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trc today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission



TRC's DDS cited for outstanding public service

DDS receives Commissioner's Citation

On March 26 in Denver, DDS was recognized by the Social Security Administration as one of the top DDSs in the nation and was awarded the Commissioner's Citation for "Outstanding Services and Commitment to Excellence in Providing Services." The award is unique in that it is for outstanding service rather than focusing on statistics.

The nomination was made by SSA Regional Office. "The Texas DDS is well organized and staffed with top notch employees," reads the nomination. "... The employees are well trained and dedicated to the mission of providing the best possible services to disability claimants. Visitors at the DDS sense an aura of professionalism that permeates the DDS and have the feeling that the staff is 'taking care of business.' A strong asset is the very capable leadership provided by its managers."

"I see people working extremely hard everyday," says Commissioner Max Arrell. "That's what makes receiving this award special. It belongs to all the staff at DDS who provide quality service."

"We have received great support throughout TRC, which has made all this possible," says Dave Ward, DDS deputy commissioner. "The Commissioner fought for the exception of the FTE cap and travel exceptions for hearings officers. These exceptions enabled us to better handle the increased workload due to welfare reform."

The Office of Disability Hearings also recognized

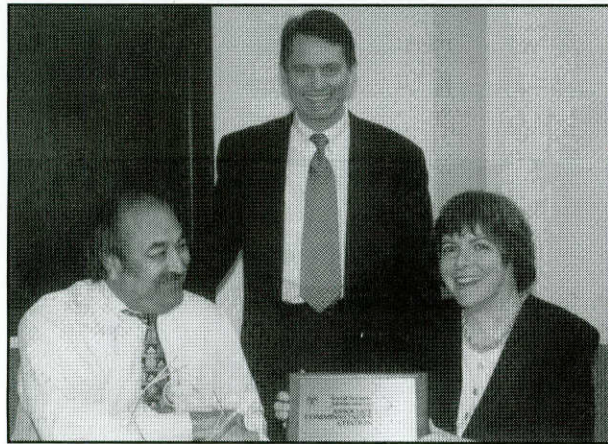
Supervisors in DDS's three Hearings Offices — Reyes Gonzales, Shirley Harwood and Mac Crone — were awarded Associate Commissioner Citations for "outstanding leadership and commitment to public service."

The Texas DDS Office of Disability Hearings has performed exceedingly well under tremendous challenge. To accommodate increased hearings workload brought by welfare reform legislation, the program has expanded from nine to 25 employees over the last two years.

"We first planned to have additional supervisors to oversee expansion, but in



■ Photographed at the DDS management forum held in March in Denver, Colorado are (left to right) Gordon Pence, disability program administrator - SSA Dallas; Dave Ward deputy commissioner - DDS Austin; Kay Chee associate commissioner for Program Operations - DDS Austin; Horace Dickerson, Jr., Social Security regional commissioner - Dallas; Charles Warner, program director, SSA Dallas.



■ Photo: Recipients of the Associate Commissioner Citation for "outstanding leadership and commitment to public service." are (left to right) Reyes Gonzales of Austin, Mac Crone of Houston, and Shirley Harwood of Arlington.

dealing with FTE caps, it was decided that the existing supervisor group would also supervise not only their component but the expansion as well," says Ward. "With the added responsibility of planning the expansion, increased workload and span of coverage, these supervisors and their staff are to be commended."

"But again, even though the award recognizes three individuals, it also represents the across the board team effort of DDS and TRC," adds Ward. "The planning and support for expansion included all aspects of DDS."

"Hearings officers are working harder than ever," says David Norman, director of DDS Special Programs who wrote the nominations for the three supervisors. "These supervisors are doing a yeoman's job in handling a tremendous workload while keeping a high standard of fairness and equity to the beneficiaries."

There are hearings offices in Arlington, Houston and Austin. The purpose of disability hearings is to provide claimants with a face-to-face, interactive setting in which a hearings officer makes an independent judgment as to the eligibility of a claim. Claimants living within a 75-mile radius of the office travel to a hearing. If not, hearings officers travel to them.

