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trc today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission



It's Ended...

*The 74th Texas Legislative Session
is now history.*

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An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission

TEXAS REHABILITATION
COMMISSION

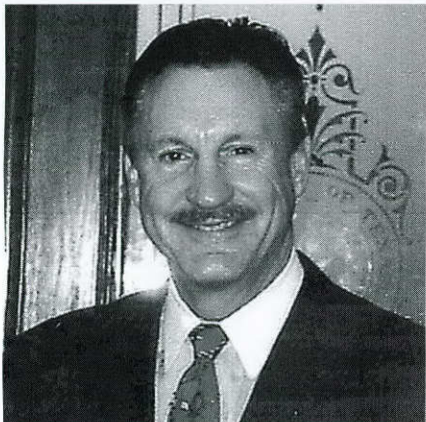
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.

Austin, Texas 78751-2399

Vol. 17 No. 5 June 1995

The 74th Legislative Session is now history. And, what a session it was. It started with such controversy ... public school finance, tort reform, gun control legislation, hate crimes concern, lifting EEOC ... and it never let up. It seems that so much was on their plates, the legislators found it difficult to get around to everything. "This session moved so slow at times it seemed we had 100 pound weights on each leg," said Sen. John Montford, chair of the Senate Finance Committee.

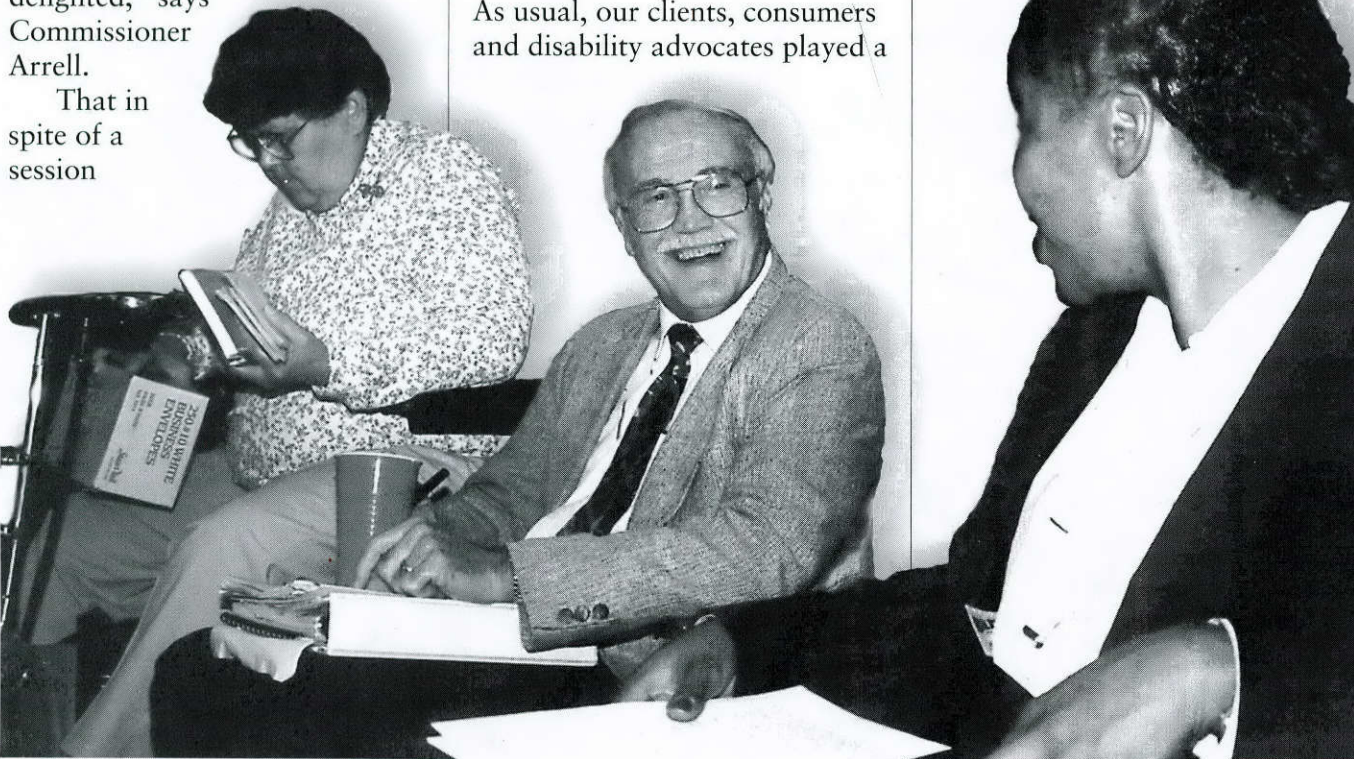
But it seemed to fly by for those wanting the opportunity to influence legislative decisions.



