

SOLUTIONS

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The Faces of *Texas Back to Work*

Employers, job seekers benefit from new jobs initiative

- 3 | Program introduces women to welding careers**
- 4 | *Texas Back to Work* offers incentives to hire unemployed**
- 6 | Nuclear power industry creates new jobs in Texas**
- 8 | *The Biggest Loser: Texoma* helps participants shed pounds**
- 9 | Project RISE gives a lift to disabled job seekers**
- 10 | Workforce News Around the State**

On the cover: Some of the employees and employers who are benefitting from Texas Workforce Commission's new jobs initiative *Texas Back to Work*. Clockwise from top left: Loretta McCloud, new account services representative at Suddenlink Tyler Call Center; Barbara Morrison, director of human resources for Suddenlink; Richard Jinks, talent acquisition specialist for TCIM Services; Bonnie Best, human resource manager for Nestle Waters North America Inc.; Shonda Mack, new medical billing and collections processor for Financial Corp. of America; Raul Godoy, new maintenance technician for Monterrey Asset Management. *Photos by Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande, Joe Anna Haydon and Cynthia Hunter.*

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Ronny Congleton
Commissioner
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We need to get the economy back on track and people into jobs — good jobs.

Everybody's pocketbook took a hit over the past year, but no one feels the economic pain like the folks who have lost their jobs.

We've got a million people unemployed in the state of Texas out of a labor force of more than 12 million. The Texas Workforce Commission is responding to job seekers by providing job-matching services, job training, unemployment benefits, and support services such as child care that keep a brutal recession from being much worse. But while unemployment benefits alone are keeping countless families above water, it's temporary and pay much less than working wages. As important as it is to get unemployment insurance claimants back to work, it is even more important to help those who don't qualify for these benefits, or who have exhausted them. We need to put as many people as possible back to work, regardless of their status, and we **will** turn the corner on this recession.

The percentage of jobs that require very high levels of education is small. Education plays a key role, but we need workers in skilled trades. Most of these jobs don't require postgraduate degrees but they do require good training programs. Better yet, the demand for skilled-trade jobs is high in the United States, lowering the risk of jobs going overseas.

We are fortunate to have leadership in Texas that recognizes this. We have dramatically increased funding in skills development, apprenticeship, and training for high-demand jobs lead by community colleges and technical schools. Preparing kids for college is important, but it is a serious disservice to millions of Americans and Texans to suggest that you cannot have a meaningful career without a bachelor's or master's degree. People who work with their hands are important to our day-to-day lives.

There are signs the recession is ending and the economy is starting to grow again. Unfortunately, there is always a lag in new job creation. We will turn the corner, however, and the jobs will come. When they do, let's do all we can to ensure that they are good high-paying jobs that will support working families and our great state of Texas. ■

Women creating sparks in the welding industry

New program teaches women about unconventional career

By Shannon Thomas

The first time Wendy Tolar attempted welding in her Women in Welding/Pipefitter program, the instructor warned the class that there would be a lot of hollering.

“Our instructor said we may holler because we were going to get burned by the welding machines,” Tolar said. “That was not the case. We didn’t burn ourselves but the welding didn’t look right on that first day. That’s why we were mad and why we hollered. Our attempts looked sloppy and tacky. We all realized it was going to take a lot of work and practice.”

Tolar’s welding is improving thanks to the 16-week program, funded by an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant facilitated through Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast. The class consists of 20 women, all of whom have received unemployment benefits, which was a prerequisite for the class.

“The women in this program are actually learning two different occupations – welding and pipefitting as well as pipefitting design,” said Nancy Tootle, Gulf Coast energy industry liaison. “It takes a little longer, but they complete the training with very marketable skills.”

According to Ralph Riley, contract manager for S & B Engineers and Constructors Ltd., the firm that manages the program, the women also share experiences with other women who work in the industry.

“We really want to show these women what it is like to work in a non-traditional career,” said Riley.

Tolar, who had previously worked as a bookkeeper for a construction company, said she likes hearing from other women in the industry.

