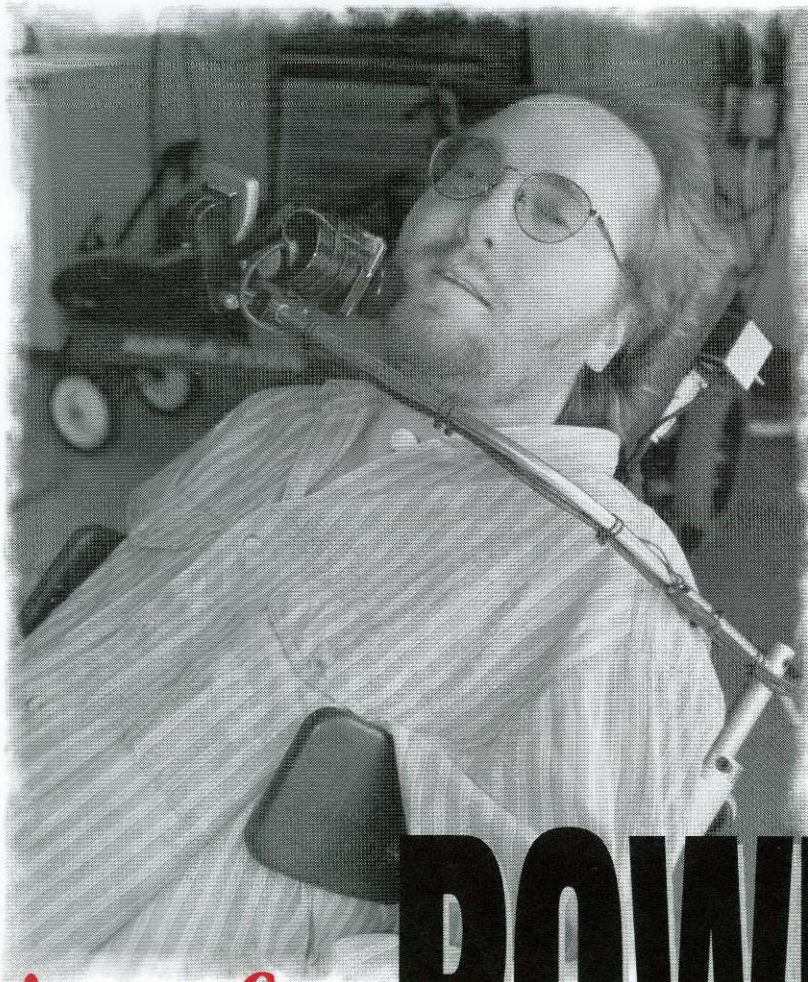


Vol. 21 No. 3 March 1998

trc today

An Employee Newsletter for Texas Rehabilitation Commission



Passion for **POWER**

Jim Finch had a desire to go places no wheelchair could take him. Read how TRC and his family helped Jim turn his passion into reality.

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Texas Rehabilitation
Commission
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.
Austin, Texas 78751-2399
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FAMILY helps fantasy come true!

It's not uncommon for a young man to fantasize driving a Range Rover or a Porsche. What *is* uncommon is that Jim Finch, who is quadriplegic, fantasized that he could trek about in a power wheelchair that would be a blend of both of these vehicles. Jim wanted to go places no power wheelchair had ever gone. He had an imbedded spirit of adventure, and coming from an adventurous family of inventors, Jim's fantasy was destined to become reality.

Jim became quadriplegic in 1978 while traveling home from a vacation in Colorado with his family. The car they were traveling in was hit head-on, leaving one son dead and Jim with a broken neck. His father, Tom Finch, provided CPR, literally breathing for 14-year-old Jim for the five hours it took medical crews to get to the remote New Mexico area.

Jim's C-1 spinal-cord injury held the family hostage to many hours in hospitals, not knowing if he would ever be able to breathe for himself or even survive. Jim was at the brink of death as his weight dropped to 54 pounds. "I could not have survived without the support of my family," says Jim. "I know it was difficult on them, but they were there with me every step of the way."

Jim's health finally stabilized, and he returned home and worked to get his high school diploma. That goal attained, he wanted to go to college. "TRC was very instrumental in encouraging him to go to college," says Jan Finch, Jim's stepmother. "His TRC counselor challenged Jim, and that was exactly what he needed."

