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# TRC TODAY

Out of a class of 16, Carol McKinney, Joycnette Johnican and Cynthia Thomas just completed their new counselor orientation together. And that's not all they have in common. All three started with TRC as secretaries and/or RSTs before moving their way up to other positions and finally to counselors.

"I've always done extra duties because I felt that they were opportunities for me to learn," says Cynthia Thomas, who has been with TRC in the Houston Central Field Office for 14 years. Thomas worked full time while attending school part time to obtain her degree.

"I've had a lot of on-the-job training," adds Joycnette Johnican, who is also in the Houston Central Field Office and has worked for TRC for 25 years. "As medical services coordinator at T.I.R.R., I had a lot of client contact and felt prepared to move into the counselor position.



I knew almost right away that I wanted to be a counselor.

Carol McKinney

I've done extra duties because I felt that they were opportunities for me to learn.

Cynthia Thomas



As you perform different job functions, you see many angles and ways of looking at things.

Joycnette Johnican

"I knew almost right away that I wanted to be a counselor," says Carol McKinney, who was a RST in the Dallas North-east Field Office and is now in the Dallas South-west Unit.

MAR 22 1994

All three employees agree that their past experience with TRC is going to benefit them as a counselor. "As you perform different job functions, you see so many angles and ways of looking at things," says Johnican. "It takes about three years to really see the big picture here," adds

McKinney. "You don't have that coming from the outside. I think we are more ready to hit the ground running."

The women also say that support from their managers and other employees has allowed them to progress. Thomas and Johnican, both being from the same unit, say that the encouragement they received from Area Manager Bobby Grant and Region IV Director Frankie Watson really made the difference.

# Moving on UP

TRC TODAY is a newsletter for the employees of the Texas Rehabilitation Commission.

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# Getting on TRAC

TRAC — the Texas Rehabilitation Advisory Council, a newly formed governor appointed consumer advisory council for TRC, kicked off its first meeting Jan. 26.

This new Council, mandated by the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, replaces TRC's former Consumer Advisory Committee. The main difference between the two is now, the governor appoints its members instead of TRC's Commissioner.

The Council will still advise the agency on program and policy changes and act as a sounding board between TRC and the disability community.

But with new faces and new responsibilities mandated by the Rehabilitation Act Amendments, the Council's role will take on a new dimension.

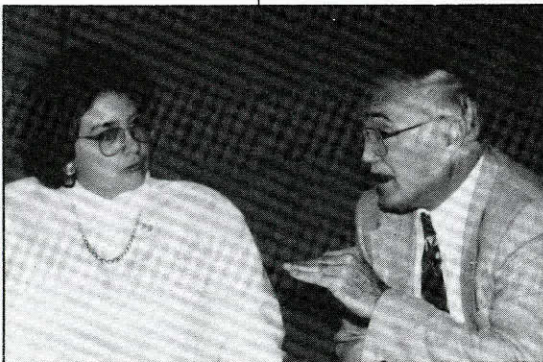
"Forming TRAC has been a wonderful experience," says Kaye Beneke, assistant commissioner for Consumer Affairs. "A cross section of disability advocates played a major role in the nomination screening process and the Governor's Office was receptive and cooperative all the way. It just could not have gone any smoother."

Commissioner Arrell expressed pride in the council in his opening remarks and offered some advice for its members: "We do not want a rubber stamp. All of you have had personal experience with disability and many of you with TRC. We want to benefit from those experiences."

Celia Israel, appointments administrator from Gov. Richards' office, was also on hand at the meeting. "Input from disability advocates made the formation of this council much easier and gave us excellent nominations to choose from," she said. "We now need for you to speak up and be part of the team."

TRAC didn't waste any time in getting down to business. Judith Sokolow from Advocacy, Inc. was named chairperson, a task force was formed to decide what subcommittees will be needed and a smaller task force was made to develop a job description for a TRC support person for the Council.

