

TRC news & views

TEXAS REHABILITATION COMMISSION

Vol. 1, No. 7

Austin, Texas

August, 1979

Full TRC longevity pay approved

The Texas Rehabilitation Commission Board has approved the use of agency funds needed to provide TRC employees with the full amount of longevity pay authorized by the 66th Legislature.

H.B. 454, signed into law by Governor Clements, entitles all workers (both exempt and classified) to "career incentive" pay of \$4 per month for each year of service as a state employee, up to and including 25 years of service.

This pay is to commence at the end of the fifth year of service and increase at the end of each five years thereafter.

Although the legislation authorizes monthly payments of \$4 for each year of service, the funds appropriated from general revenue allow only an estimated \$2 to \$3 per month for each year of service.

At their August 22 meeting in Austin, TRC Board members voted,

upon the recommendation of Commissioner W. K. Harvey, Jr., to spend the amount of "extra" agency money required in FY 1980 to pay all eligible employees at the full amount of \$4 per month.

More than 1,200 Commission employees will be receiving longevity pay, effective September 1, in amounts ranging from \$20 to \$100 monthly, or \$240 to \$1,200 per year.

Pay at five levels is determined by the number of years served as of August 31, 1979.

There are 863 TRC employees with at least five years but less than 10 years of service who will receive \$20 per month, \$240 annually.

With at least 10 years but less than 15 years, 277 will receive \$40 per month, \$480 annually.

Seventy four employees with at least 15 years but less than 20

years of service will receive \$60 per month, \$720 annually.

Twenty seven will get \$80 monthly, \$960 annually, for at least 20 years but less than 25 years of service.

Sixteen with more than 25 years of service will receive \$100 per month, \$1,200 annually.

Longevity pay is figured only on five-year anniversaries of state service. An employee who has served nine years and eleven months as of August 31 will receive "five year" pay — \$20 per month — until the beginning of FY 1981, when he would become eligible for \$40 monthly.

The legislation does not allow any pay for less than five years of service — no matter how little less, as of August 31. And the maximum is \$100 per month for 25 years of service, although some have passed the 30-year plateau.

Award notes DDD quality

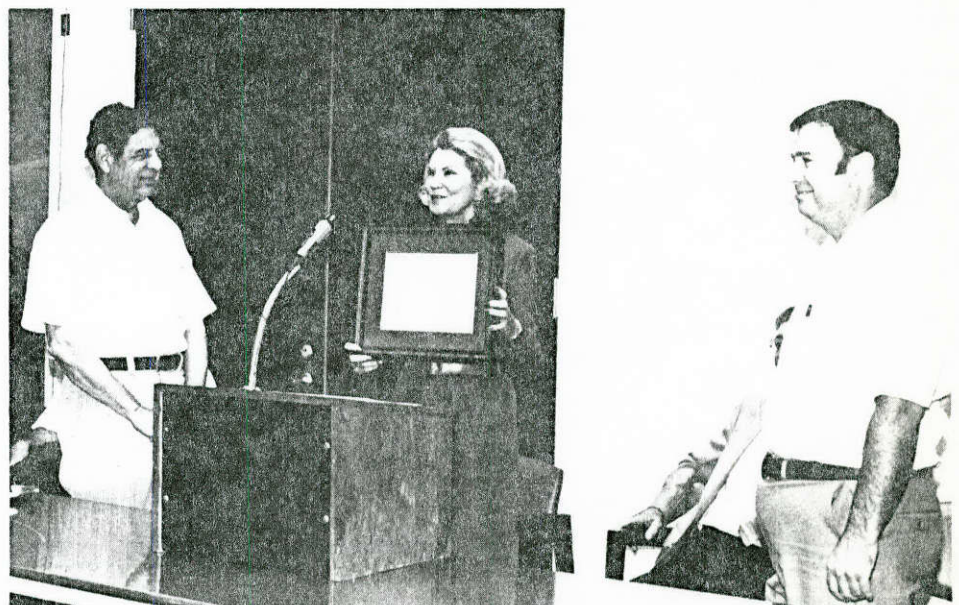
Disability Determination Division employees received a coveted "quality performance" award from the Social Security Administration on June 29.

In a crowded Central Office ceremony, TRC Commissioner W. K. Harvey, Jr. and Assistant Deputy Commissioner Dale Place accepted the citation from Martha McSteen, SSA Regional Commissioner, Dallas.

Ms. McSteen congratulated DDD on its overall record and for achievements, particularly, during the past year.