Sen. Mike Moncrief promised that the needs of persons with disabilities would be a priority... and he delivered!

How did TRC fare? "With the climate being what it is today, if you had told me at the beginning of this session how well we would come out of it, I would have been delighted," says Commissioner Arrell.

That in spite of a session



In one of the lighter moments before an all-day hearing, Arrell mixes with consumers.

characterized by such close scrutiny that one agency was placed in conservatorship, an act unprecedented in the history of the Texas Legislature. For most agencies it was a grueling test of accountability before legislative committees, constantly rescheduling and endless night sessions. For TRC it was another chance to tell our story and acknowledgement that we take care of business for people with disabilities.

"It is a real credit to our staff and the job we do for Texans with disabilities that in such a tough session that our responsiveness and our reputation was publicly addressed by legislators," said Commissioner Arrell.

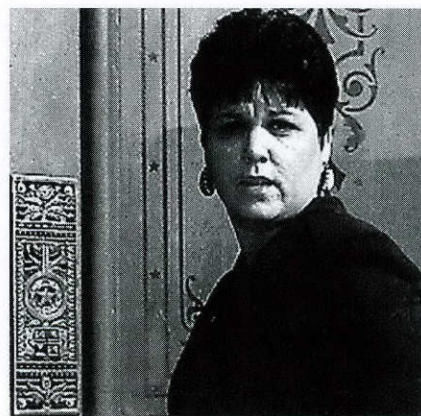
When the dust settled, here is the bottom line of how we did as an agency:

- Our state appropriations for VR increased by \$3 million;
- Personal Attendant Care and Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped programs increased by \$1.5 million each;
- TRC is still an autonomous agency, with the same board, and legislative authority;
- TRC received authority to purchase automated equipment that will streamline our system
- Legislative "targets" for FTEs (previously called caps) is well within reach without any RIFs being necessary.

As usual, our clients, consumers and disability advocates played a

big part in helping us to get our message across to the Legislature and they should get the lion's share of the credit," says Commissioner Arrell. "And, we have a lot of employees who worked long hours throughout the session that make a real difference. One newcomer who opened some new doors was Mary Wolfe."

Opening Doors



Mary Wolfe, Legislative Liaison

Rehabilitation programs in Texas have been through 33 legislative sessions – eight under Commissioner Arrell – but only this one with a Legislative Liaison Office.

Wolfe, a rehabilitation veteran of 17 years opened the Legislative Liaison Office a year ago and has had an immediate impact on the agency. "As good

a reputation as TRC has, you can't take legislators for granted," says Arrell. "At least 20 new legislators in this session needed to know who we are and what we do. That's where she came in."

"It was just a really good team effort," says Wolfe. "A lot of people had many parts to play in this session."

A Nice Surprise

The Legislature also passed a bill to provide incentive to retirement for state employees. SB 1231 allows employees to convert unused sick leave into time credit (160 hours equals one month) to be eligible for retirement. It also added a 12.5 percent permanent increase to anyone retiring before Aug. 31, 1995. The bill gives ERS trustees the option to extend that to Aug. 31, 1996. HRM has specific details regarding this bill on cc:mail.

Ended... But It May Not Be Over

If Congress passes a bill calling for a block grant that will include the Vocational Rehabilitation program, the Texas Legislature will have to go into special session to determine how that block grant will be used. We should know by the end of June.