"TRAC is definitely on track," says Beneke. "So far, they have done an outstanding job in absorbing huge amounts of information on TRC. We look forward to some really good things to come out of this council."



**We now need  
for you  
to speak up  
and be part  
of the team.**

Celia Israel

*Top: Arrell with  
Celia Israel.*

*Right: New council  
member Rena  
Ventura-Jackson  
introducing herself  
to other members.*





## Here comes Liz Gregowicz

DDS's new Associate Commissioner Liz Gregowicz became a truckdriver to get to her new job at the 118 Riverside building. It shows the determination she displayed in getting the job and the active role she will have at DDS.

Moving from her job at the Arizona DDS in Tucson, Gregowicz found all the moving vans taken in December, so she and her sister rented a moving truck, hitched her car to the back and hit the road to Austin. Now she's glad to be here.

"Texans have been extremely friendly and I

am really impressed with the DDS employees I've met," says Gregowicz. "In Tucson, a goal was getting employees to realize that they had common problems and that everyone was part of the solution. I already find that to be the case here. I feel like I'm at home and am looking forward to meeting all the units."

"I was impressed with Liz's performance record in Tucson," says Ken Vogel, deputy commissioner for DDS. "Her DDS branch in Tucson received the Governor's Award for Excellence for decreasing processing



time in half as well as reducing the stage pending workload by half. In the few short weeks Liz has been here, she has demonstrated an eagerness to help DDS achieve its goals of timely and quality service."

I was impressed with Liz's performance record in Tucson.

Ken Vogel

## The parking patrol has come to Austin

The idea is spreading around the country — community volunteers helping to police the frustrating problem of able-bodied people swiping disabled parking spaces.

And now this solution has come to Austin, Texas. City Council recently passed an ordinance creating a Volunteer Disabled Parking Enforcement Program. Out of about 250 people applying, around two dozen volunteers were initially given authority to issue tickets to those unqualified to park in spaces for disabled people's cars.

Jerry Reed, chairperson of the Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities and communications

supervisor of the Austin Police Department, says that an average five complaints about parking violations are called in to police each day but that they are a low priority because of more serious offenses such as assaults are keeping police busy.

Reed says that there are misconceptions of what constitutes legal usage of handicapped parking identification and that people just get in a hurry and think there's no harm done if they use the space for a few minutes.

The volunteers have taken classes to recognize what constitutes proper identification and if a car doesn't have proper ID, the car will be issued a \$50 fine.





# American Indian Project

In 1986, Mary Valentini, Region I director, came across special provisions for American Indians in the Rehab Act and, since the Tigua reservation was in her region, it sparked her interest. She soon found TRC was not meeting their special needs.

About the same time, James L. Jackson, executive deputy commissioner, also recognized

that American Indians were underserved and is largely responsible for expanding the American Indian Project statewide to where it is today.

In Texas, there are three Indian reservations: the Alabama Coushatta in Livingston, the Kickapoo in Eagle Pass, the Tigua in El Paso and there are also large urban Native American populations in the Dallas/Fort Worth and Houston areas. There are about 75,000 American Indians currently living in the state.

TRC has systematically developed a program to actively reach out to American Indians, resulting in significant increases in American Indian referrals.

First, TRC conducted conferences with community health representatives and tribal councils to get an understanding of their needs. As a result of that, work groups were established to define project goals and develop action plans.

Also around the same time period, Jackson visited an Indian reservation in Arizona and brought home some key

concepts that influenced TRC efforts. One was to hire American Indians to serve American Indians. Another was to conduct a needs assessment to determine what sort of services were needed.

"We came upon new challenges in dealing with this program," says Johnny Weddington, program specialist for the American Indian Project since 1991. "Our first challenge was to get the word out. This is a hard-to-reach minority and they are typically skeptical of working with 'outsiders.' It is also necessary to recognize that each tribe is very distinct — with their own language, customs and religion," says Weddington, "and each tribe is at a different stage of awareness and trust in our services."

