

Solutions

FALL 2016 VOLUME 13, NO. 4

Meeting the state's
workforce needs
through education
and collaboration



IN THIS ISSUE



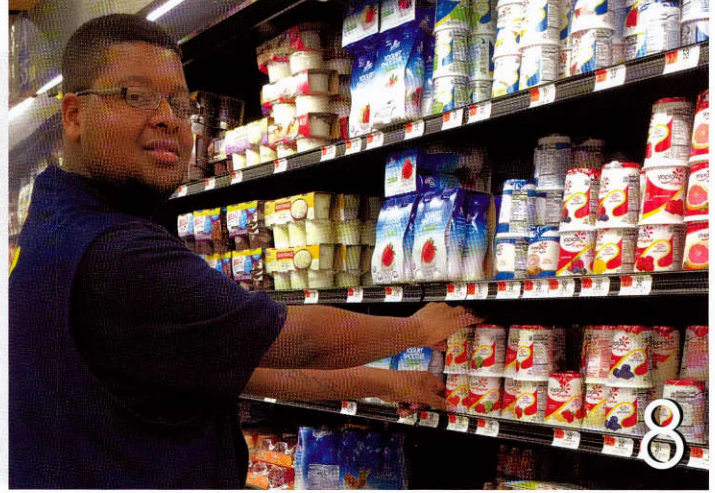
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Working Together

TO KEEP TEXAS STRONG



Welcome to the fall edition of Solutions! It is hard to believe that the holiday season is once again upon us! I would first like to take a moment to recognize everyone's hard work over the year. When I think about all that we have accomplished together it reminds me of a favorite quote by Helen Keller, "Alone we

can do so little; together we can do so much." The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) continues to be a strong partner for Texas and remains committed to equipping our future workforce with both the skills and education needed for the jobs of today and tomorrow. We are forever working diligently to ensure Texas has the resources necessary to keep it the best state in which to do business.

TWC participated in the Texas Education & Workforce Summit held September 19-20, where I, along with my fellow TWC commissioners, and the commissioners from the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, presented our conclusions in response to Governor Greg Abbott's Tri-Agency Charge. The Tri-Agency Charge also led us to focus on our transitioning service members and the importance of ensuring our service men and women are prepared as much as possible for the high-wage, high-demand job opportunities that are available in their communities throughout the state. We created Operation Welcome Home to better meet the identified needs of transitioning service members and their spouses in Texas.

In September, programs from the former Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services officially joined TWC. I am grateful that our agency gained the expertise and talents that each new team member provides. In addition, TWC partnered with the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities

and our Texas Workforce Solutions board partners to recognize National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) and launch the Texas HireAbility campaign to raise awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. The campaign was launched in conjunction with NDEAM to highlight the contributions of people with disabilities in the workforce. Some of our state's most successful companies proudly make hiring people with disabilities a priority. They know that having a diverse workforce works. It works for workers, it works for employers and it works for opportunity. As part of the campaign, TWC is partnering with local workforce development boards across the state to promote jobs and hiring fairs that connect Texas employers with job seekers with disabilities.

We are pleased to offer services through our Labor Market and Career Information Department that support informed decision making for students, parents and counselors, and equip our students with the skills and credentials required for high-demand job opportunities. Students can use TWC resources to investigate career planning opportunities, find wage occupation information and learn about current job market and employment trends. Texas students have innumerable career options they can pursue, and when paired with TWC career planning tools, they will be able to make informed decisions about college and get the best return on their education or training investment.

As your commissioner representing employers, I look forward to continuing to partner with employers and local workforce development boards to develop innovative opportunities that help create and keep jobs right here in Texas. There is no better place for conducting business than Texas. We look forward to expanding our collaborations. I wish each of you a safe and happy holiday season! 🇺🇸