*But It's Not Really Over Till...
...The Kassebaum Lady Sings
In The Senate.....*

Texas Rehabilitation Commission General Revenue FY 96-97 Biennium

Vocational Rehabilitation	63.5
Extended Rehabilitation	8.1
Personal Attendant	2.5
Independent Living Centers	3.1
Independent Living Services	3.9
Comprehensive Rehab	17.6
Deaf/Blind Services	4.5
Transitional Planning	0.8
Developmental Disabilities	0.0
Total in Millions	104.0

The Federal Scene

While the Kassebaum bill on consolidation of training programs (and rehabilitation programs right along with them) is yet to be introduced in the U.S. Senate, at least two drafts have been circulated for review and comment. These drafts served to mobilize disability advocates to be heard on the future of Vocational Rehabilitation. The drafts covered both extremes of the issue, total elimination of VR as we know it and incorporating the existing VR program within the framework of a block grant to the state.

Response from advocates has been loud, often and clear. Leave the program alone. It is more than a training program and is the only one that attends to the needs of people with disabilities with employment as the outcome. Sen. Phil Gramm, presented a position paper to Sen. Kassebaum, proposed by Commissioner Arrell, which states clearly that the “reason the VR program for people with disabilities exists today is because other programs have not met their specific needs.”

“The congressional movement toward consolidation is the gravest threat I’ve ever known to the VR program,” says Commissioner Arrell. “It is going to take every consumer

standing up and being heard for the program to survive.”

Kassebaum continues to gather information on both sides of the argument and is expected to introduce her bill in June.

In the House, H.R.1617 has been passed out of committee and has the potential to devastate the nation’s vocational rehabilitation program. As passed, it proposes to consolidate and reform more than 100 workforce development and literacy programs into four block grants to the states – one of those being the Vocational Rehabilitation Consolidation Grant. The four grant programs would be carried out by local workforce development boards through “one-stop career centers.”

Meanwhile, both the House and Senate versions of the Budget Resolution assume that Title I, the State Vocational Rehabilitation Program, will be integrated into the Federal Manpower Training Consolidation legislation as Congress stays “on a glidepath to a balanced federal budget by the year 2002.”

It promises to be a long, hot summer as these bills gain momentum and improve focus, closely tracked and responded to by disability advocates and rehabilitation professionals.

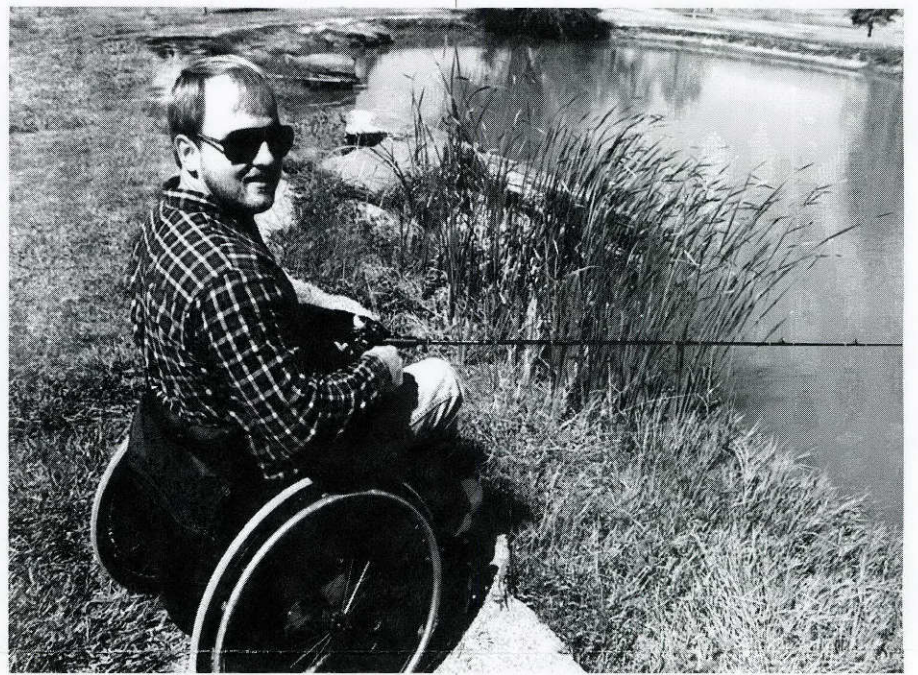
I’d rather be fishing

In Wichita Falls, there are two big sports — hunting and fishing. A fall from a deer blind last year caused paralysis for sportsman Ray Austin. But just because he is now in a wheelchair doesn’t mean he’s going to stop doing what he loves.

