us that he would interpret, we assumed the service would be performed as part of his job with the agency. At mid week we learned that Doug had taken 40 hours of his accrued vacation time to come to Galveston and spend 24 hours a day for six days with deaf attendees. I consider this gesture to be a much more eloquent statement about Doug's caring attitude and commitment to the deaf community than any words could convey. He is a credit to your office and the entire Texas Rehabilitation Commission."

Counselor **Mike Garcia** of the Corpus Christi Field Office received a letter of thanks for the help he gave one of his clients who is an alcoholic. Here is a portion of it:

"As a 43 year old recovering alcoholic, I found things getting pretty rough in the way of employment. I had no particular job skills and was getting real discouraged about my life. We talked about going back to school and your encouragement about returning after all these years gave me the confidence and the boost I needed. For the first time in my life, I am reaching for a goal I know I can obtain. Times still get rough, but I still maintain my goals and my spirits are high. Thus far, I am maintaining a 3.7 average (As and Bs) at Del Mar and keeping Alcoholics Anonymous a major part of my life. I achieved five years of sobriety today. I can't thank you enough for being a major part in helping me change my life for the better 'One Day at a Time.'"

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 **Applause**

These TRC employees recently received press coverage for the Commission: **Jo Anne Hull**, counselor in the Corsicana Field Office; **Judy Freeman**, counselor in the Longview Field Office; **Anna Marie Posey**, counselor in the Victoria Field Office; **Richard Jurek**, area manager in the Waco Field Office; **Sandra McKinley**, clerical supervisor in Disability Determination Unit 60; **Doug**

**Jourdan**, director of Budget and Planning in the Central Office; **Ken Honeycutt**, program specialist in the Central Office; and **Bob Marx**, regional director in the Dallas Regional Office.

**Charles Hearn**, TRC client and student at Tyler Junior College studying computer programming, was named a finalist for the 1988 Outstanding Student with a Disability Award given by the Texas Council on Vocational Education. Although he missed winning the award, his standing as finalist recognizes his excellence as a student enrolled in vocational education courses at the post-secondary level. Hearn's TRC counselor is Betty Rozell of the Tyler Field Office.

Goodwill Industries of Dallas recently presented its special Counselor of the Year Award to **James Lampkin**, TRC counselor in the Dallas Southwest Field Office, for working closely with the Goodwill staff in referring clients and for consistently attending to his clients' progress. Ron Case, president of the board, made the presentation at

Goodwill's annual meeting in January.

**Joellen Flores Simmons**, assistant deputy commissioner for programs, received an award from the Texas Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities for her years of service on the council and her many contributions to people with developmental disabilities in Texas.



TRC News & Views is published by the Texas Rehabilitation Commission for distribution to its employees and retirees throughout the state. Inquiries may be addressed to Vernon Dement, Public Information Office, Texas Rehabilitation Commission, 118 E. Riverside Drive, Austin, Texas 78704; or telephone (512) 445-8249.

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**New Tax Law TIP**

To help you understand the new tax law, the IRS has two new publications. **Publication 920** explains changes affecting individuals and **Publication 921** explains changes affecting businesses. Both are free. Ask for one at any IRS office or call the IRS Tax Forms number in your phone book.



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