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trc today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission



TRC Statewide Employee of the Year Winners

Winners Becky Molina, Edna Walker and Rick Phelan with Commissioner Arrell

SEASON'S GREETINGS
and Best Wishes for a Happy and Prosperous New Year

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An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission

Texas Rehabilitation
Commission
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Employees of the Year . . . TRC picks 3 of the best

"There's no better honor than that of being recognized by your peers," said Commissioner Arrell at the opening of the 1996 Employee of the Year (EOY) Ceremony held in October. And that's what TRC's Employee of the Year program is all about — recognition of employees who do an outstanding job — day in and day out.

In June, about 280 employees nominated fellow workers, which was followed with across-the-state ceremonies to recognize nominees in their areas and announce those who would be considered for the final selection.

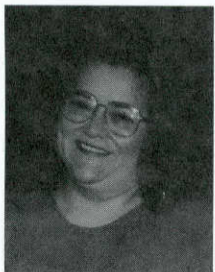
Winners received a \$1,000 savings bond, engraved pens and plaques. Each year, the money for prizes and promotions is raised through special statewide fundraising efforts, including t-shirt sales. This year, there was a contest for t-shirt design with Larry Coindreau winning first place.

"It takes a lot of hard work of many employees to put this program together — from the selection committee, to fund raising, to writing up a nomination," says James Swift, recognition coordinator. "But it's really worth it to see employees who do an outstanding job recognized for their contributions."

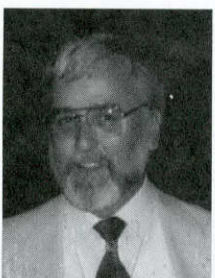
The Winners



Becky Molina has been with TRC for two years as an AST and began her employment under trying circumstances. Her position had been vacant three months and the position's supervisor was on extended sick leave and not able to return to the job. Becky worked under the supervision of the area manager with limited support from an experienced MSS for a period of nine months. Becky's interaction with the new MSS allowed for administrative services to function with a team concept.



Edna Walker is always first to volunteer for extra work, never complaining but accepting all extra assignments with a positive attitude and a smile. She has trained several RSTs and is known as the 'queen of VR' in the office because of her extensive knowledge of VR policy and procedure. Clients know that they can call at anytime and Edna will listen with patience and understanding, and will be honest with them.



Rick Phelan has been with TRC for over 23 years. This year his efforts helped save the VR program from annihilation at the federal level. What is well known is that there were two bills introduced in Congress which were intended to consolidate workforce development programs. What isn't widely known is the part that TRC and Rick Phelan played in preventing the program from becoming part of this consolidation.

First hand looks

Last June, Commissioner Arrell asked all executive managers (anyone with commissioner in their title and a few others) to spend three days each with a disability examiner and counselor before Jan. 1. These were not to be VIP visits or mere looks, but work sessions. Managers were to roll up their sleeves and experience the work done with our customers first hand.

Half the visits are complete. All participants say it's been a very rewarding experience. They describe employees who serve claimants and clients as warm, sharing, resourceful, creative, committed, connected and passionate. They also see the job they do as hard, frustrating, full of pressures, and a unique challenge. And managers came back from these visits with some new views.

A new appreciation for DDS . . .

They expected a cumbersome, structured and impersonal process. It impressed them to see the amount of personal contact, interest, and time. Jackie Feinberg, reengineering project manager, stated, "There was a lot more personal contact than I expected. You do become involved with those persons in those files on your desk."

A new definition for severe . . .

When dealing with the legislature and consumers, the definition for "severe" refers to a person with more than one disability. In working with clients with real-life threatening situations, severity took a new meaning. Kaye Beneke, assistant commissioner for Consumer Affairs, pointed out, "The people we saw needed immediate solutions to keep their jobs. The disability is not severe, but the employment situation is catastrophic to them and their families."