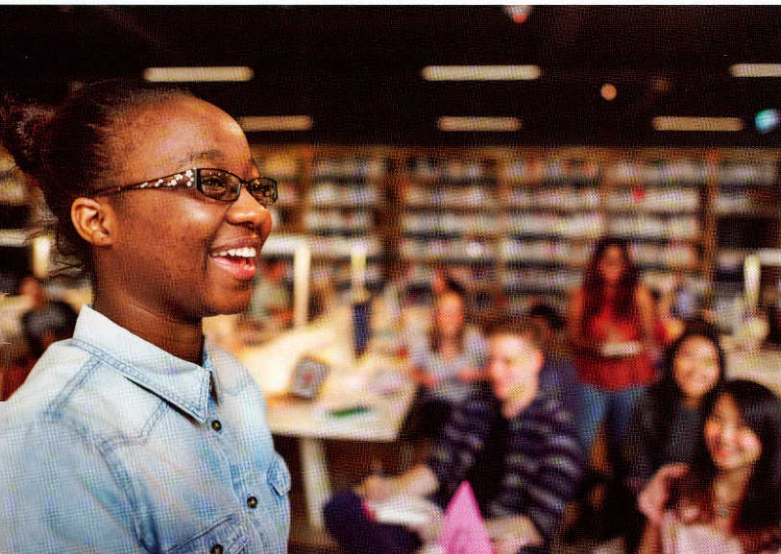
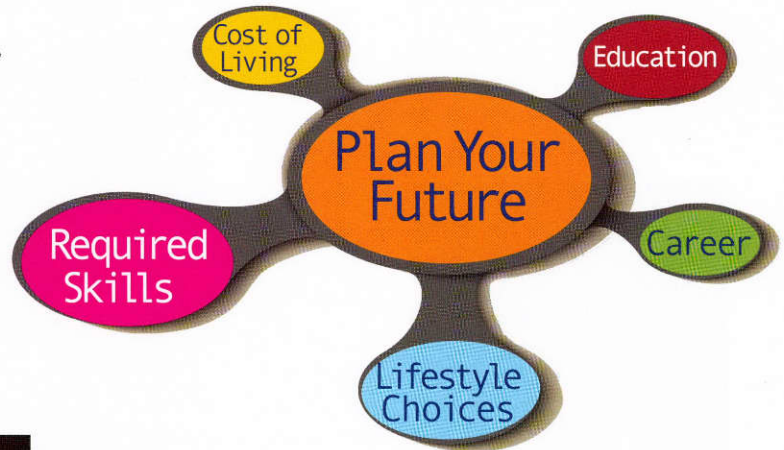
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ruth R. Hughs".

Ruth R. Hughs | Commissioner Representing Employers

TWC provides career exploration RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

BY RONNIE BURCHETT

With over 20 years of combined experience in education, academic advising, economic development and youth program management, the Texas Workforce Commission's Labor Market and Career Information (LMCI) team helps students explore careers. LMCI's Education Outreach Specialists offer a variety of services to help educators teach students about workforce realities, employable skills, finding and keeping a job, as well as searching for colleges and training. Utilizing LMCI's online and printed resources, educators focus on data-driven material to illustrate career planning for youth and adult students.



In response to the Foundation High School Program legislation (HB5), TWC began working with academic partners to connect career exploration to education and labor market data through a variety of services. Empowering parents and educators, LMCI's Education Outreach Specialists offer classroom presentations, professional development or in-service sessions, career fair expos and college night events, and online resources to teach students about career exploration throughout the state of Texas.

Applying region-specific data, demonstrations and collaborative exercises helps students to learn what employers want, why doing what you like is important and how to explore post-secondary education or training opportunities to achieve those goals. O'Donnell ISD Secondary School Tech Applications and Career Teacher Connie Bagley instructs seventh graders about career planning by focusing on a spectrum of professions. To help with this exploration, Bagley uses the LMCI publication *Exploring Careers, Be Alert, Be Aware! Careers Are Everywhere Activity Workbook*, and sections of the *Job Hunter's Guide*.

"I have been teaching seventh graders the course *Exploring Careers* for the past two years," said Bagley. "My [students] receive a very broad picture of careers as we study the sixteen career clusters, the different career and lifestyles, and the insight on assessing themselves and living within our means. Many of the LMCI publications are used in bits and pieces to help 12-to-13 year olds have a glimpse of their future choices."

In addition to Bagley, other teachers use LMCI information to help students explore careers and post-secondary options. Both teachers and students learn of new workforce realities by using LMCI data and tools. Numerous online resources provides support for educators and parents such as webinars, videos, bulletins and web applications – Texas Reality Check, Texas Career Check and Texas Work Prep.

"The teachers love how Texas Reality Check helps students see the 'big picture' and consider all of the expenses that are required of adults," said Round Rock ISD Career and Technical Education Coordinator Peggy Mica. "They also like how it gives the students a chance to consider the type of lifestyle they would like and then see the types of careers required to support that lifestyle. These observations help reinforce why education and training are important in their future."