“It does help seeing and talking to other women in this field,” Tolar said. “They tell us we might hear some criticism from guys, but we need to keep going.”

The classes are conducted at Brazosport College in Lake Jackson, and faculty provide instruction. S & B will sponsor another class at the College of the Mainland in Texas City after the current session ends.

Students attend 40 hours of instruction and welding labs per week. All participants will receive 20 hours of



Milca Rivera practices her welding technique during classes at Brazosport College. Rivera is part of a 16-week program to teach women welding and pipefitting. Photo courtesy Brazosport College

college credit along with certification in welding from the National Center for Construction Education and Research. Participants also will receive the Houston Area Safety Council card, which is required to work at area plants.

Class organizers are working with local Dow Chemical Company officials to place the women in jobs after they complete training.

Women also are given instruction on topics like financial planning and how to succeed as an independent contractor.

Tootle said if the program receives additional funding, there are plans to expand it to encompass other industries such as nuclear energy and wind turbine manufacturing. The jobs could be very lucrative for women who pursue them, she added, with starting wages in the Gulf Coast region ranging from \$15-\$25 an hour.

“Over the next 10 years between new projects and ongoing plant maintenance, there will be more work than there are trained and certified workers,” Tootle said. “For women who commit to this as a career, and earn overtime pay, the salary can go up to six figures annually.” ■

Putting Texas Back to Work

New program offers incentives to hire unemployed

By Debbie Pitts

Providing employment opportunities for unemployed Texans and rewarding employers who hire them are benefits of a new Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) initiative called *Texas Back to Work*. The program offers up to \$2,000 in incentives for employers in the form of wage subsidies. Private employers can receive subsidies for hiring unemployed workers and keeping them on their payrolls in full-time positions (at least 30 hours a week) for at least 30 to 120 days.

“Businesses can earn *Texas Back to Work* incentives to expand their operations and offer new opportunities to unemployed Texans,” said Lt. Governor David Dewhurst. “All Texans should have the opportunity to provide for their families.”

Lt. Gov. Dewhurst was a proponent of legislation during the 2009 Texas legislative session, which allocated \$15 million to fund the program over the next two years. In addition, TWC has been able to leverage additional funds for the program from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Contingency Fund grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program could receive up to an additional \$52 million and be able to offset the wages of more Texas workers.

In order for newly hired employees to qualify their employers for the subsidies, they must have been receiving unemployment benefits or have used up those benefits before being hired, have earned up to \$15 per hour before in their previous jobs, and be hired at minimum wage or higher.

“*Texas Back to Work* will help employers defray some of the costs associated with hiring and training new workers,” said TWC Chairman Tom Pauken. “It also gives employers a reason to consider hiring from the pool of qualified unemployed Texans.”

Large and small employers can benefit from the savings. By early May, nearly 500 employers statewide had already signed on to take advantage of the program, which kicked off in February, and more than 1,000 unemployed workers had found work as a result.

One of those who found employment was Raul Godoy of El Paso who was trained HVAC technician who had been working as a maintenance technician at Ft. Bliss before being laid off.

“I applied everywhere, but the employers always told



Shonda Mack of Austin was pleased to land a job doing medical billing and collections work. Her new employer, Financial Corp. of America, will be able to collect *Texas Back to Work* incentives as a result of hiring her and keeping her on their payroll. Photo by Joe Anna Haydon

me I needed more experience. How can I get experience if no one will hire me?” Godoy said. “All I want is a shot.”

Ray Baca of Monterrey Asset Management (MAM) gave him that shot and gained a valuable worker along with the opportunity to receive the *Texas Back to Work* wage subsidies.

“As an employer I find it useful to have programs that help subsidize training expenses,” said Baca, who hired Godoy shortly after the program launched. Godoy was selected from applicants for MAM’s maintenance

Workforce Focus

technician opening due in part to the fact that he met the qualifications for the *Texas Back to Work* program.

“Without this program, I probably would not have been hired,” Godoy said.

Shonda Mack of Austin also was hired by Financial Corporation of America (FCA) due, in part, to her eligibility for the program. Mack, a medical billing and collections processor, had been laid off by her previous employer where she was doing the same type of work and was very pleased to have found her new job.