Jim had an insatiable curiosity and interest in computers. TRC worked with San Antonio College

(SAC) to develop a correspondence program that allowed Jim to get a degree in computer programming. Though the cumbersome wheelchair and life-sustaining devices Jim required created mobility difficulties, Jim wanted to physically go to his classes at SAC. His family worked to help make that happen.

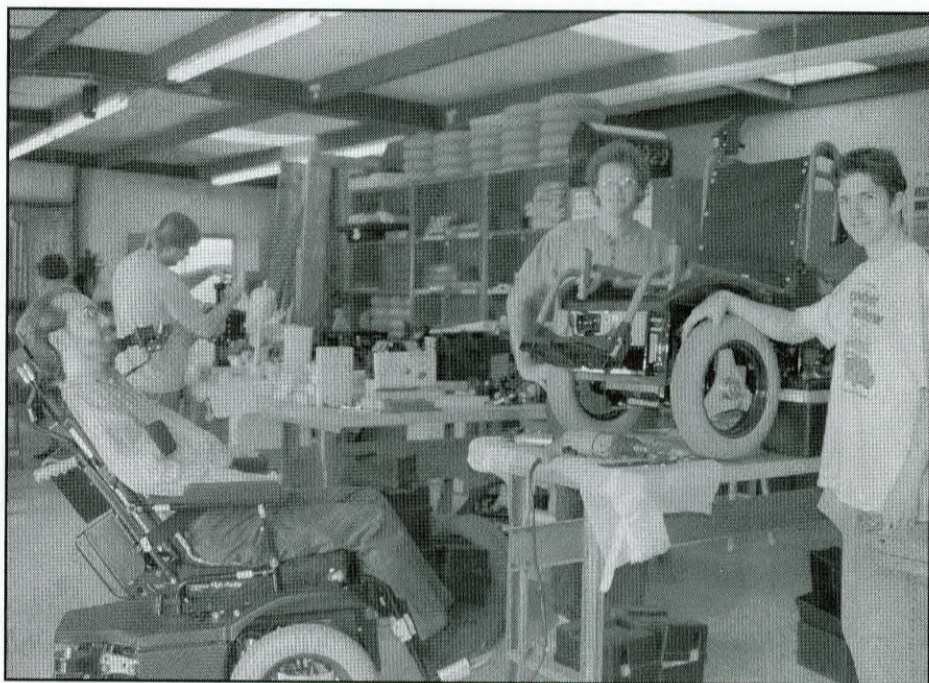
"This family is incredible," says Bill Glenn, area manager in San Antonio. "You present a problem and they will come up with a way to solve it."

Jim's family bought a 1973 van and began ripping it apart. Soon the redesigned van was equipped to transport Jim to and from school. "It was pretty primitive at the time, and the fold-up channel ramps were scary, but it was better than staying home," recalled Jim.

Jim completed his Associate of Arts degree in computer programming and computer assisted design (CAD) and went to work as a computer programmer at the 50-Off Store. He did not, however, give up his fantasy to trek about the hill country where he lives with his family and go on their outings down to the river in his wheelchair. The Finches went to trade shows to find a chair that would meet Jim's needs, but none was available.

Encouraged by his dad, Jim began to use his CAD skills to design a chair that would make his fantasy come true. "All I wanted was a powered chair that could travel 10 miles per hour while pulling 500 pounds up a 25 percent grade," laughed Jim. "How I was going to achieve this goal was a mystery to me, but I was intent on figuring it out."

Three years later, Jim completed designing a transaxle for a new wheelchair. Jim's dad



Jim with brother, Tom Finch (center) and Bryce Conard (right) work together to develop new products in the family manufacturing plant.

— an experienced inventor of several aeronautical designs — drafted the patent language for Jim's transaxle. They received their approval from the U.S. Patent Office and began to develop a game plan.

In February 1995, the family began manufacturing the first prototype with a simple goal — to build the best powered wheelchair in the world.

Each family member had a specific role. "Dad, my brother Tommy and I worked on the engineering and electronics, while Jan made arrangements for booth space at a trade show in November," said Jim. Tables, computers, plotters and file cabinets transformed the family living room into a CAD center. The grand piano became the drawing area and conference table. Finally, at the end of October the big day arrived.