Since 1991, the number of American Indians TRC has served increased 45 percent, from 214 in 1991 to 409 in 1993. "There are a lot of reasons for the increase. There are now 11 professional-level TRC employees who are American Indians and we are gaining more support from Tribal Councils. And we have had a great



*Catholic and Indian traditions blend together in the Tigua tribe. Above is the "manda" ceremony.*



deal of commitment in employees working with American Indians such as Larry Smith, area manager and Counselor Richard Yahola who have done a tremendous job in their area," says Weddington.

### The Tiguas

Three hundred years ago, a small tribe of Tiguas, displaced by the violent Pueblo Revolt, settled near El Paso. In the late 1800s, their land was confiscated by Anglos and their culture was slowly engulfed by other cultures as the city of El Paso developed around them.

Because of discrimination, the Tiguas learned to speak Spanish and hid who they were. Their language, culture and religion were in danger of dying out. In the 1960s, the Tiguas fought for national and state recognition and they achieved it. They now regulate their own affairs as a sovereign Indian nation and have since successfully preserved their traditions.

On their reservation, the Tiguas built a cultural center and successfully maintain a restaurant. A recent addition is a large bingo hall in the complex, which is creating new jobs.



*Guadalupe De Leon and Connie Benford in front of a pueblo style house on the Tigua reservation. De Leon reports that now, many Tiguas relate to and trust Connie Benford and are calling her directly, which is a big step in trust.*

The Tiguas have come a long way but they still face many problems. Disabilities, such as substance abuse, diabetes and back injuries, are common occurrences in the tribe.

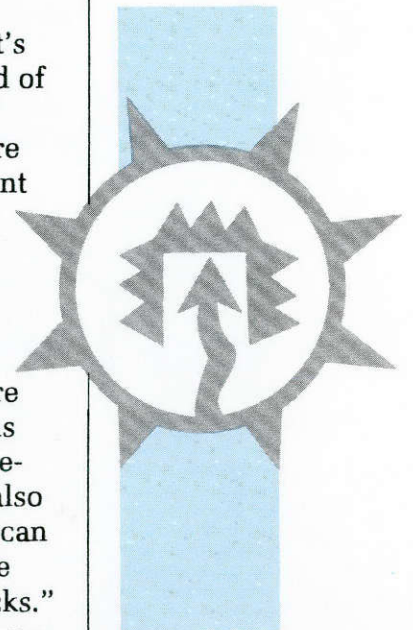
Before April, there were only three TRC clients who were Tigua. Now, there are 23 people served and the number is steadily going up. Much of the reason for this success is a new TRC employee, Guadalupe (Pica) De Leon. De Leon is Tigua and has been able to bridge the gap between the two cultures.

De Leon's position with TRC is services coordinator and she works with Counselor Connie Benford to serve the Tigua population in El Paso. Before that De Leon acted as TRC liaison, but she says that she was very limited in this position because, not being an employee,

she had very limited knowledge of the VR process and thus could not communicate effectively.

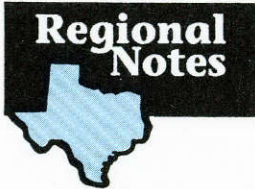
"Now I know what's really being done and of TRC's commitment," says De Leon. "Before the Tribal Council sent TRC the wrong types of referrals and people were turned away. That caused them not to trust us. Now I know that there are different programs available such as Independent Living and also similar benefits they can receive so that no one falls through the cracks."

"These people are my father, my brother, my uncle, my grandfather," says De Leon. "I will take the extra steps to make sure they get what they need because they are my family."



*The symbol for the Tiguas in El Paso. The arrow points to their original homeland in New Mexico.*





### Region I

Willie Jones was selected as counselor in the Odessa Field Office.

Ricky Turner is a new counselor in the Big Spring Field Office.