“We heard about the program and then took a look at our applicants to see which ones were unemployed,” said Cheryl Fleming, human resources administrator for FCA. “I was unemployed at one time myself, so I know what that is like. I would always rather hire someone who really needs a job so that we can give them the opportunity to go back to work.”

The program is administered through the 28 workforce development boards across the state, which also provide employers with recruitment assistance, pre-screening of qualified applicants, and training programs.

“The workforce center will screen the individuals and send you the qualified candidates, so it’s really like having your own HR recruiting agency working for you for free,” said Bonnie Best, human resource manager for Nestle Waters North America Inc., located in Hawkins. “If the new employees are successful and stay for a certain number of weeks, you get paid back. You would be crazy not to [participate].”

Local workforce board representatives currently are promoting *Texas Back to Work* to employers in their regions.



Carlos Tanguma Jr., who had been receiving unemployment benefits, was hired by White’s Custom Cabinets in San Angelo. The company, which uses Workforce Solutions Concho Valley for all of its hiring needs, will be eligible for up to \$2,000 in wage subsidies through the *Texas Back to Work* program. Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions Concho Valley

“Businesses can earn *Texas Back to Work* incentives to expand their operations and offer new opportunities to unemployed Texans.”

David Dewhurst
Lieutenant Governor

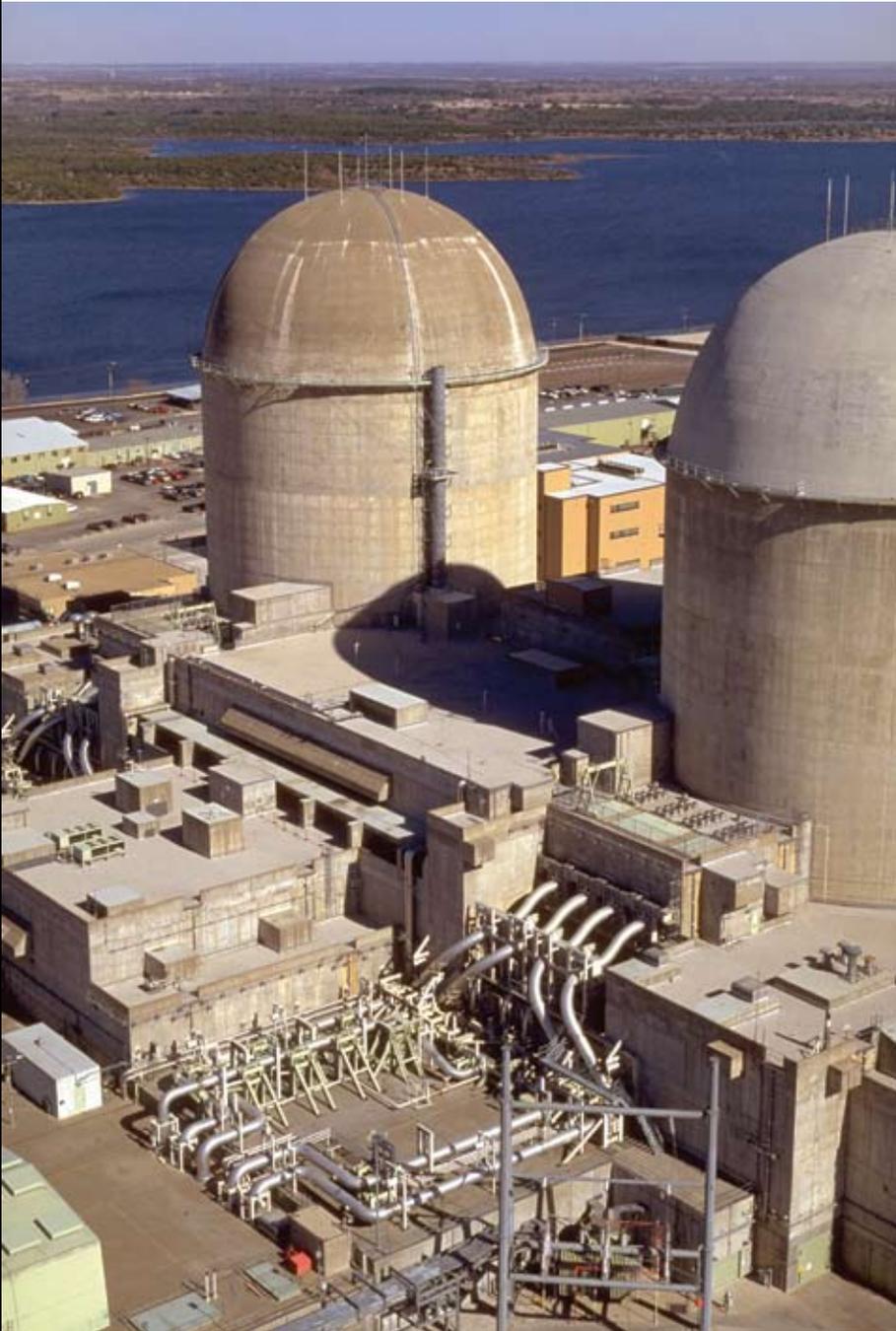


Texas Lt. Governor David Dewhurst (right) speaks with Latoshia Stuart, a unit clerk at the CHRISTUS St. Michael Health System who was hired through the *Texas Back to Work* program. Photo by Texas Workforce Commission

“*Texas Back to Work* will give employers a reason to take a harder look at unemployed applicants and hopefully encourage other employers to consider hiring again,” said Cathy Ballard, Workforce Solutions Concho Valley director of planning.