Career and education choices made at a young age can have a far-reaching impact on adult lives. Connecting factual numbers with career exploration provides educators with resources to help students make important life decisions; like what major to choose in college or what occupation to pursue. ■



JET program supports CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR TEXAS STUDENTS

BY JUSTIN MINSKER

Thousands of students across Texas now have an opportunity to receive training, with access to high-tech equipment, for a career in a high-growth occupation. In April, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) announced the availability of \$10 million in funding from the Texas Legislature for the Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) grant program during the 2016-17 biennium.

Recently, TWC awarded 25 grants totaling nearly \$5 million for the first round of funding to public community and technical colleges and independent school districts for programs that focus on supporting high-demand occupations in new emerging industries.

Qualifying educational institutions were selected among grant applicants for the development of programs or courses leading to a license, certificate or postsecondary degree for students in their communities.

“I congratulate these JET grant recipients as they work to enhance educational curricula and high-demand job training for our students,” said TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar, who chairs the JET Advisory Board. “As they make the transition into the workforce, it is crucial that students have the education and skills to succeed in the workplace.”

The Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) was among the awardees and received almost \$300,000 towards the upgrade of class equipment to meet automobile industry standards. HCISD can now offer students a new opportunity to gain relevant certifications and college credit towards an associate degree in the auto collision field.

“Our auto collision and repair courses housed at Harlingen High School are going to see major improvements with the purchase of updated equipment,” said Jessica Hruska, special projects and grants specialist with Harlingen Public Schools.



JET Advisory Board from left to right – Educate Texas Executive Director John Fitzpatrick, TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar, Toyota Motor Manufacturing Texas, Inc. Director of Government Relations and External Affairs Mario Lozoya, Rosenthal Pauerstein Sandoloski Agather LLP Attorney Steve Lecholop, Perdue Brandon Fielder Collins and Mott, LLP, Partner Tony Fidelie, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Deputy Commissioner for Academic Planning and Policy Dr. David Gardner.

The JET grant awarded to Angelina College (AC) will allow the college to purchase new equipment to be used in welding classes for AC’s welding technology associate degree and certificate programs.

The purchase of the new equipment will allow AC to increase enrollment from 16 to 20 students per welding class on its main campus in Lufkin. The JET funds will allow 40 more students, per semester, to enroll in welding courses.

“By increasing the number of machines in the welding lab, we are able to help more students each year, and this is our goal,” said Janice Huffman, workforce development coordinator at Angelina College. “These courses are in great demand because of the need for welders in the East Texas region.”

The new equipment funded through the grant will be in place and ready for use for the spring 2017 semester. High school students in the Angeline College service area are able to earn a Level 1 Basic Certificate in Welding Technology while they attend high school. Upon graduating, those students will have

the basic skills needed for entry-level employment or they can continue skills training toward an intermediate welding certificate and/or pursue an Associate of Applied Science Degree in welding.

The JET Advisory Board assists TWC in administering the grants. The six-member board meets at least once each quarter, or as needed, to review applications and make recommendations on grant awards.

“It is amazing...the quality applicants the JET program receives through its grant solicitations. School districts, community colleges and institutes of technology across our state have jumped at the opportunity to apply for these much needed funds,” said JET advisory board member Tony Fidelie. “With programs ranging from nursing, to web development to welding, countless students across Texas are going to have the opportunity to be trained for good paying, stable jobs.”

For more information on the JET Program, visit texasworkforce.org/jet or email jetgrants@twc.state.tx.us. ■

Agencies unite

TO ALIGN WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION STRATEGIES FOR TEXAS

BY DEBBIE PITTS

Ensuring that Texas' workforce and education strategies align to equip Texans with the skills, education and training needed for the jobs of today and tomorrow is a responsibility shared by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). In March, Governor Greg Abbott established a Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative and charged commissioners from all three agencies with assessing local economic activity, examining workforce challenges and opportunities, and considering innovative approaches to meet the state's workforce goals.

"I established the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative earlier this year to seek out innovative approaches to meeting the state's workforce goals," said Gov. Greg Abbott. "For Texas to be the undisputed center for innovation and intellectual capital in this decade and beyond, we need to accelerate learning to the speed of business and technology."