Jim performed the test drive riding around the driveway and sidewalks. Then he cautiously led a parade of spectators down the gravel trail to the river and back. Excitement filled the air as Jim ended the escapade with a perfect donut spin in the driveway. The family celebrated by christening the prototype as the OmegaTrac™.

The OmegaTrac's™ patented transaxle drive provided consistent steering and maneuvering. True tracking and precise steering capabilities gave it exceptional

response in confined or open spaces. In the OmegaTrac™, Jim could safely travel over side slopes, down grades with up to 30 percent slope, over rocks, gravel, up escalators and through many other environmental obstacles.

The OmegaTrac™ was an undeniable hit at the '95 Medtrade show in Atlanta, Georgia. Jim and his family have had to hire people to help build more of them while they work on other products to introduce at next year's trade shows.

Jim got the power he wanted. His revolutionary power wheelchair has changed that market, and opened doors for Jim that he never dreamed possible. He has also established himself in the world of design for aircraft and continues to design new products to help make life better for people with disabilities.

For more information on the OmegaTrac™, check out Jim's website at

<http://www.teftec.com>

or the Medtrade show at

http://www.teamrehab.com/dec97/medtrade_products.htm

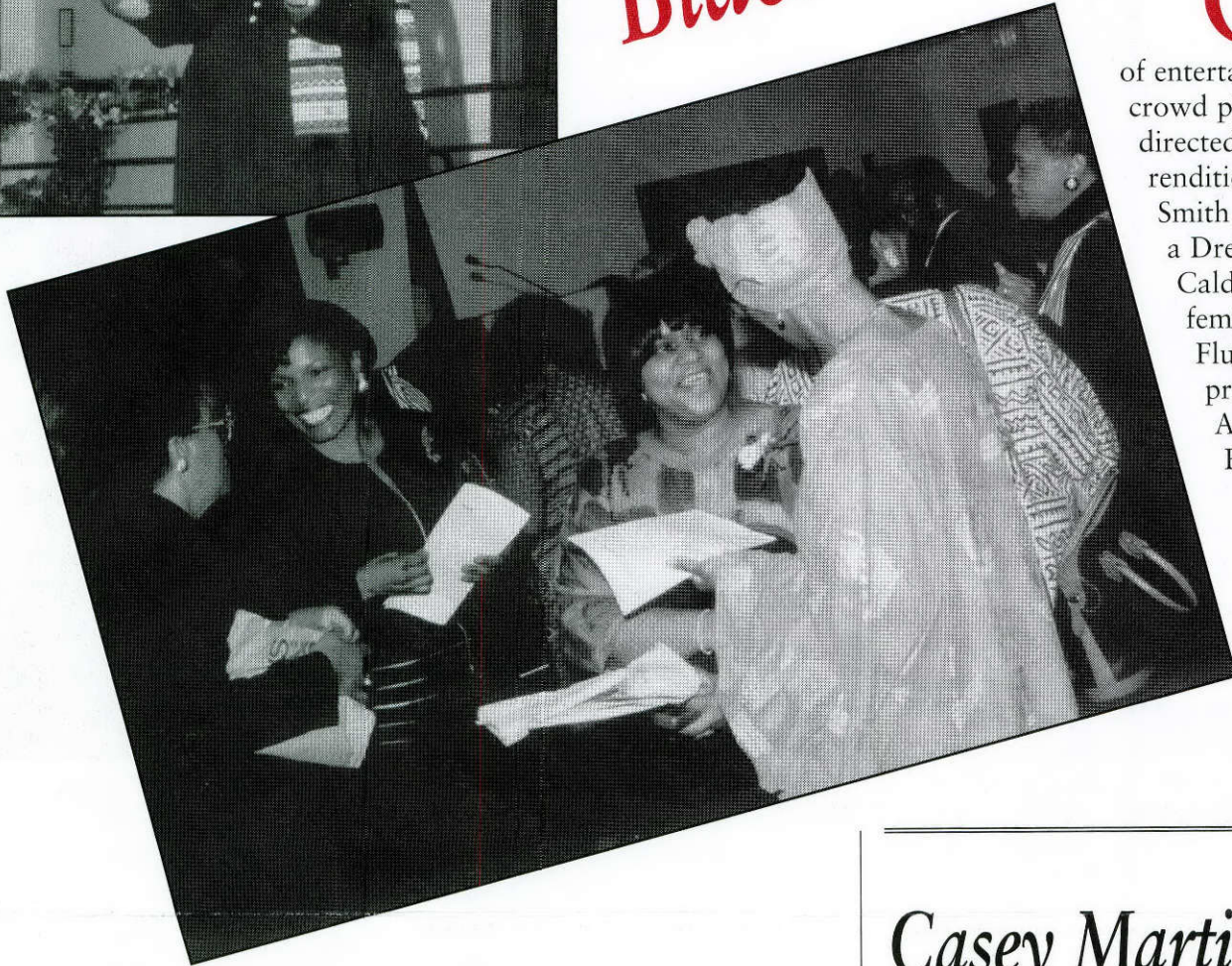
He can also be contacted by telephone at 830-885-7588.