"In July 1978, the accuracy rate

(Continued on page 2)



MARTHA McSTEEN, Regional Commissioner, Social Security Administration, Dallas, displays an award to DDD employees accepted by TRC Commissioner W. K. Harvey, Jr., left, and Assistant Deputy Commissioner Dale Place.

"Without your help . . ."

Letters of appreciation, from clients to counselors, come into one or more of the Commission's 167 offices every day. About as regularly . . . and beautifully . . . as the sun shines.

Selena Johnson, counselor, Port Arthur TDHR-TRC Office, shares a typically warm note from an individual nearing completion of associate registered nurse's training through Lamar University:

*Texas Rehabilitation Commission
To all of my friends:*

I have tried to think of some appropriate words to express my genuine thanks to all of you. You have been so kind, helpful, and encouraging to me. I just want to say thank you. Without your help my task would not have been possible. I will never forget your kindness. Your friendship will remain with me throughout my lifetime. God bless all of you.

LOVENIA BELL

TRS benefits increased

Commission employees under the Teacher Retirement System will benefit from provisions in several bills passed by the 66th Legislature and signed into law by Governor Bill Clements.

The general retirement bill (HB 2083) amends the definition of "annual compensation" in the Teacher Retirement Law to remove the \$25,000 ceiling on the amount of compensation subject to TRS deduction and credit, effective September 1, 1979. It also:

(1) removes the ceiling from the best-five-years'-average compensation factor in the TRS benefit formula for those retiring after August 26, 1979;

(2) increases survivor benefits, effective September 1, 1980, from a \$500 lump sum payment and \$75 per month (\$150 per month for beneficiary spouse with children) to a \$1,500 lump sum and \$100 monthly benefits (\$200 for beneficiary spouse with children);

(3) removes, on September 1, 1980, provision for termination of survivor benefits upon a beneficiary's remarriage;

(4) allows employment after retirement up to one-half time without suspension of benefits;

(5) authorizes a retired member or beneficiary to waive all or a portion of benefits;

(6) removes the 5 percent fee for delinquent deposits assessed on years before 1975-1976 only, and authorizes the refund of delinquent fees already collected on years prior to 1975-1976;

(7) increases the state contribution from 7½ percent to 8½ percent; and

(8) provides for the collection of the state's 8½ percent contribution from funds received by school districts and institutions for salaries paid from federal and private grants.

HB 2084 provides certain retired members with annuity increases effective in September, 1979. There will be a 13 percent increase for members who retired before March 31, 1969 and a 6 percent increase in annuities for members who retired on or after March 31, 1969 but before September 1, 1973. No funds were appropriated to provide benefit increases to any member who retired after September 1, 1973.

Survivor benefits are also increased for the first time since 1957. Beneficiaries receiving the \$75 per month survivor benefits in August will have the amount increased to \$100 per month in September, 1979, and thereafter. In September, 1980 the lump sum survivor benefit is increased from \$500 to \$1,500, and the present provision that remarriage disqualifies a beneficiary from monthly survivor benefits is repealed.

Address changes requested

Copies of the Commission's NEWS & VIEWS are mailed each month to all retired TRC employees as well as current personnel throughout the state. Office addresses of everyone on the agency's payroll are accurately kept, of course, but moves of retirees are more difficult to follow. If you are a former employee and would like to keep receiving this publication, please let us know if and when your address changes. Send any mailing list corrections to: Georgia Reeves, 118 East Riverside Drive, Austin, Texas, 78704.

AWARD

(Continued from page 1)

in initial Title II review was 84 percent," she noted. "At the end of May 1979, it was 96.8 percent."

"This remarkable improvement in product accuracy is unparalleled," Ms. McSteen declared. "More recent success in reducing processing time while maintaining accuracy is a rarely equalled example of the accomplishments that can come from able leadership, a competent and dedicated staff, and effective teamwork between organizations."

Ms. McSteen recalled that the Division's work on hand for a "trying period" had climbed from 4.8 weeks in March 1978 to 8.2 weeks in December 1978, but was reduced to 5.2 weeks by June 1979.

"The percentage of 70-day cases pending reached an all-time high of 15.6 in December 1978, but June 1979 showed a 5.8 percentage," she said. "Again, a remarkable record of accomplishment."

"Upon reflection, it seems almost incredible that you were able to accomplish this mission," Ms. McSteen added. "I'm sure there were many moments and days when the percentage of frustration reached an all-time high, too. But, looking back at the magnitude of the problems, makes the achievements even more satisfying."