Concho Valley resident Carlos Tanguma Jr. was hired by White’s Custom Cabinets which will benefit from the hiring incentives. Owner Wendell White uses Workforce Solutions Concho Valley for all of his hiring needs. He said that makes the hiring process seamless for him and stated that he would use the \$2,000 subsidy to reinvest in his company.

Employers who are interested in learning more about *Texas Back to Work* should contact their local workforce board for information (see back cover). ■



Comanche Peak Nuclear Power Plant is located in Somervell County, Texas, about 40 miles southwest of Ft. Worth. It relies on nearby Squaw Creek Reservoir for cooling water. The plant has about 1,300 employees and is operated by Luminant Generation Co. LLC, a subsidiary of Energy Future Holdings Corp. *Photo courtesy Luminant Generation Co. LLC*

Nuclear power in Texas creates new generation of jobs

By Lisa Givens

The increasing need for alternative energy sources has helped nuclear energy to be reconsidered as a viable, clean energy source and as an industry that can create jobs and serve the energy needs of Texas and the world.

Texas has four nuclear power plants in operation and plans for at least four more plants have been announced by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

“With each new power plant requiring up to 450 employees, the nuclear power industry faces the hurdle of developing a skilled and ready workforce,” said Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Director of Employer Initiatives Doug Ridge. “Texas is unlocking the gateway to this opportunity by being at the forefront of innovative workforce initiatives that support the development of nuclear energy.”

A partnership between TWC and the Nuclear Power Institute (NPI), headquartered at Texas A&M University, recently received international attention when NPI representatives were asked by the U.S. Department of Energy to speak at a worldwide nuclear energy conference in Vienna.