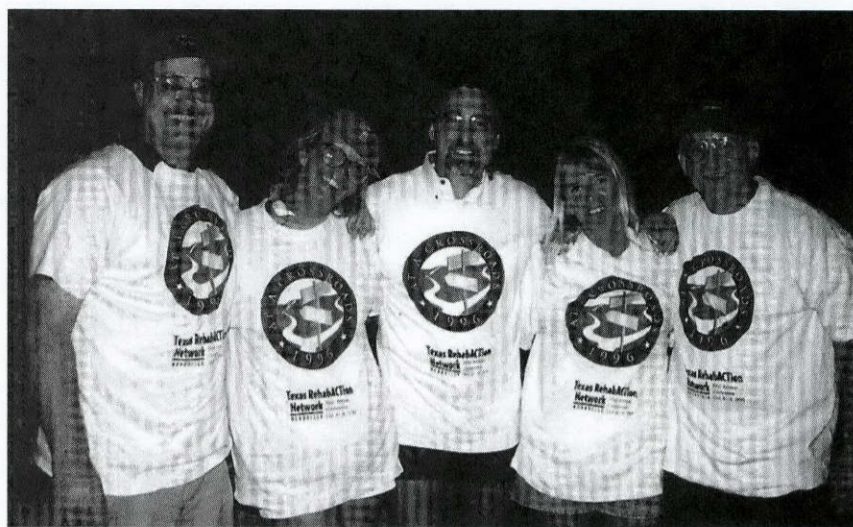
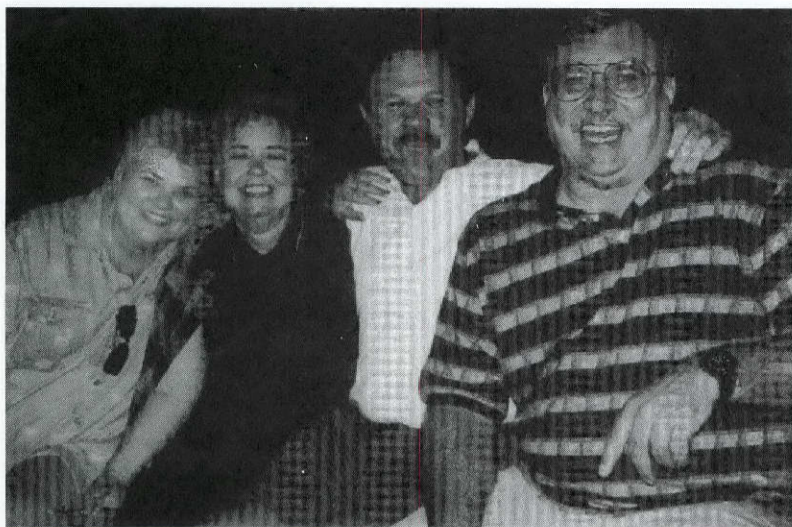
A new view of teamwork . . .

They were surprised to find interdependency of the RST and counselor positions. David Henderson, director of the Grants/Contracts Unit, noted, "When the counselor is on the road, the RST becomes the link. Having served in a reengineering lab, I'm pleased with the new system's potential to enhance the teamwork in those two positions."

A new commitment to support . . .

John (Jed) Davis, associate commissioner for Automated Services, after seeing logical disability determination decisions overturned by administrative law judges without any justification, was ready to write his congressman. There was acknowledgment for what cannot be done (change SSA), but also an awareness of what can be done such as changing some agency policies, monotonous forms, and the sea (as in cc) of bulletin boards that soon drowns any faithful swimmer. There was a focus on their role. Simon Rodriguez, general counsel, stated, "It made me understand why some of the issues we handle happen."

They saw where the rubber meets the road. Dave MacCabe, associate commissioner for Management Audit, stated, "This is the best professional development activity because it is back to the roots of what this agency is about — direct services."



At a Crossroads

Left: Region II employees having fun at the barbecue: Jan Boyd, Lucy Endermark, Paul Baganz and Larry Stults. Right: the first place volleyball team: Ken Vogel, conference chair, Leslie Hendren, Brian Mobley, Holly Houser and Bill Dunn.