Welfare reform has brought new

challenges to the hearings process. The kind of hearings being conducted today are more difficult. Many times, hearings officers are dealing with small children who often become restless in an office setting. Furthermore, it is not unusual to have five or six witnesses there on behalf of the claimant. The hearings officer must maintain control of the meeting and gather the information needed to make a fair adjudication.

"We had to be creative from the very beginning to keep this program growing and viable," says Mac Crone. "We have had excellent leadership in Dave Ward and David Norman," adds Shirley Harwood. "They encouraged us to standardize the process and communicate with each other."

"I believe the key to getting this award is the commitment to the hearings program and to doing it right," says Reyes Gonzales.

"We do this by giving claimants the due process they have coming to them about their claim."

Town Meetings

TRC consumers and clients, parents and disability advocates are invited to discuss TRC services in a series of town meetings to be held around the state. TRC professionals will listen to consumers in May at these scheduled locations:

May 12, 1998 4 to 6 p.m.
Wayland Baptist University
Lubbock Center
4601 83rd Street
Lubbock, Texas 79424
(806) 794-8008

May 14, 1998 9 a.m. to noon
Montgomery County Library
104 IH 45 North
Conroe, Texas 77301
(409) 788-8377

May 21, 1998 5:30 to 8 p.m.
TRC Texarkana Field Office
410 North Baylor Street
Texarkana, Texas 75501
(903) 832-1199

I have freedom ... I have independence ... I have life!

Asophomore in college, Lucinda Harman was no different than most 19-year-olds who think they have it made in the world. She was smart, active, and saw a bright and promising future. When doctors told Harman that she had Ehler-Danlos Syndrome — a rare disorder of the connective tissues that would eventually impact her ability to walk and function normally — she had no idea what was in her future.

Harman spent the next 20 years coping with the disorder that had her in and out of a wheelchair. She married, had a child and adopted one, finished her undergraduate degree in psychology and went on to get a Ph.D. in experimental psychology. Coping with the Ehler-Danlos was an inconvenience, but by maintaining a healthy lifestyle, she managed, for the most part, to keep it in remission. In 1993, that changed.

While living in Hawaii, Harman had an allergic reaction to a toxic spider bite. That brought her out of remission and started a series of difficulties that required her to have 24-hour-a-day care. "I was back in a wheelchair, on oxygen and even lost the ability to speak," said Harman. "My skull bones were pushing in and causing compression on the brain. The doctors were just waiting for me to die, and coping with my illness was causing my husband's health to deteriorate. I felt isolated and angry."

Then, Harman did something radical. She defied doctors' orders, took herself off oxygen, and left her family to fly back to the mainland to get the help she needed. The support she expected didn't materialize, and she suddenly found herself broke,



■ **Photo:** Lucinda Harman proudly displays an old tire which she carries with her in her van. Harman is now on her second set of wheelchair tires. "I like to be productive and this van and wheelchair help me do that," said Harman. She teaches at Mary Hardin Baylor University, works as a private consultant with Cambridge, is president of the Central Texas Area Rehabilitation Association. She is project coordinator for the Area Agency on Aging's Developmental Disabilities Coalition, and writes training curriculum and poetry.

homeless, unemployed and coping with a severe disability. She finally "bit the bullet" and called her parents in West Texas.

In West Texas, she began physical therapy and worked to regain her independence. In therapy six hours a day, six days a week, she regained some ability to walk. With no transportation, she found herself confined to her

parent's quasi-accessible house. She sent out letters and resumes, and was offered a teaching position at Mary Hardin Baylor (MHB) University in Temple.

A month later, Harman found herself back in a wheelchair. The doctors encouraged her to go back into therapy, but that meant six days a week again. "I could choose a life of therapy, or I could choose life," said Harman. "I chose life."