Stephanie Sparks was selected as RST in the Amarillo TRC/DHS Field Office.

### Region II

Henry Serrano was selected as counselor in the Fort Worth Field Office West.

### Region III

Doug Harrison is the new administrative director in Region III. Harrison has been with TRC for 26 years, most recently as administrative officer in Houston.

Janie Escobedo is the new MSS in the Austin East Field Office. Escobedo has been with TRC for eight years as RST in the same office.

### Region V

Mary Louise Montalvo was selected as RST in the San Antonio Central Field Office.

Gene Tone joined the staff at the San Antonio Central Field Office.

### Region VI

Cynthia Stewart and Charles Stevens were selected as counselors in the Plano Field Office. Paula Casey has been appointed RST for Stevens. Stewart is returning to TRC after being with Richland College for 11 years. Stevens is a retired Central Office employee.

Jack Norville has returned to employment with TRC and his RST, Lynne Sharits, have moved to the HEB Field Office.

### Central Office

William Churchill, assistant commissioner for Legal Services, left TRC in January to become a Federal Court Judge for Health and Human Services in Los Angeles.

Mike Noble was selected as the Grants/Contract Specialist I - Auditor in the Grants and Contracts Unit. Noble is retired from the Navy and has experience with the government in contracting and Community Block Grant programs.

Johna Kay Ramirez joined the Public Information Office as video journalist. She comes to TRC from KVUE-TV.

Desiny Irwin was selected as the new travel technician in the Claims Section. Irwin had been working as a temporary in the Travel section for the last six months.

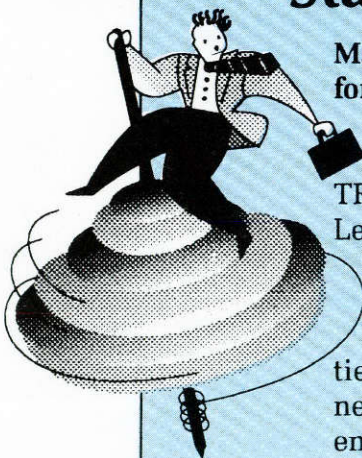
Ruth Ann Bryant has been certified as a professional secretary. Bryant is in the Security Administration Office. Congratulations, Ruth!

## Stay on Top

Managers here is a program for you!

HRD proudly announces TRC's first extensive Management/Leadership Development System.

Developed and written by employees from all facets of the Commission, it consists of three tiers designed to address specific needs at different levels of experience. Look for a brochure coming to you soon and if you have any questions, call Pat Robinson at 512 483-4209.





# Hiring the cream of the crop

TRC has enjoyed a long-standing reputation of highly skilled counselors and yet, a few years ago, we were in danger of slowly losing that reputation. "We were finding that the private rehabilitation sector was recruiting almost all master degreed students, which used to be our life blood," says James L. Jackson, executive deputy commissioner.

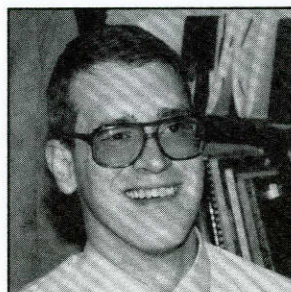
Not any longer. In the last several years, TRC has rekindled the effort of recruiting qualified students back into the public arena with some excellent results. TRC has been working with three universities: University of Texas in Austin, University of North Texas in Denton and East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma.

Students and professors are being given tours of Central Office and meeting with various TRC employees. In the Austin area, students are being given the opportunity to meet with counselors for a day. "Jim Mihlhauser and Tony Lawrence have teamed up in a beautiful way to give students a good idea of what a counselor does," says Jackson. "Most students say that the time spent with counselors is the most meaningful to them."

... the private rehab sector was recruiting almost all our master degreed students, which is our life blood.

...students say that the time spent with counselors is the most meaningful to them.