The governor charged the three agencies to:

- Identify and advance public and higher education initiatives that make college more affordable for families and help students enter the workforce more quickly with marketable skills.
 - Work with industry and local stakeholders to assess local workforce needs and identify innovative workforce development models that directly coordinate with industry partners and promote postsecondary success, including career and technical education (CTE) and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.
 - Evaluate current agency efforts, as well as state and local web-based education and career awareness systems in an effort to better link students, parents and educators to the broad array of high-demand jobs in this state and the educational requirements to secure those opportunities.
 - Identify gaps in services to Texas veterans, advance strategies to enhance their education and employment opportunities, and develop solutions to ensure a seamless and accelerated transition back into the Texas workforce.
- Make recommendations that build the skills of the Texas workforce and advance regional economic expansion, job creation and the goals of 60x30TX [60x30 is THECB's initiative which aims for 60 percent of 25 to 34-year-olds to hold either a certificate or degree by 2030, with the goal of growing the state's workforce industry and the economy.]

Commissioners from the three agencies held regional meetings in Midland, San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, El Paso, McAllen, Tyler and Austin to gather regional input related to these charges. At these meetings, the commissioners heard from industry leaders; business executives and entrepreneurs; school district superintendents; chambers; economic development corporations; workforce development board leaders; directors of community and nonprofit organizations; higher education leaders; and other stakeholders.

"Through collaboration with local leaders across the state, we obtained valuable insights into how to best address Governor Abbott's charge," said TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar. "I thank the valuable partners in education, workforce and industry who supported our efforts to identify innovative approaches to meet our state's education and workforce goals in support of a stronger Texas economy."

Based on the conversations at regional meetings, the commissioners proposed recommendations to help Texas achieve preeminence in the global economy. These recommendations were formalized in the Tri-Agency Report to the Governor entitled: *Prosperity Requires Being Bold: Integrating Education and the Workforce for a Bright Texas Future*. The four prime recommendations identified in the report are:

1. Identify statewide initiatives for the next generation that will make Texas the clear leader in targeted fields and position the state for economic preeminence.
2. Strengthen pre-kindergarten through high school academic instruction to establish foundational skills in math, science, language arts and social studies so that students graduate high school career- or college-ready and are prepared for lifetime learning.



Left to right – University of Texas Chairman of the Board of Regents Paul Foster, Texas Commissioner of Higher Education Raymund Paredes, TWC Commissioner Representing Employers Ruth R. Hughes, TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Julian Alvarez, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath, TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar and University of Texas System Chancellor William McRaven.

3. Build a proactive, ongoing partnership among TEA, THECB, TWC and other stakeholders to align the educational goals of Texas with the state’s higher education plan of 60x30TX, which aims for 60 percent of 25 to 34-year-olds to hold either a certificate or degree by 2030 with the goal of growing the state’s workforce, industry and the economy.
4. Identify services for Texas veterans and advance strategies to enhance their education and employment opportunities while developing solutions to ensure a seamless and accelerated transition back into the Texas workforce.

The report also identified major initiatives that support these recommendations and some have already been announced or are underway. Recently, TWC announced that \$5 million in grants would be dedicated to two programs that support the education and training needs of veterans and their families. The Operation Welcome Home and the Military Family Support programs were developed to assist recently separated service members and spouses experiencing challenges in finding employment, completing two-to-four-year college programs or obtaining an appropriate certification to compete in the Texas job market.

“The introduction of Operation Welcome Home and the Military Family Support programs will provide Texas employers more opportunities to connect with Texas veterans



Attendees at the 2016 Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative Summit heard from agency leaders as they presented their recommendations related to the Governor’s charge for the Tri-Agency Initiative.

and their spouses who possess the skills and experience they need,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Employers Ruth R. Hughes. “These programs give employers access to a more qualified workforce and recognize veterans’ training and experience gained during their service to our country.”

In September, public education, higher education and workforce development agency leaders announced the availability of \$7.2 million in grant funding to launch Texas Industry Cluster Innovative Academies, which provide students opportunities to earn post-secondary credentials in high school with a focus on applied learning opportunities like internships, externships, apprenticeships and career counseling high-demand fields.

“I look forward to the implementation of the Innovative Academies and I am excited that the lives of our students and future workforce will be transformed by having unique mentorship opportunities and meaningful engagement with industry leaders and mentors,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Julian Alvarez.