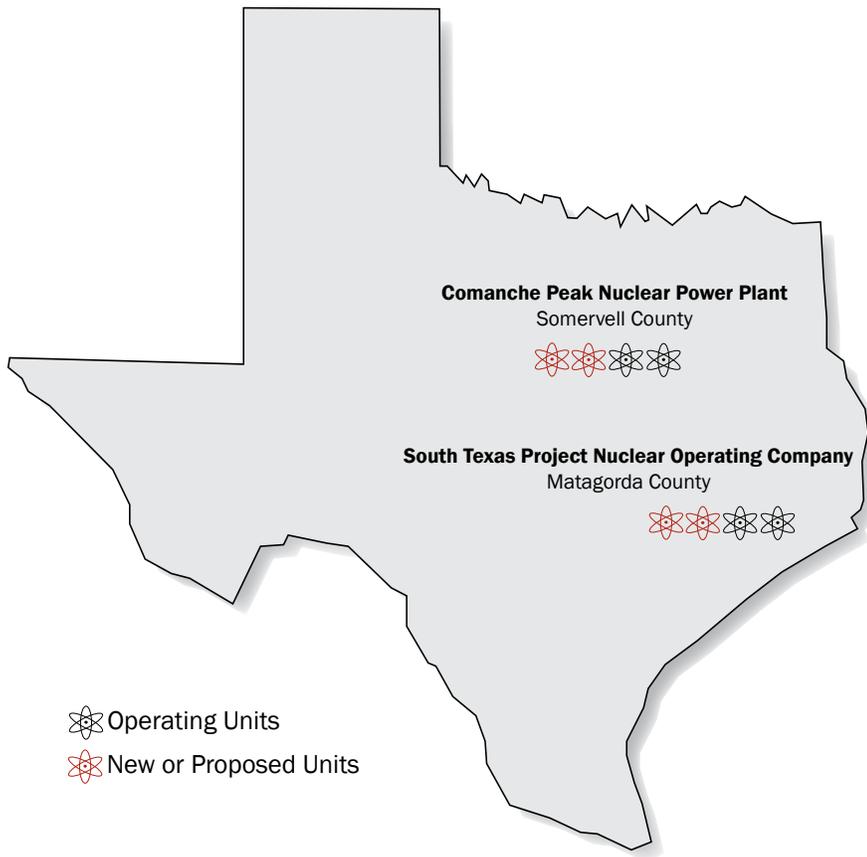
“The need for a skilled workforce to sustain the growth of nuclear energy is an international challenge,” said NPI Director Dr. Kenneth Peddicord. “Initiatives created here in Texas are gaining recognition and interest around the world.”

Because education is the key to successfully training the nuclear power workforce of the next generation, NPI is engaging middle and high school teachers through outreach programs like the Research Experience for Teachers. This four-week summer program offers teachers the opportunity to work with engineers from Texas A&M University and the South Texas Project’s nuclear facility, giving them firsthand knowledge about how nuclear

Going Nuclear



Nuclear Power in Texas



four-year universities, two-year technical and community colleges, the nuclear power industry, state agencies, and local organizations to provide a highly trained and skilled workforce to operate the new power plants planned for Texas.

Nuclear plant technicians represent the industry's top demand occupation and require an associate degree in programs such as nuclear power technology, radiation protection, or digital instrumentation and control. In addition, the System Engineering Initiative from NPI brings nuclear engineering and multidisciplinary programs together to offer students hands-on experience, fusing academics with workplace applications, as well as opportunities to interact with industry engineers at seminars and lectures. By means of a certificate program offered through internet-based courses, bachelor's degree students in mechanical engineering, chemical engineering, electrical engineering, engineering technology, and engineering physics at NPI partner with universities to gain valuable background in nuclear power plant fundamentals, systems, operations, and human performance requirements.

The pressing need for a skilled nuclear workforce exists worldwide, and NPI is working with the international community to design nuclear energy workforce education strategies similar to current NPI programs.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has cited Texas as a model for countries developing nuclear power as they attract students into academic programs that lead to careers in the nuclear industry and inform the public about the role of nuclear power.

The programs developed in Texas by NPI through its partnership with TWC are serving as a template for addressing the nuclear workforce challenge around the globe and helping to make Texas a worldwide leader in nuclear energy. ■



POWER SET girls listen to a speaker during their visit to Texas A&M University in January. The POWER SET girls were able to have hands-on experiences with engineering and science classes during their visit. *Photo courtesy Texas A&M University*

power works. This program allows teachers to develop curriculum and conduct experiments to take back to their classrooms, increasing student awareness of engineering, and encouraging them to consider engineering careers.