Black History Celebration

On Feb. 26, the Fourth Annual Black History Month Celebration was held at DDS. Living up to its high standard of entertainment and introspection, the event was a crowd pleaser. The State Agency Mass Choir, directed by Harriet Harding, gave rousing renditions of several traditional gospel tunes. Kyle Smith re-enacted Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, and high school student Leah Caldwell stole the show with her decidedly feminist story of Sojourner Truth. Dr. Lauri Fluker, keynote speaker, made a thought-provoking presentation on "African Americans In Business: The Path Toward Empowerment."

The event was made possible through the Multi-Agency Black History Committee, and their fund raising efforts garnered an additional \$2,000 for the Sickle Cell Disease Association.



Photos: (Above) Leola Smith of the Health and Human Services Commission performs "Creation" by James Weldon Johnson. (Right) DDS staff Margery Mackey, Tamara Ross-Miller (left) and Joan Roberts-Scott (far right) visit with Dr. Lauri Fluker, keynote speaker, (center) after the event. Marnette Walker of Central Office is shown at right in the background.

PIO Listens

In August 1997, TRC Today went high tech with our online edition. We gave our intranet readers an opportunity to tell us what they thought, and here is what some had to say.

On a scale of one to five, 80 percent of you said you liked our online edition better and it was easy to navigate. Thirteen percent gave us a grade two, and there were no ones. So, is our online edition easier to read? Sixty-six percent of you said yes, while 33 percent said it was more difficult.

We heard what you said and have made some changes since that first issue. Because the online space is not as limited as our printed version, this gives us the opportunity to give you more photos and more information. We can publish almost all of the letters you send us now. This is

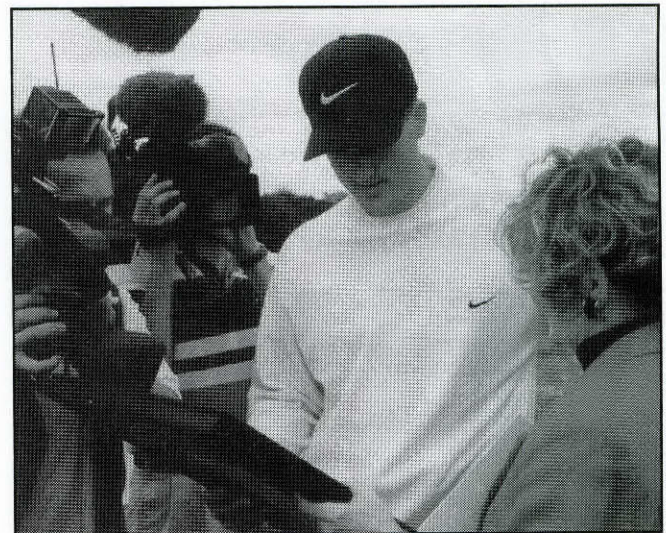
also your opportunity to share some photos — just send them to us so we can share it statewide.

Our online tutorial now makes it easier for readers who are not yet comfortable with online information. We originally gave you smaller, bimonthly versions. Our most recent versions are large monthly editions.

We like your responses and we read every one. We have tried to make each issue a little better and easier for you to read. But, we're human and may make some mistakes. Let us know what you think. If you like something, we will try to do more. If you don't like something, please give us your suggestions. The TRC Today is an employee newsletter intended for your information. It's up to you to help us make it better.