Above left: TRAN elected leadership -- L to R: Terri Contreras, secretary; Jerry Price, treasurer; Jackie Feinberg, vice-president; Leslie Hendren, president-elect; and Reuben Taniguchi, president. Above Right: Dora Trevino giving an RST perspective of the new reengineered system.

In early October, the Texas Rehabilitation Action Network kicked off its first annual conference in Kerrville. During the keynote address given by Shar McBee, author of the book, *To Lead Is To Serve*, she asked attendants to set goals for the association. They responded: to advocate, educate, inspire, focus, commit, prepare and stay informed. The first annual conference successfully set the stage for those goals to be accomplished.

In the day and a half conference, training sessions focused on effective advocacy in letter writing, legislative visits, media relations, and presentation skills. And

there was lots of fun. Many attendants arrived early for sports activities such as tennis, volleyball, horseshoes and golf.

In the closing session, bylaws were voted on and special recognition was given for contributions to the new association. Reuben Taniguchi, TRAN's first president, thanked Commissioner Arrell for his leadership role in forming the first state chapter of the American RehabAction Network: "Commissioner, your vision got us to where we are today, but it's now up to each of us to make a difference."

Joe Owens, executive director of CSAVR, brought TRAN members up to date on issues surrounding the Vocational Rehabilitation program nationally. The following is excerpts from that talk:

Whether you knew it or not, you enlisted in the fight when you became a member of TRAN. That's the reason you're here today ...

This coming year, the issues in Reauthorization are:

1. Will the Act and the programs continue?
2. If it should continue, who will provide the services? (Public and private or solely private)
3. Will there be a narrowing definition of who the program serves?
4. Will advisory councils be given a greater role in administration of programs?
5. Will there be a voucher system?
6. Will there be caps placed on administrative costs, including counselors and other field staff?

Focus ... that is what it's about. In the 1992 Reauthorization, there was renewed focus on placements in competitive employment. And, that's the purpose of RehabAction-- staying focused on advocating for the VR program and anything that will make it better.

We are in the middle of the biggest backlash against people with disabilities I've ever seen. While everyone is worrying about ADA, program after program, advancement after advancement that enable economic independence for persons with disabilities are being whittled away.

Ninety-five percent of the concerns about the VR program are about its service delivery system. Yet, the service delivery system is not provided for in the Rehabilitation Act. That's why we need to streamline — so we can say to Congress and our customers that we made the system more user friendly, customer friendly and outcome driven.

WOW!

DDS has a large number of teams that have reached their first, second and third set of 12 maximizers. Due to this, we can't photo you all. But congratulations for a job well done! The teams are:

- Unit 3 on their first set
- Unit 6 on their second set;
- Unit 22 on the second set;
- Unit 1 on their second set; and
- Unit 70 on their third set of maximizers.



Mike Jones, examiner in Unit 15 is on his third set of 12 maximizers!

DDS Update —

Welfare Reform and Process Redesign

One of the big questions looming over DDS since recent welfare reform is the effect it will have on the DDS workload.

An interagency work group, with a subcommittee chaired by Dave Ward, DDS's new deputy commissioner, recently completed its assessment of the new legislation and developed strategies for dealing with those individuals who no longer meet Social Security Administration's (SSA) criteria for benefits.

Bottom line: For FY 1997, DDS will have the *largest workload in DDS history*, with the expectation being over 274,000 cases. On top of new cases coming in, TRC DDS will:

- redetermine eligibility for approximately 17,000 children, with a potential of 12,000 children losing SSI benefits, according to SSA estimates; and
- process about 19,500 Continuing Disability Review (CDR) cases.

This new workload will require considerable expansion of staff and space including reconfiguration of the existing DDS facility, and possibly a second location. There will be a minimum of 80 positions throughout the entire year, which will mean three new operations units. A priority in the hiring will be people with dis-

abilities. DDS and Rehabilitation Services are working together to make that happen.