POWER SET (Powerful Opportunities for Women Eager and Ready for Science, Engineering

and Technology) is another NPI program. It was created at Palacios High School in Palacios, Texas, and inspires young women through mentoring, professional development, and other educational support needed to pursue educational and professional opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Additionally, NPI connects

The Biggest Loser: Texoma a winner at promoting a healthier workforce

By James A. Johnson

To encourage a healthier lifestyle among area workers and combat rising health care costs and lost productivity, Workforce Solutions Texoma (Texoma) recently launched *The Biggest Loser: Texoma*. The initiative, which mirrored the popular television reality program's fitness mission, helped 50 area workers shed a combined 686 pounds in 14 weeks.

"Everyone's goal was to add excitement, fun, and positive peer pressure to encourage a healthier workforce," said Janie Bates, Texoma's executive director. "Employers reported improved fitness, employee morale, and productivity."

The competition consisted of five-member teams representing 10 regional employers, including two from Oklahoma, that were selected from 80 applicants. Participants received gym memberships and health care screenings, attended nutrition and fitness seminars, logged 2,000 gym hours, and walked approximately 3,000 miles.

To launch the initiative, Texoma partnered with the Southern Oklahoma Workforce Board, Ruiz Foods, CIGNA HealthCare, Texoma Health Foundation, Choctaw Wellness Center, Nautilus Sport & Fitness Centers, #1 Fitness, Gorrell's Martial Arts & Fitness, North Texas Fitness Centers, and KTEN-TV. The local television station helped with marketing and program design, interviewed contestants and health care experts, and announced team standings weekly.

Teams earned points for losing weight and reducing blood pressure and cholesterol, and faced weekly



Participants in *The Biggest Loser: Texoma* prepare for a turkey bowling event in which they tossed frozen packaged turkeys in place of traditional bowling balls. Doubling as a fundraiser, the activity was among many that helped participants target fitness goals. Participating employer teams were awarded points for bowling scores and for the amount of food collected and donated to local food banks. Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions Texoma



fitness challenges such as walking 10 miles, recording personal-best treadmill times, visiting gyms, abstaining from carbonated drinks, and not smoking. Participants also earned points for participating in a 5K race benefiting diabetes research, and in a simulated bowling activity.

LaNease Gunnoe was part of the Red River Regional Hospital (RRRH) team in Bonham, whose members averaged an 11 percent body weight

loss and shared \$2,000 in prizes. The team entry fees covered the costs of the prizes.

"My relationship with co-workers grew stronger as fitness teammates," said Gunnoe, who shed 33 pounds. "I can always rely on them to stay on track and remain healthy."

Teammate LuAnn Daniel lost 43 pounds.

"The experience even inspired co-workers to share healthy lunches," Daniel said. "We know that the healthier we stay, the more productive we'll be."

The Biggest Loser: Texoma inspired RRRH to replicate the contest's fitness concept for area employers by offering free health and drug screenings.

Jerry Panter, RRRH chief financial officer, praised the initiative's corporate impact.

"The competition energized our employees, boosted morale, and has proven that a healthier workforce is a more productive one." ■

Project RISE assists disabled youth in Lower Rio Grande Valley

By Joe Anna Haydon

Connecting employers looking for trained workers with job seekers who can provide the necessary skills is the primary objective of workforce solutions offices throughout Texas. In some cases, special programs are needed to bridge the gaps that hamper those connections. One such program is Project RISE, or Regional Initiative for Supportive Employment, which aims to increase employment opportunities for disabled high school seniors by helping them to become more employable.

“The goal is to promote good work habits, whether the student is going directly to work or to post-secondary training after graduation,” said Gretchen Well, director of Talent Services for Workforce Solutions Lower Rio Grande Valley (Lower Rio Grande Valley). “Project RISE has served as an educational experience for our workforce staff who now better understand how to work with and serve our disabled clients.”

Project RISE, a pilot project of the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, was initiated in 2007 through a three-year grant. The program has built a network among Lower Rio Grande Valley workforce staff, local school districts, and the Department of Assistive Rehabilitation Services (DARS). The program assists 30 to 35 students annually.