Before his accident, Austin was a pest exterminator which he says provided him a good

a lift for a van, they came around.”

“It’s important to work but it’s also important to play. I want to do everything possible that I had done prior to my accident,” adds Austin. “I am not going to change what I do because I’m in a wheelchair, but I might have to change my approach to how I do it.”



income. Now he is halfway through with a degree in computer programming.

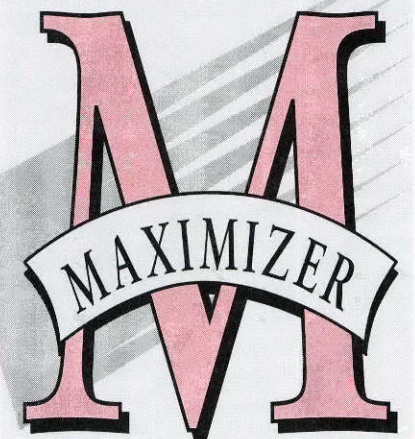
“After my accident, I researched the market, looked at my capabilities and what I needed in income for my family,” says Austin. “That’s when I came up with the idea of computer programming.”

As you can probably tell by now, Austin is the kind of person who knows what he wants and goes after it. And part of what he wanted was something a TRC office had not encountered — a lift for his truck.

“TRC had never done a lift for a pick-up truck. When I presented them with this new vehicle, they weren’t sure,” says Austin. “But when I told them that I researched what it would cost to do a lift on the truck and that it was \$2,000 cheaper than

Austin’s advice for other people in a similar situation — “Don’t quit doing anything ... even when you think it’s not possible. Everyday I find things I can do just because I’m willing to try.”

REACHING THE MAX....



Unit 22 gets Maximized!

Make This Clear

In contacting their representatives in Congress, disability advocates are making these points as clear as possible:

- Do not repeal Title I of the Rehabilitation Act – people with disabilities who are served by this program have needs that go beyond generic job training.
- Rehabilitation professionals are specially trained to assist people with disabilities move into the workforce. Generic job training programs cannot provide this support.
- The unemployment rate for people with disabilities already exceeds 60 percent ... taking away their only employment program will raise that percentage.
- It’s a proven fact that workers with disabilities return many more dollars in taxes than is invested in their vocational rehabilitation.



It's the HUB thing!

On April 21, nine state health and human service agencies held a workshop in Central Office for persons interested in becoming certified as a historically utilized business (HUB) and for HUB vendors looking for contract opportunities. The event was a huge success and attendance far exceeded expectations. The next step is to take this show on the road to other Texas cities.



Jose Montoya (right), TRC HUB coordinator, put in a lot of time and effort making it a success.

Creating choices for employment success

Recently, over 80 counselors and area managers came to Central Office for a workshop which purpose was to give employees new tools and information on how to better achieve employment outcomes. It was the first of its kind and was well received — providing current labor market information, ways to better involve client in selecting employment goals, and effective techniques in career counseling and development.

“Workshops like this give great information on how to market your clients and direct them into faster growing industries,” says Mike Brevell, program specialist for employment. “My goal is to make this information available to all counselors because it means better jobs for our clients.”



Left to right: Mike Brevell with Bonnie Bowen, a presenter at the workshop, and husband Ken Bowen, area manager in Victoria.

TRC: The Next Generation

Here are a few kids and parents experiencing life at TRC and answering that age-old question, “What does mom or dad do all day?” On *Bring Your Child To Work Day*, they got an inside look at TRC and the work that’s done here ... but they thought it was more fun than work.