"Both state and federal program changes will have major impact on the Texas DDS this next year. And SSA just released the FY 1997 baseline budget, which we are currently studying," says Ward. "What we do know is this: It will take all TRC's combined efforts and resources to make these changes a reality while still continuing to provide quality public service. It will be our biggest challenge yet."

Process redesign

There have been rumblings for months about an uncertain future for SSA's Process Redesign initiative. With the resignation of SSA Commissioner Shirley Chater, effective Jan. 31, and other pending changes in leadership, the rumblings have erupted into a steady roar.

The plan to redesign disability case processing had already been under fire from many fronts, including the U.S. Congress. Chater has been an ardent supporter of the process redesign and her absence could greatly affect the direction and scope of the initiative. Indeed, state DDSs have been informed that process redesign will be given a fresh look due to recent federally mandated disability workloads.

Across the State

Welcome Aboard!

Kim White, system support specialist
Charles Enriquez, accounting clerk
Gregory Robinson, network manager
Mary Doran, network manager
Angelique Langston, network manager
Jennie Santos, RST
Marie Borrego, counselor
Linda Diane Scott, RST
Pamela Holub, secretary
Linda Farmer, HRM
Alicia Berry, secretary
Sylvia Hernandez, RST
Connie Phillips, RST
Lester Young, counselor
Reynaldo Ochoa, counselor
Susana Reyna, RST
Reynaldo Alaniz, examiner
Donna Boyd, examiner
Rene Bywater, examiner
D. Christopherson, examiner
Mallinee Diggs, examiner
Lisa Dover, examiner
Cynthia Ewing, examiner
Luis Fierro, admin. tech.
Belma Garcia, examiner
Diane Gill, examiner
Ilene Gray, examiner
Randall Joh, examiner
Sheree Lambert, examiner
Karen Lawrence, examiner
Cathy Ludgate, examiner
Patricia Malave, examiner
John Norman, examiner
Karen Parshall, examiner
William Proszowski, examiner
Cheree Robertson, examiner
Sandra Rodriguez, examiner
Cynthia Uresti, examiner
Kimberly Vickery, examiner
Patricia Wills, clinical records tech.
John Wright, examiner

Congratulations!

Dave Ward is the new deputy commissioner for DDS. Ward has been with DDS since 1974 and has worked his way up through management. He is a recipient of the Doyle Wheeler Award and a two-time winner of TRC's Manager of the Year Award.

Bertha Hinojosa is the new Region III Director, replacing Jim Muhlhauser who retired. Hinojosa most recently was Region II operations director and has been very involved as a lab member and pilot leader of the reengineering project.

Deaths

Melvin Thomas, administrative technician in Records Management, passed away Sept. 7. Thomas had been with the Commission for nearly eight years.

100% and that's a fact

Two field supervisory units, (Tyler/Athens and Rosenberg/Wharton/Bay City/Angleton) recently received a 100 percent program audit. Unit supervisors Dennis Kutach and Elizabeth Rhodes were recognized by the TRC Board for their units' exceptional work. "I don't remember ever seeing a 100 percent audit," says Commissioner Arrell, "And here I have two. I appreciate the quality work these folks are doing to make this happen."



Area Managers Dennis Kutach and Elizabeth Rhodes with Board Member Ray Wilkerson

Four counselors and RSTs were reviewed in each supervisory unit, receiving perfect scores in areas such as documentation, substantial services and verifying employment.

"When Elizabeth and I talked, we found that we approached the audit in the same way, that it was a unit project where teamwork and using everyone's strengths made a difference," says Dennis Kutach. "It was the unit working together that enabled us to achieve the results that we did."

Texas Rehabilitation Commission
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.
Austin, Texas 78751-2399

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*Shayla Fleshman, Editor
Susan Antoniewicz, Design*

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State Service Awards - November 1996

10 Years

Charles Hoskins
Carlynn Huffer
Lucy Petrucelli

15 Years

Molly Lovett
Malaya Wilson

20 Years

Brenda Myers
Brenda Gescheidle
Reynaldo Alaniz

25 Years

James Spiller

30 Years

Evangelina Salinas
Mae Goffney