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trc today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission



It's Here...

*The 76th
Legislative
Session*



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Texas Rehabilitation
Commission
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.
Austin, Texas 78751-2399
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Make way for the 76th Session

The Texas Legislature opened the 76th Legislative Session on Jan. 12, 1999. After the televised inauguration of key elected officials, Texas lawmakers got down to business, organizing committees and their rules of procedure. This session may prove to be very interesting. While there is no single issue predominating, policy-makers are carefully considering how to take full advantage of the budget surplus. Priorities include education and tax cuts. If history is any guide, there will be anywhere from 5,000 to 6,000 bills filed during the 140 days of the Texas regular session.

FUNDING

One of the key bills in any legislative session is the General Appropriation Act. This enormous bill is basically the state's entire budget—approximately \$90 billion dollars over two years. The Legislature is considering the first budget of the next century and decisions made in the next five months will have far reaching implications for the years 2000 and 2001. One issue associated with this moment in history is that the Legislature will have to assess and prepare for the Y2K situation.

Turning to the Texas Rehabilitation Commission, the Legislative Budget Board honored the TRC Board's request for certain appropriations levels as identified in TRC's Legislative Appropriations Request. TRC budget staff is analyzing the "baseline" budget. Later in the process, the Legislature will consider additional budget needs.

EMPLOYEE PAY RAISES

State employee pay has received some attention. A recent State Auditor's Office report indicated on average, state employees have cumulatively lost \$5,438 in real earnings over the last five years. This loss was due

Gentlemen:

As the Chief Executive Officers of large State agencies, we are sensitive to the leadership's guidance as it relates to holding the line against General Revenue and Total Funds increase. However, we would be remiss in not addressing the issue of salary adjustment for state employees. Acknowledging

■ CEOs of the large state agencies worked together to author a letter advocating for state employee pay raises. You can read this letter in our online version of TRC Today at <http://www.trcnet/trctoday/febtdy/online.html>.

to inflation. What's more, many private sector employees have actually gained real earnings in recent years since their salary increases exceeded inflation. These findings contributed to higher levels of state employment turnover. In the 75th Legislative Session, state employees received a monthly \$100 across-the-board pay increase but some agencies are finding it increasingly difficult to attract qualified employees.

The issue of pay raises is complicated by the serious competition for state dollars in this area, especially in the area of teacher pay raises. Because education is a priority area, legislators are considering some statistics that show that the salary of Texas public school teachers lags about \$5,000 per year below the national average.

The chief executive officers of the large state agencies, TRC included, sent a letter to state legislative leadership to advocate on behalf of state employees. "We realize that there are many fiscal demands that the leadership will be dealing with during the 76th Legislative Session," reads

the letter. "However it is vitally important that state salaries remain competitive with relevant labor markets. Non-competitive salaries weaken our ability to attract and retain the number of quality people necessary to conduct the State's business."

SUNSET

RECOMMENDATIONS

As you have read, all health and human service agencies have been under review by the Sunset Commission this year. On Dec. 15, the Sunset Advisory Commission voted on several recommendations on the organizational structure of all health and human service agencies. One of the recommendations is to create a new agency to oversee long-term programs. At the time of this writing, the actual legislation relating to the Sunset recommendations has not yet been filed. It is important to keep in mind that the legislative process is complex and the law that is finally passed may or may not track the recommendations word for word.

As the session progresses, TRC Today will report on matters of interest to TRC employees. So stay tuned.



An Important Reminder...

Anytime you want to voice your opinion to legislators and others, whether for TRC programs or for any personal issues, please remember to keep your role as a TRC professional completely separate from your role as a private citizen. Of course, a state employee has the rights of freedom of association and political participation guaranteed by the state and federal constitutions, but there are special rules that apply:

- You CAN'T use state time or any state equipment, including agency letterhead, e-mail, faxes, copiers and computers for these purposes;
- You CAN'T impose your views on other employees, clients or vendors or require their participation or support.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please consult your 1998 Employee Handbook.