Harman's wheelchair was in bad repair. She had to drive it backwards to get up hills and frequently had to be rescued. "It's pretty bad when you hitchhike in a wheelchair," laughed Harman. "My boss at MHB said 'you need help' and sent me to Judy Marvel at TRC. Judy said 'we can help,' but I still couldn't see how. I just didn't know."

With Judy's encouragement and TRC's help, Harman's life began to change. The first order was to get an appropriate wheelchair, equipped with a lift for reaching file cabinets and writing on the chalkboard. "My trusty steed goes 10 mph downhill, has headlights, a horn, and signals, and the front-wheel drive allows me to go places I couldn't go before," said Harman. "It doesn't cook breakfast and it doesn't slice bread, but it does just about everything else."

"I have a very low tolerance

for idleness, and my wheelchair helped me start being productive again," said Harman. "With Judy's encouragement, I now had the freedom to do some of the things I like to do." Soon, however, that freedom required more extensive transportation.

Harman got a van, and TRC helped with necessary modifications. "It's my golden chariot," says Harman. "Her name is 'Rosie' and she has brought me more freedom than I ever imagined. This vehicle gives me the transportation I need to participate in life."

"Judy kept saying 'You've got a lot! You can do it!'" recalled Harman. "She was my brain at times because I did not realize what is possible. TRC gave me my independence back, and Judy helped me when I was emotionally fragile — always encouraging, always finding solutions. Now, I am involved in life again. I am back to teaching, and my classes are overfilled. I have freedom, I have independence, I have life!"

THE BODY

*I miss so much the body,
the reach and stretch
the ability to whirl and twirl
in imitation of the leaves
blazing in the autumn crisp
blowing in the wind.*

*I miss so much the body,
the spring and fall
the ability to leap and writhe
in imitation of the phoenix
flying, soaring to the sun
crashing to the earth
rising once again from ashes.*

*I miss so much the body,
the twist and flex
the ability to arch and curl
in imitation of the birth
of love, marking rhythm
new and old, creating joy,
ecstasy and mirth.*

1998, Lucinda Harman

See more of Harman's poetry in our online edition

Read more about Harman's activities at:
<http://www.compuserve.com/~Harman1>
<http://www.bbm.vom/~combridg>
or e-mail her at:
LHarman@compuserve.com

Employees who have received 12 maximizers

MARCH 1998

REGION 4
Virginia Easterwood
Angela LaBar
Phillip Roddy
Fran Wester
Suzanne Baxter

REGION 5
Albert Lozano
Carolyn Dougherty
Irma Mancinelli
CyDeana Ramirez
Aaron Wallace

Making our dollars count ... Client Purchase training

When you want to make a purchase, it's usually a fairly simple process. You do a little shopping, pull out your checkbook or credit card (if you're lucky, cash) and you're done. At TRC, it's a little more complex than that, but steps have been taken to simplify the process and place the purchasing power in the hands of those directly serving our clients. But with this privilege comes responsibility.

In June, field staff will be trained on how to make the best

possible use of that purchasing privilege. The six-hour training has been designed to use interactive exercises and video to make it useful and interesting. An in-service training grant is covering the cost of travel for 40 employees across the state who will come to Austin for "train the trainer" activities in May.

"The objective of the training is to provide all our purchasing agents statewide with a consistent package of information on how to use this purchasing privilege in

an effective, responsible and ethical manner," says David Johnston, director of Technical Services in BSS. "It is also to provide folks on the front lines the means to provide the best possible goods and services to our clients."

"Now that everyone has this privilege, we want to make sure they use it correctly," adds Dawn Bosley, trainer, who played a central role in developing the training. One of the outcomes we hope in this training is to get counselors to use a consistent thinking process before making a purchase."