Texas is ranked first in the nation (among most populous states) for fewest errors — less than one percent — in approving or denying almost 150,000 claims last year.

Claims adjudicated by DDD — from Social Security district offices throughout the state — resulted in the payment of \$66.2 million in monthly benefits to disabled Texans and dependents during fiscal 1978.

Center cited

An award recognizing the Vernon MHMR Center for its program to hire handicapped persons was presented on August 2 to Superintendent Frankie E. Williams, M.D., by Marjorie Booker, supervisor for the Texas Rehabilitation Commission in Wichita Falls.

"Vernon Center has maintained a very positive attitude toward hiring the handicapped," Mrs. Booker said. "This attitude and practice has resulted from the leadership of Dr. Williams, who has been a strong advocate that handicapped persons be given an opportunity to perform in gainful employment."

"I am not always aware that we go out of our way to hire the handicapped," Dr. Williams said in accepting the award. "What we try to do is look at them as people and not as problems. If they really want to work, we find they perform better than the non-handicapped in a lot of ways."

TRC Counselor Randy Jacobs praised Vernon Center for being "extremely cooperative in hiring the handicapped."

Ron Davis, Center personnel officer, said that TRC had been "a very useful resource for finding useful employees."

Mrs. Booker cited the Center not only for its non-discriminatory hiring policies but also for its program to remove architectural barriers from its grounds and buildings to create an environment more suited to employing handicapped personnel.



PARTICIPANTS in an award ceremony at Vernon MHMR Center included, left to right: Ron Davis, Center personnel officer; Frankie E. Williams, M.D., Center superintendent; Marjorie Booker, TRC supervisor, Wichita Falls; and Randy Jacobs, TRC counselor, Vernon.

Thomas Word is appointed staff development director

Thomas G. Word, Jr. has succeeded Donna Eagar as Director of Staff Development, effective August 1.

Word has been with the Commission since January 1970, following completion of the Masters program in VR Counseling at the University of Texas at Austin. His undergraduate degree, in Psychology, was also earned at UT Austin.

After an initial assignment in the Austin District Office, Word served three years as a Counselor in the TRC office at UT Austin. While there, he was responsible for developing and conducting a highly successful program to provide for better coordination between the University and handicapped students.

He was also instrumental in the establishment of MIGHT (Mobility Impaired Grappling Hurdles Together), an on-campus organization devoted to identifying and solving problems facing the severely handicapped in a university setting. In 1972, he was chosen by the Texas Rehabilitation Counselor Association to receive the Elkins Award as Counselor of the Year.

In December 1973, Word was selected to be one of the original Regional Training Officers in TRC,

serving in that capacity for Region III, in Austin, until becoming Director of Staff Development. As an RTO, he contributed significantly to development of that role in the agency, with emphasis on providing training based on established individual need.

Ms. Eagar, who had been Director of Staff Development since June 1, resigned to establish a private VR counseling service in Utah, headquartered in Salt Lake City.

Glass leaves personnel post

Clarence Glass, Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Personnel, resigned on August 17 to accept the position of Special Projects Director, Audits Department, in the Governor's Office of Budget and Planning.

Glass was employed by the Commission as Personnel Director in March, 1970 and has served as an Assistant Deputy Commissioner since September, 1977.

A native of Austin, Glass started his state career after graduation from high school, working as an auditor for the Texas Department of Public Safety from 1956 to 1960.

Glass left the DPS to enter Southwest Texas State University where he received his BBA degree in 1963.

He returned to state employment in August, 1963 as a Personnel Assistant for the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. Glass was promoted to Personnel Management Specialist with MHMR and in September, 1966 became the Business Manager of Travis State School. He served in that position until joining TRC after it was established as a separate agency.

'Terrible Tuesday' victims assisted

By **MARJORIE BOOKER**
Supervisor, Wichita Falls

Alter 6:12 p.m. on April 10, the day would become known as "Terrible Tuesday" in Wichita Falls. That is the time when a massive tornado made its first contact with the city.

The warning was short. Wichita Falls had been alerted of a tornado on the ground in the Vernon area, but learned on the evening TV weather report that it was moving toward Oklahoma, out of our path.

While on camera, presenting that information, the weather reporter was handed a later bulletin:

"A tornado is on the ground at the west edge of Wichita Falls, at Memorial Stadium, moving from west to east. Do not go outside and look. You do not have time. Take immediate cover, to an inside hall or closet."