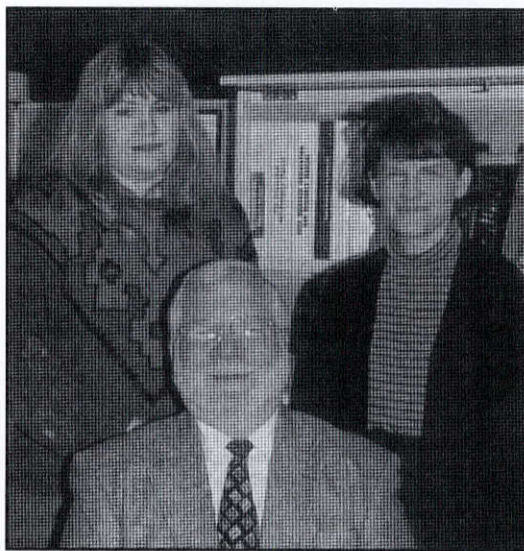
Help Is At Your Finger Tips

Field staff no longer need to spend time searching for answers. Julie Locke with the Central Office Help Desk is ready to find the answers for you. When a client or client's family is in your office and you have a question, Julie is here to help. The Help Desk offers quick answers so that you can provide timely services to clients. If the answer is not readily available, Julie goes on the hunt for you and gets the information while you continue to do your job.

Julie came to Central Office Programs last September after working 2-1/2 years as an RST in Fort Worth. The Help Desk team (Locke and Program Specialists Mike Brevell and Jeri Badgett) spent the next few months developing a data base of up-to-date information and a process to provide that information to field and central office staff. Together, the team has over 23 years of field experience.

"I think it is important that we have a field perspective and we be sensitive to field needs," said Mike Brevell who was key to developing the Help Desk. "Our goal is to supply accurate, consistent answers to staff questions. We are all committed to providing a quicker, easier way to get answers and all of us help cover the calls."

Since November, Julie has averaged 15-20 calls a week, a number that is growing fast. Most questions are very specific and relate to RSM policies and procedures and their application to the RSS system. A list of frequently asked questions (FAQ) is posted on the Programs web page located by clicking the Programs link on the TRC Net. The Help



■ Programs Help Desk staff (left to right) Jeri Badgett, Mike Brevell and Julie Locke.

Desk is equipped with an RSS training system so Julie can walk through procedures with the caller.

"When I worked in the field, I wasn't always sure who to call with questions about policy, the RSS, rehab technology, etc." says Locke. "I hope to make everyone's job easier by being the person everyone knows to call. If I can't answer their questions, I will refer it to someone who can."

Letters...Letters...Letters...

Here's a letter to VRC Christie Turner from a client in Tyler, Texas. —

Today was a great day. I had my wheelchair lift installed in my van. I am so thrilled. For the first time we can go out as a family and enjoy ourselves to the fullest.

I do not know if I can find the words to express my thanks for the Texas Rehabilitation Commission's and your help in this matter. Please know just how grateful my whole family is concerning this lift.

The kind of work that the Commission does is invaluable to the community and folks like me who just want to live a normal life even though it has been disrupted by someone becoming disabled.

Thank you so much for all of your courteous and valuable help. If there is ever anything that I might do for the Rehab Commission I would be happy to do so. Thank you again from the bottom of my heart. ♡

Get your questions answered by:

calling 512-424-4868 (424-HUNT), or e-mail your question to Julie.Locke@rehab.state.tx.us, or visit the web page to check our list of FAQs. Click on the Programs link on TRCNET (<http://www.trcnet/Welcome.html>).

A button on the web page will submit your question to the Program's Help Desk.

A NEW NAME ...

A New Year

Many of you know the Texas Rehabilitation Advisory Council (TRAC). If you start seeing the name Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT), don't be confused.

Due to the Rehabilitation Act Amendments the TRAC name has changed, but you can still expect them to provide input into TRC's rehabilitation programs.

So what's in store this year for this Council? Let's take a look.

First is new faces. Dawn Bosley will work with the Council as TRC's Consumer Affairs director. Dawn brings strong communication skills and is looking forward to her new role to bring TRC's point of view to the Council.

Dawn is not the only new face this Council will see. Anne Brown took over as the new chairperson in October, and anticipates that by April, Gov. Bush will make appointments to fill at least some of the seven vacant positions on the Council.



■ TRC's Consumer Affairs Director, Dawn Bosley, and Anne Brown, chairperson of the RCT, visit during a break at the recent RCT meeting in Austin.

In addition to new faces, the RCT is looking forward to receiving the regulations on the Rehabilitation Act Amendments to see how its role will change. "We will work in partnership with TRC to restructure our Council to meet the new federal regulations," says Brown. "We don't know how comprehensive the changes are going to be yet because RSA really hasn't given us final word. There appears to be some new roles for the

Council in the reauthorization, and as soon as we get clarification, we will move forward."