Carolyn Morrow and grandson Sterling



Diane Miller and son Ryan



Jack Mazzetti and daughter Stacy

Letters

Sent to Commissioner Arrell from a client:

I returned from Vietnam in October 1971 with severe emotional problems and a heroin addiction. For the past 23 years or so, I've been in and out of Texas prisons and treatment facilities. In all that time, I've never received anything remotely resembling concrete help.

A few months ago – after spending 10 years in prison – I was referred to TRC by my drug counselor. I attended the orientation session at the Houston North Field Office. There I met TRC counselor Randy Wood, TRC counselor. He has been attentive, instructive, encouraging and caring. Most important of all, he has been interested. After over two decades, I'm finally receiving the help I needed.

An electronic letter sent to the TRC library regarding our electronic bulletin board:

“Thank a mil” for operating this bbs. I'm a 34 year old quadriplegic and I'm currently volunteering my computer skills to the Beaumont State Center. I just learned of this and hope to find it available in the future.

Sent to Commissioner Arrell from a claimant:

I am writing you because of a situation I find to be so unusual and gratifying. For several months I have been trying to get my social security disability and Mr. Mark Cognetti (Unit 10) has been not only extremely helpful but actually concerned! This is so rare nowadays. 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.

Because my doctor was so overworked and not too good at getting paperwork out, we were waiting on my case to be decided. Mr. Cognetti called and told me exactly what I needed.

My husband was a federal employee for many years and so many times it is a thankless job, so I just wanted someone to know that Mr. Cognetti is a conscientious man who cares about his job and the people he serves.

Across the State

Welcome Aboard!

Frances Bowen, RST, Arlington FO
Virginia Davis, RST, Dallas Northeast FO
Valerie Evans, RST, Irving FO
Larry Sharp, counselor, Texas A&M FO
Wanda Jean Sherman, RST, Corpus Christi FO
Noe de la Fuente, Jr., counselor, Harlingen FO
Marilynn Stubits, ad tech, DDS North Texas

Retirements

Patsy Person, RST, Dallas FO Southeast,
Ed White, counselor, San Antonio FO Northeast,
Frances Lanham, ad tech, DDS Information Management Services,

Kudos

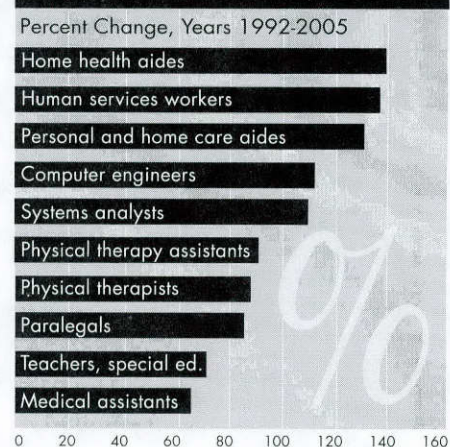
Dr. Ufot Umana, counselor in the South Austin FO, was recognized as Marbridge's “TRC Counselor of the Year.” During the past three years, 29 of 32 residents sponsored by Dr. Umana at one of Marbridge Community Living Centers have been successfully employed after completing training.

Where the jobs are:

The effect of computer technology and health services industry growth are reflected in the fastest growing occupations.

The fastest growing occupations include workers at all levels of educational attainment. Home health aides require no more than a high school diploma, systems analysts require a bachelor's degree, and paralegals are generally trained through post-secondary training that is less than the bachelor's degree.

Seven of the ten fastest growing occupations are health or computer related!



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Address Correction Requested

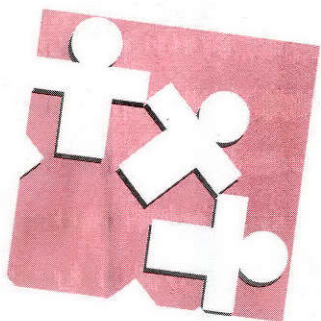
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There is now a special Reengineering video and newsletter that gives up-to-date info on where we are in the project. Your area manager has a copy of the tape.

And by the time you read this, you should have seen the most recent "Conversation with the Commissioner" – which covers important legislative information.