Many other initiatives are in progress or in development.

“Texans have always been hard working, driven, innovative and fiercely ambitious to achieve things tomorrow that don't exist today,” said Governor Abbott. “Our goal is to ensure that the next generation builds on that legacy and perpetuates the Texas brand of exceptionalism.” ■

Students with disabilities FIND CAREER SUCCESS WITH THE HELP OF TRANSITION SERVICES

BY KATTIE BASNETT

Transition services provided by Texas Workforce Solutions—Vocational Rehabilitation Services are preparing the state’s large population of students with disabilities to meet Texas’ evolving economic and business needs through competitive or self-employment.

In school, students with disabilities receive services and support to help them succeed in their classes and master skills they need as they mature into adults. They can also receive transition services from vocational rehabilitation counselors to build skills for employment and independence after leaving school.

Transition services are provided in partnership with the students’ families, schools, local education centers, higher education institutions and business partners. Services include job exploration and counseling, work-based learning opportunities, counseling on education and training opportunities, workplace readiness training, and more.

Isiah Franklin, who has attention deficit disorder and an intellectual disability, began receiving transition services as a high school senior. He participated in internships at Scott & White Hospital through Project SEARCH, a program to help students

gain work experience and job skills.

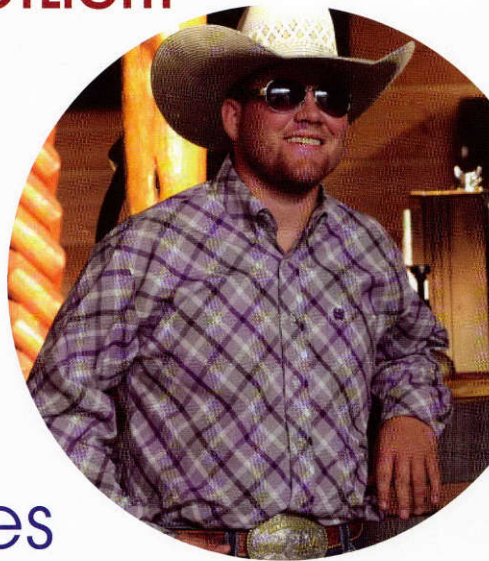
This work-based learning opportunity taught Franklin not only how to meet his employer’s expectations for timeliness, work pace and quality, but also helped him gain a well-rounded set of skills to meet the hospital’s medical inventory needs.

“I learned things about work I never knew about. I learned to stay focused and work with others,” Franklin explained.

Today, at age 19, Franklin is an important part of Walmart’s inventory and stocking team. He is a full-time employee with benefits.

Rowdy Codgell, age 22, is an example of another type of employment outcome made possible through transition services—self-employment. Rowdy, who is blind, started his journey toward owning the Night Owl Espresso and Tea Bar in Silverton, Texas, at age 10 when he began receiving services.

Codgell decided that he wanted to open a coffee shop after receiving job counseling, participating in work readiness training to learn about employer expectations and completing work-based learning programs like



Left – Rowdy Codgell at Night Owl Espresso and Tea Bar.
Right – Isiah Franklin stocking shelves at Walmart.

Project SWEEP (Summer Work Experience and Empowerment Program) at Texas Tech University.

Codgell and his counselor worked together to ensure that he had the skills and training to successfully operate his own business. He completed a proposal for self-employment and a feasibility worksheet to document his ability to meet expenses.

His counselor then provided employment assistance services. She determined what assistive technology — a screen reader — Codgell would need to operate his business and helped him purchase equipment for his business.

Today, the Night Owl is a popular new spot for Silverton residents to go to enjoy specialty coffees, teas, frappes, smoothies and desserts.

“I feel like all of the help that I have received through my life from my family, my community and the transition services have helped me to accomplish my dreams,” Codgell said. ■

For more information on services visit: texasworkforce.org/vryouth

WORKFORCE NEWS

Workforce Solutions East Texas partners with food nonprofits to serve jobseekers

Workforce Solutions East Texas (East Texas) is teaming up with the East Texas Food Bank and local food pantries to deliver workforce development services to community members.



Each month, East Texas staff members set up a mobile unit at a food pantry and provide information about local jobs, online applications, and educational and skills training opportunities.