To get ready, the RCT has already reviewed the law and established sub-committees to take a look at current issues.

The RCT hit the ground running this year with work on the TRC State Plan. The Partnership Ad Hoc Committee reviewed agency goals and priorities and developed a recommendation that the RCT and TRC both support. The full Council approved the recommendations on Jan. 29. Because of the responsive actions by the RCT and the Partnership Committee, the agency will be able to file the new TRC State Plan by the Apr. 1 deadline.

In addition, the RCT is reaching out to the Texas Council on Workforce and Economic Competitiveness (TCWEC) and representatives of the Texas Education Agency based on new wording in the Rehabilitation Act Amendment. "No one knows when the rules will come out," said Barbara Ritter, TRC staff coordinator. "By making some of its own interpretations and taking actions now, the Council hopes to be ahead of the game on improving services to Texans with disabilities, which is why it is here in the first place."

DDS Explores Space with IWS/LAN

TRC employees don't have to wait for the summer blockbuster to experience the new Star Wars. It's right here, right now in TRC at DDS.

The Star Wars fleet has arrived in Austin, and their mission is to take DDS forces on a journey, training them to interact with their intelligent workstations on the local area network (IWS/LAN).

In our last newsletter, we told you that DDS was getting new computers. What we didn't tell you was the immense amount of teamwork involved in that project.

In July 1998, an impetus to become Y2K compliant brought TRC DDS a new challenge. We had six months to change over a thousand users to new computers, get them productive on software they had never seen, convert massive numbers of forms, make sure all the laws are adhered to, and not interrupt workflow.

"We were dealing with very complex ideas between SSA who had an entirely global aspect, and the state (TRC) who had their own set of requirements," said Bob Garza, Project Coordinator for the IWS/LAN project. "We had to make sure that our federal and state partners were happy and the work would still get done. The team effort that resulted was phenomenal. We even had people from SSA give us their home telephone numbers so we could contact them at any time."

"A major challenge facing us was educating a thousand people with computer skills ranging from those who knew the basics to those who had developed some expertise," recalled Perry Watson, manager of DDS Staff Development. "We tried to make the training as interesting as possible and entertaining enough to keep everyone's attention. A Star Wars theme produced positive results. Overall, I think employees are not just learning how to use the new system, they're having fun in the process. We tried to develop an atmosphere where people could make the most of a changing work environment and everyone has been extremely receptive."

DDS employees attend training for their new computers on Friday afternoons while their workstations are being reconfigured. Users return to their workstations on Monday morning to find a powerful computer with new Microsoft software and an Internet browser. In addition, they find the familiar VERSA software, the bread and butter of the DDS program. The new computers are much faster than the old ones and provide an array of options never offered before in DDS.

"It was really easy to adjust to," says Disability Examiner Ilene Gray. "VERSA is the same and that is mainly what I use. To me it was a matter of how much it was going to disrupt my work. It didn't, and that is the criteria of happiness in my work for me."

Installation is scheduled in stages to minimize downtime. The first shipment of computers arrived in Austin in late October and on Jan.

22, installations were half complete. Now in hyperdrive, future installations are scheduled every two weeks until March 26, when bringing in the Austin Annex, Arlington and Houston will complete the installation phase.

As we approach the end of March, keep your eyes to the skies and you may see a flash as Han Solo, Princess Leia or Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi glide in on the Millennium Falcon to celebrate the final computer upgrade at DDS.

Until then, may the Force be with you.



■ (L-R) Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi (Sid Wamack), R2D2 (a new printer on the IWS/LAN), Princess Leia (Debbie Danforth), and Han Solo (David Pimentel) are ready to guide DDS forces through the IWS/LAN training.

Employees who have received 12 maximizers

DECEMBER 1998

REGION III
Lori Vogel
Edna Walker
Cindy Cook

Gloria Banda
Sherron Haglund
Euwana McCarty
Beartrice Tristan
Helen Velasquez
Marva Patterson
Emma Rodriguez
Nelda Sanchez