“I see students at all levels of disability,” said Project RISE Director Casey Pebley. “Some are dealing with mental retardation, Down syndrome, or mobility, auditory, or visual disabilities. Before Project RISE, the schools may not have been able to tell you the name of their DARS counselor but now they are taking the



Through his participation in Project RISE, Nicoli Elliot was recruited to participate in Disability Mentoring Days. Elliot worked at a local restaurant, where he gained experience in his desired field, culinary arts. *Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions Lower Rio Grande Valley*

initiative to contact one another.”

McAllen DARS counselor Leigh Ann Godinez became involved with Project RISE in the program’s first year.

“We evaluate our students’ abilities and Project RISE tailors job skills training for each individual,” said Godinez. “These training classes are coordinated with the schools on a weekly basis.”

Students are referred to Project RISE by school staff who also register them with DARS and Lower Rio Grande Valley. Registering with these groups gives students access to many resources after graduation. Students receive job-readiness and self-sufficiency training through the workforce board and can take advantage of the Texas Workforce Commission’s job-matching Web site, WorkInTexas.com.

Students participate in Disability Mentoring Days, where they job-shadow in industries such as law, construction,

medical, and food. Project RISE also introduces students to collegiate environments, including universities, community colleges, and technical trade schools. There are currently 15 former Project RISE students enrolled in college, eight who are employed, three who are both working and attending college, and five others who are enrolled in pre-employment services through a DARS contractor.

“I like the program [Project RISE] because I learned a lot about work,” said 19-year-old Alvaro Luna, a former Project RISE participant and graduate of Pharr-San Juan-Alamo North High School in Pharr, Texas.

Mentoring days offer the students great opportunities to show others the abilities of the disabled. According to Pebley, “Project RISE helps students become more independent, feel accomplished, and become successful when they and their families previously didn’t see the possibilities.” ■

Central Texas board among best companies to work for

Workforce Solutions of Central Texas (Central Texas) has been named among the 2010 Best Companies to Work for in Texas for the fifth straight year by *Texas Monthly* magazine.



The award identifies companies with the best practices among Texas employers and recognizes employers who create better workplaces for employees.

Central Texas ranked eighth among 35 mid-sized companies with between 75 and 249 employees. The list was published in the February 2010 issue of *Texas Monthly*.

The annual assessment, sponsored by the Texas Association of Business, the Society for Human Resource Management Texas State Council, the Best Companies Group, and *Texas Monthly*, included a thorough review of the local board's personnel policies and procedures, as well as an in-depth, anonymous employee questionnaire.

Training helps medical staff with Spanish-language skills

Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area partnered with the Round Rock



Chamber of Commerce and Austin Community College to offer training sessions in functional Spanish-language skills to help medical office staff better communicate with Spanish-speaking patients.

The effort has addressed the growing Hispanic population in Texas and is helping health care providers improve care to patients.

A total of 43 staff members from St. David's Round Rock Medical Center and Scott & White Hospital were trained at a cost of \$228 per staff member using Workforce



Workforce Solutions of Central Texas members receive the 2010 Best Companies to Work for in Texas by *Texas Monthly* magazine. Front row: Larry Anglin, board chair, and Susan Kamas, executive director; Second row: Linda Angel, Mary Kliever, board vice-chair, and Vickie Gideon; Third row: Horace Dicks, Kimberly Patterson, Jerry Haisler, Bud Alexander and Lewis Boren. Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions of Central Texas

Investment Act local activity and statewide alternative funds.

Program introduces simulated work settings to at-risk youth

"Directions," an eight-week youth employment program,



was a collaboration among Workforce Solutions Cameron, private industry, and several community-based organizations that offered participation in a simulated work environment for 50 at-risk youth ages 14 to 18.

"Directions" taught responsibility; sharpened interpersonal and team skills; created awareness of careers in targeted industries including renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, health care, education, and hospitality; and exposed participants to regular work settings.

Participants each earned \$1,680 through the program, engaging in team projects such as planning and constructing a scale-model, safety-focused children's playground. As

a result of the program, 75 percent of the participants stated that they would choose to continue their education beyond high school.