Be sure to check out this month's online edition at:
<http://www.trcnet/trctoday/online.html>

Casey Martin stays the course



Casey Martin accepts certificate of recognition from Prissy Pense of TRC's Public Information Office.

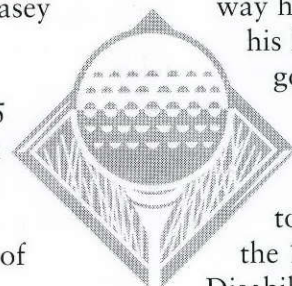
TRC recognized Casey Martin with a certificate of recognition when the 25 year old came to Austin to compete in the Nike Tour's Greater Austin Open held at The Hills of Lakeway.

Martin has the rare and incurable Klippel Trenaunay-Weber Syndrome, a degenerative circulatory disorder that causes bleeding in his leg and knee, particularly after stress. The disease has caused his right leg to be so weak that walking long distances is impossible.

Martin found that the only

way he had a chance to follow his lifelong dream to play golf was if he were allowed to ride in a cart. The PGA rules prohibit that. Martin took them to court, citing the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. The Austin tournament was Martin's first since a federal judge in Oregon ruled in his favor. It has been a controversial decision, and it is not over yet.

Martin's actions have garnered a ground swell of public support and given others with disabilities the inspiration to follow their dreams.



TRC says farewell to a good friend

On Monday, Jan. 26, TRC lost a special friend and employee when Bobby Grant, regional director for Region III, died unexpectedly from a heart attack. He was 48 years old.

Bobby began his 19-year career with TRC as a VR counselor in Houston. He worked in various Houston offices before moving to Fort Worth in 1985. "Bobby was noted for his fairness and his ability to work with clients and vendors," recalled Joyce Cooley, MSS who worked with Bobby in the Houston Central field office. "He valued the worth of individuals and encouraged others to strive for excellence."

Promoted to area manager in 1989, his staff produced the highest in the region for many years due to his leadership. "He realized that the 'stats' were not just numbers but were individuals helped



to a better life," recalled Frankie Watson, regional director in Houston.

In March 1994, Bobby moved to Austin assuming the program director position for Region III until Nov. 1, 1997 when he became the regional director.

Bobby was also active in TRAN, TRA, TARS, TRAA, and HARA, serving on many committees through the years. He worked closely with HARA at the Astrodome, and was named TARS Boss of the Year in 1993.

"Bobby was a very special person," says Mary Wolfe, deputy commissioner for Field

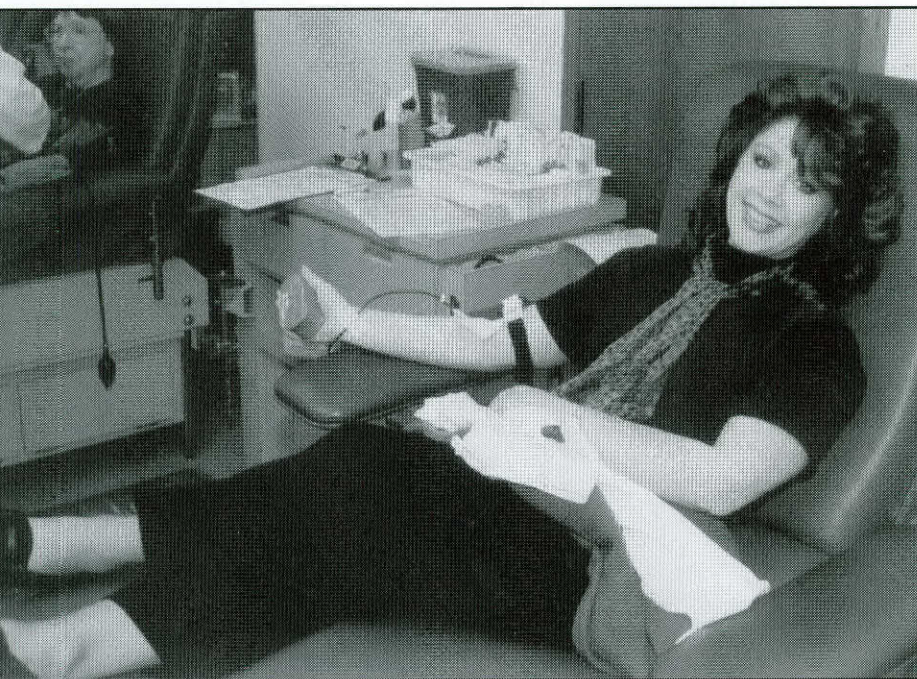
Operations /External Affairs. "His greatest accomplishment was the effect he had on the lives of those around him as he listened and encouraged them to follow their dreams." Survived by his wife, Ophelia, and 5-year old son, Joshua, Bobby left many friends in TRC. We will miss him.