Bosley says the thinking process comes down to three questions:

1. Why am I making this purchase?
2. How does it relate to the rehabilitation outcome?
3. What is the best value?

The training also explores the concepts of informed client choice and determining what services are essential. "First, we need to be getting clients involved up front with the decision of what will be purchased and which provider will be used," says Bosley. "Also, how do you determine what is essential to the rehabilitation outcome? Each purchase should provide clients with the opportunity to work or to live independently."

"A special work group comprised of BSS, HRD, Management Audit, Automated Services, Programs and Field Operations are to be commended for the creative approach they took to this training," says Linda Loucks, director of Buyer Support Services, who chaired the workgroup. "With the authority of making the purchases comes the responsibility and accountability to make the purchases within guidelines placed upon TRC in this area. We don't want to do anything to jeopardize the purchasing privilege we enjoy as an agency. That's what makes this training so important."

TRC DDS hosts national systems meeting



■ Photo: Participating in a planning session at the national systems meeting in Austin are (left to right) Doug Willman, president of NCDDD and administrator of Nebraska DDS; Jim Preissner, SSA associate commissioner; Charlie Warner, Dallas Regional Office; and John DiPalermo, New York DDS.

On March 3-5, the TRC DDS hosted a national systems meeting in Austin, a milestone event in DDSs. This first-time event included 13 federal SSA representatives and eight representatives from other state DDSs. They met to address software and hardware issues related to the SSA's new nationwide computer system, known as the Intelligent Work Station Local Area Network (IWS/LAN).

In August 1996, the DDS formed a systems consortium representing three primary systems groups of DDSs throughout the nation. The meeting was a result of 18 months of work by the consortium and the National Council of Disability Determination Directors (NCDDD).

"By the close of the meeting, SSA staff acknowledged that they had a newfound understanding of the DDS environment, mission, and requirements," said Judy Sandberg, director of Systems Development at TRC DDS. They also recognized that DDSs should retain local autonomy over their automated systems and developed 28 action items geared at achieving mutual goals. The goals will benefit all 54 DDSs and are geared to better serve the needs of the public.

Across the State

Welcome Aboard

March 1998

Lisa Lopez, accounting clerk
Diane Soucy, counselor
Tashee Leggett, counselor
Sylvia Traylor-Davenport, counselor
Melanie Savins, counselor
Shin-I Chiang, counselor
Bruce Grissom, counselor
Janelle Eastham, counselor
Mary Scheffler-Chrowl, RST
David Trevino, counselor
Elsa Guerrero, DST
Marvin King, DST
Rachel Gonzales, disability case review specialist
Linda Reyna, DST
Pauline Kindy, DST
Donald Hall, admin. tech.
Lois Jarmon, disability case review specialist
Amanda Manas, DST

Retirements

March 31, 1998

Billye F. Austin, operations administrative technician at DDS, retired with 20 years of state service.
On March 31, Counselor Bettie M. Rozell, Tyler Field Office, retired with 26 years of state service.
Barbara Hammons, DST at DDS, retired with 10 years of state service.
RST Irma Mancinelli, San Antonio West Field Office, had 27 years of state service upon her retirement.

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

Here is an excerpt from a letter sent to Debra Harvey by a disability claimant. Debra works in the Disability Hearings Office in Houston.

My SSI will keep on going thanks to your time and consideration ... I do appreciate the time and overall evaluation you gave. You are a great asset to your office and I wish there were more understanding people like you working for Social Security. ♡

See our online edition for more letters written to TRC staff.

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Address Service Requested

trc today

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Shayla Fleshman, Editor
Prissy Pense, Writing & Photography

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State Service Awards - April 1998

10 Years

Lori Friesenhahn
Marion Walkner
Jeri Badgett
Carol Mason
James Geiger
Betty Lee
Joyce Fielder

15 Years

Sharon Miller
Adrienne McCain
Rosalinda Rodriguez

20 Years

Claire Vogler
Carmen Cullers
Lillian Fisher
Dana Hoffmann

25 Years

Charles Harrison Jr.
Amy Bloebaum
Dorothy Monnig
Susie Young

30 Years

Minnie Salinas

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