James L. Jackson



*New Counselor Frank Donaldson in the East Austin Field Office came to TRC from the Internship Program.*

Qualified students are also being given four month internships in numerous field offices around the state. "Every intern has had really good work experiences and been offered a job with TRC when they completed their studies," says Professor Randall Elston of East Central

University in Oklahoma. "I feel like we are a Texas program north of the Red River. TRC is very progressive and interested in quality. I get calls from different entities trying to recruit interns all the time but Texas is the leader in the country and I'm glad they are going to TRC."

In addition to his recruitment efforts, Jackson now sits on three different university advisory councils and is able to recommend to the universities improvements in the curriculum. "I've encouraged universities to offer management courses for students," says Jackson, "because, as counselors, they will need to know how to manage a \$150,000 budget and supervise other employees."

So far, TRC's relationships with the universities are win/win scenarios. TRC is getting top-quality students for employees, students are getting a dose of real-life employment before their diploma and the universities are getting feedback on how to improve their programs.

## January 1994 Service Awards

**Region I**  
10 years  
Vicki Nevins

**Region II**  
20 years  
Doris Wells  
25 years  
Diana Hejl

**Region III**  
10 years  
Lori Ann Brown  
Leeda Womack

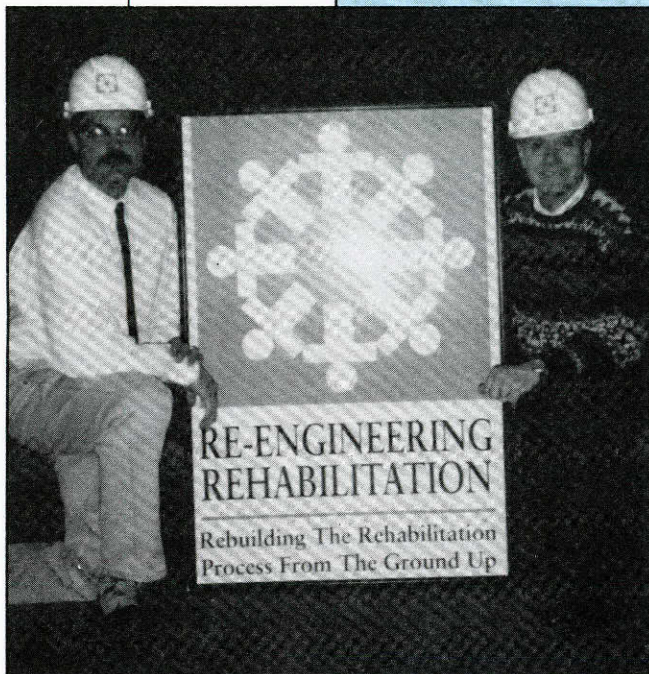
**Region IV**  
10 years  
Brenda Augustus

**Region VI**  
15 years  
Michelle Henninger  
20 years  
Christi Dabbs

**DDS**  
10 years  
Cathy Gillispie  
Shirley Haywood  
15 years  
Babette Hewitt  
Brad Scott  
20 years  
Paula K. Connell  
Mary Esther Diaz  
Wanda Guidry  
Sandra Ross

**Central Office**  
10 years  
Rachel Esquivel  
Norman Owens  
15 years  
Betty Eli  
Sylvia Macias  
Jyoti Someshwar  
20 years  
Linda Allen  
Patty Jo Morrow  
Marnette Walker





**Hard hats and a new logo** greeted the Re-engineering task force when they met in early February. "You'll be seeing this logo quite often as this project unfolds," said Jimmy Jackson. Randy Phinney, director of Graphic Arts, designed the logo.

*Left: Randy Phinney and Jimmy Jackson showing off hard hats and poster.*

**TRC**  
*Today*

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Randy Jennings  
Director of  
Public Information  
Shayla Fleshman  
Editor  
Susan Antoniewicz  
Graphic Designer

TEXAS REHABILITATION COMMISSION  
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.  
Austin, Texas 78751-2399

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