Executive Council formed to address economic development

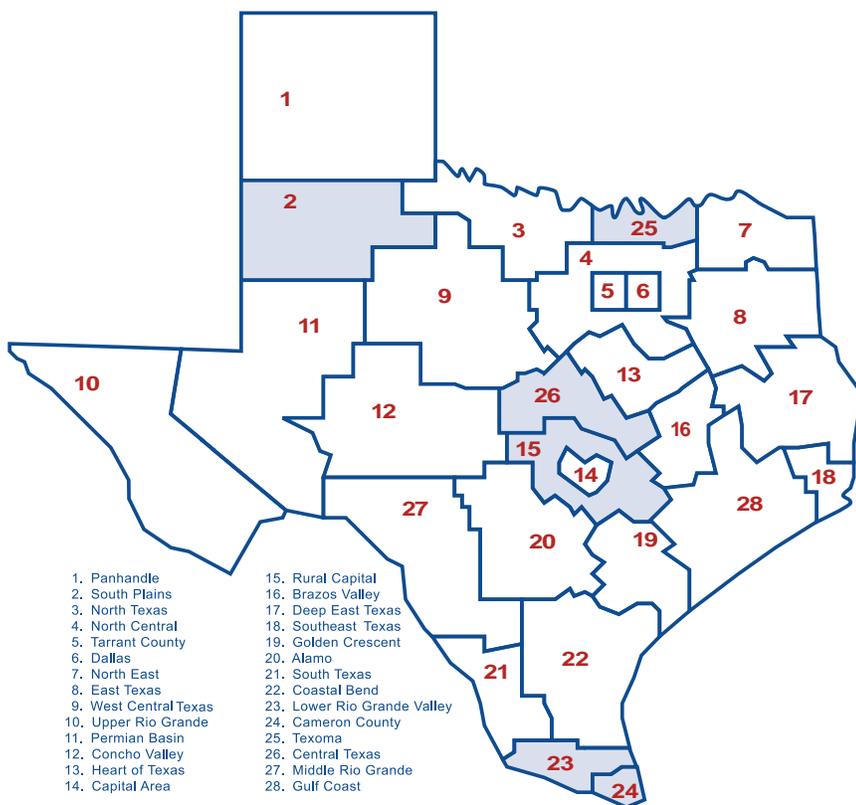
Workforce Solutions Texoma (Texoma) recently formed the



Grayson County Executive Council, comprised of county government officials, economic development leaders, Texoma officials, and representatives from the Texoma Council of Governments, to increase communication among communities in Grayson County.

The council meets quarterly to provide a forum for small communities to learn best practices from economic development leaders of larger communities. Texoma leads the meetings and produces reports for each community to help better coordinate economic development efforts.

Fannin County has established a similar organization.



Lower Rio summer youth employment effort recognized

Workforce Solutions Lower Rio Grande Valley has been recognized by the National Association of Workforce Boards in its 2009 Summer Youth Employment Program “Best Story Winners” competition.

The winning entry described how workforce center employees in Pharr helped 21-year-old Rudy Ibarra rebound after he lost his job, received an eviction warning, and sent his wife and two children to live with his mother. The workforce center helped him secure board-approved funds for housing that allowed his family to return to their apartment.

He enrolled in the board’s Summer Youth Employment Program, which allowed him to work for Goodwill Industries while studying electrical technology.

South Plains event introduces students to area job market

Workforce Solutions South Plains (South Plains) partnered with Lubbock’s Estacado High School counseling staff to coordinate the third annual Estacado High School Career & Job Fair.

Twenty-six area employers and more than 300 students attended the event and gained a better understanding of the region’s job market.

The event provided employers with the opportunity to promote specific education and training needs. Students learned about regional demand occupations, salary structures, and educational requirements for various jobs.

Retail, restaurant, health care, government, banking, and telecommunications employers provided helpful employment application tips. Some on-the-spot hires resulted, said Lisa Spears, South

Plains public information officer.

Information also was provided regarding dual-credit programs offered by area colleges and universities.



Saul Caballero, Covenant Medical Center human resources recruiter and Health Traxx coordinator, speaks with an Estacado High School student at a recent career and job fair held at the school. Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions South Plains



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The Texas Workforce Commission, in partnership with 28 local workforce development boards, forms Texas Workforce Solutions.



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