TRC Blood Drive helps sustain life in Central Texas

TRC plays a vital role in helping supply 19 hospitals with blood products, according to a press release from the Blood and Tissue Center of Central Texas. On Jan. 27, TRC held its first blood drive of the year in Central Texas with 26 Central Office employees giving blood. DDS-Austin participated when 25 employees gave blood on March 4.

Each unit of blood is processed into three different blood components to be transfused to three patients, so 153 people were touched by the units donated from the TRC blood drives. TRC receives one credit for each pint of blood donated. The credits are used to help TRC employees and their immediate family members who need blood.

The next blood drive for Central Office is scheduled on April 14 and DDS is on May 12. Both dates will be morning only. Central Office staff may contact the human resources office at



424-4858, or DDS staff may contact Terri Hefner at 437-8877 to schedule an appointment. Non Central Texas employees may contact either Chuck Smith at 512-424-4329 or Hefner to find out how to participate in a blood drive in your area.

Photo: Renee Johnston of the Commissioner's Office gives blood at the Blood and Tissue Center of Central Texas. "I try to donate as often as I can," says Johnston. "It is one way I can help someone else, and that makes me feel good." Donors must wait 56 days before they can donate blood again. Johnston goes in every other month and has almost reached the three-gallon mark.

Across the State

Welcome Aboard

March 1998

Marcia Abbey, HR assistant

Reta Potts, RST

Walter Roy, counselor

Rachelle Holt, counselor

Kristi Uhlemann, counselor

Oswaldo Garza, counselor

Delbert Gardner, Jr., counselor

Kendall Guidry, counselor

Vicki O'Meara, counselor

James Bayles, counselor

Maria Gonzalez, counselor

Lilly Rodriguez, DST

Tamara Culberson, DST

Carolyn Hill, contract technician

David McDowell, contract technician

Tania Waters, DST

Lillian Garrett, DST

Retirements

Pete Medina, data base administrator in the Information Services Management of Central Office, retired with 13 years of service on Feb. 28, 1998.

Gloria Lopez, systems support specialist in the Budget Office of Central Office, retired on Feb. 28 with 27 years of service.

Douglas B. Harrison retired from the Austin Regional Office. He was a staff services officer and has 30 years of service.

Arlington Field Office Counselor Sonia Nixon retired Feb. 28 with 14 years of service.

Congratulations

Tony Lawrence was named as the new Region III regional director. Lawrence most recent position was as program director after serving as area manager of the East Austin Field Office for nine years.

Deaths

Retired TRC Counselor Jerome Duderstadt passed away on Feb. 19, 1998. He had worked in the Bryan area.



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Shayla Fleshman, Editor
Prissy Pense, Writing & Photography

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State Service Awards - March 1998

10 Years

Karen Beard
Larry Juergens
Russell A. Smith

Anita Edwards
Sandra Hogue
Teresa Mason Bolden
Sylvia Gomez
Q. Yvette Humphrey
Shari Maynard
Linda Shell

15 Years

Virginia De La Vega
Lori Petty
Sherwin Sanders
Elizabeth Salinas

20 Years

Linda Cage
Abigail Arguijo

Debra Lambright
Linda D. Baker
Lorraine Scott

25 Years

Linda Loucks
Earnestine Williams
Rebecca Anglemyre
Vangie Casares
Kaye Costin
Major Craddock
William Johnson

Isaac Ramirez
Bruce Rollman
John F. Wright

30 Years

Darlene Boykin
Wendell Rowland
Delia Villareal

Correction

Stacy Kevin Bible was incorrectly listed as Stacy Kevin in the new hires last month.