As the message was completed, warning sirens were being sounded and the television station went off the air.

It appears that radar had not picked up three or four tornadoes that merged and became one giant, black funnel estimated to be a quarter of a mile wide, swerving from north to south with its path of destruction some three-quarters of a mile wide.

The funnel stayed on the ground for 16 miles, eight miles through a heavily populated residential section. Wind speeds were estimated at 175 to 225 miles per hour.

In 15 minutes it was over, leaving the crippled city without lights or water and very limited telephone service.

News reports do not really relay the vastness of such total destruction. There are 45 dead, 1,000 injured and 20,000 homeless. An estimated \$300 million loss includes 5,000 residencies and 80 businesses destroyed or heavily damaged. In some way, it touched the lives of each of the 96,000 residents.

TRC offices in Vernon and Wichita Falls were not in the tornado's path. Three Commission employees in Wichita Falls lost their homes and one employee's home was badly damaged. Almost all had relatives or friends who lost homes.

The Texas Rehabilitation Commission took immediate steps to assist tornado victims. The Federal Disaster Assistance Administration was contacted and TRC was listed in the full page newspaper postings of agencies who could be of assistance.

Printed information said, in part, that TRC is an agency that "can pro-

vide help to the handicapped or those who are vocationally handicapped as a result of disaster injuries."

Counselors are working at both hospitals on referrals, and we anticipate that TRC services will be needed by an appreciable number once initial treatment has been completed and shock alleviated.

ADDENDUM

Eight individuals hospitalized, including four amputees, were identified immediately as individuals who would need TRC assistance. Each counselor was asked to work individually with clients on their case-loads who were in the tornado.

All barber college students lost their tools, but 12 kits and three beauty college uniforms were reordered at once so they could resume training when the school was relocated and reopened on April 17.

Counselor Jerry Hickman worked with an organization of about 100 persons formed to coordinate services for persons affected by the tornado.

Central Office concern and support was expressed in a visit by James Jackson and calls from John Fenoglio and others. Regional Director Lon Young came over from Fort Worth to offer area assistance to the

Wichita Falls staff.

Robert E. Garner, Personnel Officer, Region II, kept track of letters and contributions to TRC employees who had losses in the disaster. He reported that many donations by fellow workers throughout the Commission enabled one family to purchase a washer and dryer and other items which were destroyed.

One employee's car was demolished and her new one needed to have hand controls installed. Another was able to replace her refrigeration which was lost in the tornado. Another received a check for many things she will need when her home is rebuilt.

A note signed by TRC tornado victims — Betty Lou Black, Juanita Jacobsen, Patience Green and LaVerne Woolfolk — says: "We sincerely thank the employees of Texas Rehabilitation Commission for the gifts and concern shown to us after the April 10 tornado. We were reminded that when trouble strikes, there are those who care."

"Today we wrote the final checks closing this account," Garner said on July 11. "The employees of this Commission came to the aid of these employees financially in the tune of thirty one hundred and twenty five dollars (\$3,125.00)."

"There are still people," he concludes, "concerned with the needs of others."

UT Arlington program grows

The University of Texas at Arlington received a grant from the Texas Rehabilitation Commission in 1975 for removal of architectural barriers. The following year the Texas Rehabilitation Commission provided a grant to the University to establish the Educational Support Services Office.

This office under the grant provided handicapped students with all support services such as library assistants, wheelchair pushers, note-takers, live-in attendants, interpreters, etc. On-campus housing is available for handicapped students requiring live-in attendants. Special registration is held each semester prior to regular registration for all handicapped students.

A physical education class for credit is offered to all physically handicapped students where the individual can work on an exercise program geared to his personal needs. In 1978, an interagency agreement between the University and TRC was

signed which allows for repair and maintenance of client wheelchairs on campus by the Educational Support Services Office staff with TRC paying for the equipment with no charge to the agency for labor.

The Texas Rehabilitation Commission has maintained a full time office on-campus since 1973, and provides counseling and guidance and other rehabilitation services. Ongoing liaison between TRC Counselor John Baker and Rehabilitation Technician Flora Williams with the Educational Support Services Office, has resulted in appropriate case finding and increased services to severely physically impaired clients in this college setting.

This program reflects the end result of sound teamwork planning and involvement with Regional Program Officer, Program Specialist, TRC Counselor, TRC Supervisor, and University staff towards the goal of removing architectural barriers and providing Commission services.