Carrie Farrell
Beverly Gajewski
Sandy Ray
Cheryl Thomas

REGION III
Janice Ging

JANUARY 1999

REGION V
June Armstrong

REGION IV
Christie Arsenis
Annette Davis

REGION II
Carroll Norton
Teenie Savage

Across the State

Welcome Aboard December 1998

Evelyn Adams
Melba Alexander
Francine Anders
Norman Attilee
Holly Baker
Barbara Booker
Kay Bryant
Audrey Chavason
James Compton
Linda Contreras
Sharon Cummins
Ruby Davila
Joan Dragon
Louvenia Durst
Rhonda Dyer
Leslie Etter
Barbara Franklin
Francis Genco
Nicki Glenn
Laura Ham
Tammy Hardin
Christine Hawkins
Pamela Hawkins
Valerie Hilton
James Hunter
Barbara Lazard
Kent Lord
Laura McCullough
Roy Moreno
Phyllis Morris
Margo Newcomer
John Owens
Dennis Parks
Rueben Perez
Marcia Powell
Kristy Printy
Janet Ratcliff
Katherine Reese
Ivece Saliu
Adriana Segura
Jane Simpson
Charla Smith
Sara Stephens
Janra Steverson
Daniel Taylor
Natascha Timberlake
Maria Torres-Rios
Debra Vaughn
Eunice Weider
Richard Woolsey

January 1999

Mary Alexander
James Brennan
Ralph Burger
Hilario Carreon
Jennifer Colburn
Geneva Davis
Colleen Edwards
Katherine Estill
Arnold Gamez
Ramona Goza
Blake Humphries
Brandi Laster
Kenneth Magness
Eric Mills
Cheryl Phillips
Deborah Saylor
Larita Stanley
Kathia Toledo
Darlene Wolfe

Retirements

November
Nellie Jenkins - 21 years

December
Ann Barkholtz - 6 years
Cecelia Stark - 27 years
Frances Ramirez - 25 years
Robert Gonzalez - 26 years

January

Darlene Boykin - 32 years
Patricia Sue Cypert - 17 years
Gloria Wilson - 33 years
William Frank Coggins, Jr. - 20 years
Norman S. Hummell - 28 years
Marnette Walker - 25 years

Congratulations

Patricia Robinson was selected as the associate commissioner for Management Audit on December 1. Robinson is a Certified Public Accountant and Certified Information Systems Auditor and has been with the Commission for over nine years.

Dawn Bosley was selected as the new director of Consumer Affairs. Bosley, who has been with TRC since 1981, has vast experience in DDS, Central Office Programs and most recently as a trainer in HRD.

Richard Moline is the new associate commissioner for Human Resources. Moline has spent the last 5 1/2 years in TRC as a human resources manager, first for the Central Office and then as the statewide Director of Human Resource Management.

Deaths

Retired TRC employee Margaret Wilson died after a brief illness on Thursday, Dec. 10. Margaret worked for the TRC for 11 years and retired in May 1987. She was a secretary in the Houston South East Office.

Texas Rehabilitation Commission
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Address Service Requested

trc today

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Shayla Fleshman, Director of Public Information
Prissy Pense, Editor

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State Service Awards

Jan./Feb. 1999	Elizabeth McBeth	25 Years
10 Years	Don McKnight	Linda Allen
Ruth Bryant	Vicki Mondragon	Paula Connell
Denise Clontz	Norman Owens	Mary Diaz
Michael Keim	Leeda Womack	Wanda Guidry
Charlotte Morrison	Zane Bennett	Patty Morrow
Charlene Potts	Robert Garza	Sandra Ross
John Rehm	Elizabeth Johnston	Marnette Walker
David Royal	Craig Kalkofen	Mac Crone, Jr.
Mike Vinson	Joseph Mayberry	Delores Franklin
Bruce White	Kathy Silberman	Brenda Hills
Stephan White	Sharon Stromberg	Larry Hughes
Carolyn Castro	Judy Whitfield	Carl Risinger
Patricia Cruthirds		Gracie Roberts
Roy Hernandez	20 Years	Aaron Wallace III
William Jones	Sandra Deleon	Deborah Wilks
Linda McMillin	Betty Eli	
Elaine Mittel	Michelle Henninger	30 Years
Robert Weikel	Babette Hewitt	Diana Hejl
	Sylvia Macias	Leslie Doleshal
15 Years	William J. Wilson	Rita Thomas
Brenda Augustus	Melinda Cohagan	
Lori Brown	Stanley Collins	<i>Here's one that</i>
Patrick Carnahan	Susan Gaudichon	<i>we missed in</i>
Rachel Esquivel	Suzette Gregg	<i>September.</i>
Cathy Gillispie	Diane Hume	
Shirley Haywood	Garnard Morrison	Elizabeth Cutney -
Jane Jett		10 years

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