This collaboration and others statewide fulfill a Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) goal — strengthening partnerships with local food banks to provide workforce development services.

Expanding the Board and food bank partnerships to promote Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) services will enable SNAP recipients to gain immediate access to services and quick exposure to the local labor market, which will assist recipients with entering into employment.

For more information about SNAP E&T, visit www.twc.state.tx.us/programs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-employment-training-program-overview.

Helping our neighbors

Louisiana continues to recover from the devastating flooding that killed 13 people and damaged at least 60,000 homes across



20 parishes. As part of the recovery effort, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) immediately offered a helping hand to our neighboring state of Louisiana.

The Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) was working with only half of their unemployment claims staff. Within a few hours, TWC arranged a conference call with LWC to formulate a plan. In less than 24 hours, TWC jumped into action by learning the LWC HIRE application process.

Approximately 50 TWC Customer Service Representatives began helping folks in Louisiana with their unemployment claims. As part of this collaboration, TWC handled 6,396 Louisiana Disaster Unemployment Assistance calls between August 23 and October 10.



Workforce Solutions Borderplex part of national employment project

Innovate+Educate (I+E) and the National Association of Workforce Boards awarded the W. K. Kellogg Foundation Two-Gen grant to Workforce Solutions Borderplex (Borderplex). The \$100,000, three-year grant is unique in that it addresses the needs of two-generations of low income families; including emphasis on the child's early education needs and creating opportunities for parents to increase employment and wages.

Borderplex is one of three public employment agencies selected for this national project and the only agency in Texas. The funding will support Borderplex's initiative to advance new pathways to employment for parents and families with young children up to eight years old. This pilot project will support a sustainable model for economic advancement for low-income families.



2017 Conference Dates

- Houston** **Jan. 20**
- Grapevine**..... **April 27-28**
- Bastrop-Lost Pines** **June 2**
- Lubbock** **August 25**
- San Antonio** **Sept. 14-15**

Stay tuned for additional locations!

TO REGISTER, VISIT
texasworkforce.org/tbc
OR FOR MORE INFORMATION
CALL 512-463-6389.

FALL 2016 TEXAS STAR AWARD WINNERS

The Texas Star Award recognizes TWC employees who perform above and beyond at promoting agency systems and solutions and provide outstanding customer service and support. The following distinguished professionals recently received the Star Award.

Improve Fraud Discovery Team Earns Star Award, 4th Quarter

The Improve Fraud Discovery (IFD) project was led by a cross-functional team, including employees from the Regulatory Integrity Information Technology, Unemployment Insurance Benefits Tax and Operational Insight divisions. The Center for Digital Government selected the IFD project for the “2016 Best of Texas Best Data Analytics/Business Intelligence Project” award. The IFD team created a world-class fraud detection and prevention tool which benefits all Texans by preserving Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund dollars for legitimate claimants and helps TWC meet federal directives for reducing fraudulent claim payments.



The Improve Fraud Discovery Team

Front row: Abel Gutierrez Jr., Nancy Yang, Mike Hopkins, Jerry Ramos, Pat Dotson; *middle row:* Victor Ramirez, Jennifer Payne, Shu-Ching Chen, Donald Stevens, Debbie Dodson; *back row:* Gabriel Field, Joseph Henry, Blake Whitehead
Not pictured: Julia Buenrostro, Henry De La Cerda, Bryan McKay



Rebecca Spears, Individual Star Award, 3rd Quarter

Rebecca Spears (above and left in photo), a systems analyst with the IT Infrastructure Services Department, has exhibited exceptional customer service and support through her work on various Rapid Process Improvement (RPI) projects. Her initiative has made work more efficient for employees and customers at every level throughout our agency and across the state of Texas.

Stephanie Bonnet-Kramer, Individual Star Award, 4th Quarter

Stephanie Bonnet-Kramer (above and right in photo), a program specialist with Workforce Program’s Child Care Policy Department, coordinated two statewide Child Care Summits with the Office of the Governor and the Texas Education Agency. Stephanie’s diligence and planning ensured that the conferences were content-rich and well-received, providing important and relevant training opportunities for early child care professionals across the state.



Benefits of Hiring
People with Disabilities
Business Forum

Wed., Jan. 25, 2017
Norris Conference Center

at North Cross Mall
2525 W. Anderson Lane • Austin, TX 78757

To Register: bit.ly/disabilityforum

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