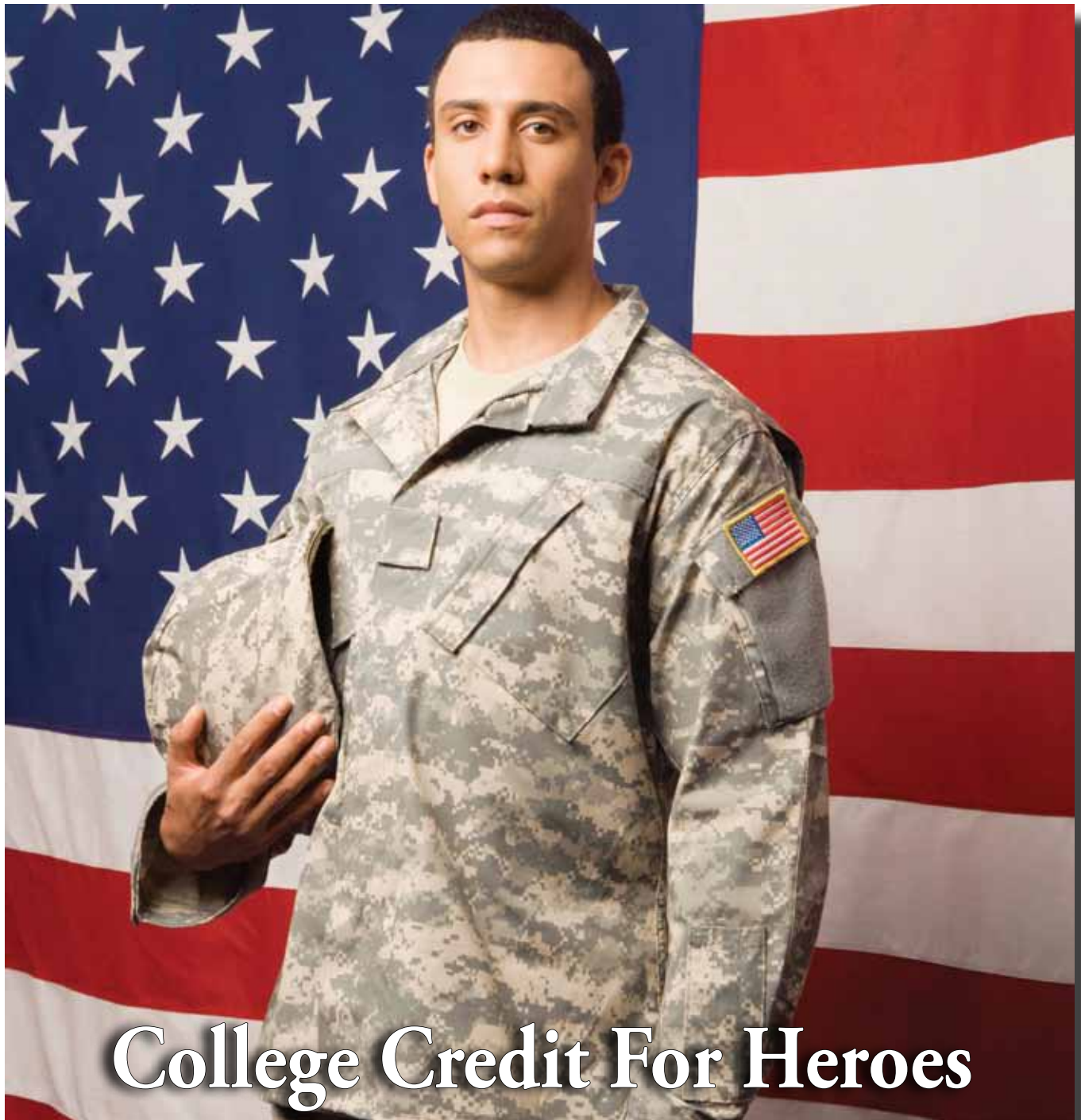


SOLUTIONS

Fall 2011

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College Credit For Heroes

New program allows veterans to fast track their education goals

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On the cover: Military service members will be able to get a jump start on completing their education by receiving college credit for skills they obtained while serving their country under the new College Credit for Heroes program.
Photo by Jupiterimages/Creatas/Thinkstock

Texas Workforce Commission

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Ronny Congleton
Commissioner
Representing Labor

Texas stands at a crossroads. The country has been battered by the Great Recession and uncertain economic times. Our great state has withstood the turmoil better than most, but that is little consolation to several hundred thousand Texans that have not yet found work. Their suffering is real, and so is the damage to society caused by this waste of human productivity. Now is the time to join together to improve our economy and our working conditions for a brighter future.

We need to make work pay for Texans. We can do so by creating a favorable climate for job creation. Not just any jobs, but jobs that pay enough for a person to earn a decent living without having to work nights and weekends somewhere else just to get by.

It hardly needs repeating that we must have a favorable business environment for that to occur. This means low taxes and limited governmental regulation, but it also means effective law enforcement. Businesses in Texas need to know that the rules will be applied equally across the board and that they will not be put in a competitive disadvantage by scrupulously complying with the law.

A limited and clear regulatory system is essential to the smooth operation of the law of supply and demand. Business needs stability to thrive, but beyond that, we must stimulate consumer demand. A steady supply of customers willing and able to spend money is crucial to the success of any market-based enterprise.

We have gone through a decade or more in which the spending capital of consumers has come not from their work, but from the value of their homes. That was unsustainable and led in large part to the economic crash we have experienced. We will not return to prosperity without creating wealth and consumer demand, but it is neither likely nor desirable that we rebuild an economy based on real estate speculation.

Instead, our future wealth should come from work. As Americans, we all have an innate sense that hard work is the foundation of success. Our efforts should be focused on making that work pay. When payday comes, we want workers to have money left over after they pay their bills to spend on goods and services created in the USA. The health of our economy depends on it. ■

College Credit for Heroes assists veterans returning to the classroom

By Laura Ybarra

Under the new College Credit for Heroes program, military service members will be able to get a jump start on completing their education by receiving college credit for skills they obtained while serving their country. Administered by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the \$3 million workforce development program was launched by Gov. Rick Perry at a bill signing in San Antonio.

“When I first got out of the military in 1996, I only received three college credits for my military experience,” said Ron Brown, associate vice chancellor of the Division of Education Partnership for the Lone Star College System. “This program will recognize the training veterans receive while in service and helps prevent them from beginning their higher education career from square one. That helps both veterans and the state save money as it expedites veterans returning to the workforce.”

The Lone Star College System is one of seven community colleges located in a high veteran population area selected to help facilitate the College Credit for Heroes program. The other six selected schools are: Alamo Colleges, Central Texas College, Lee College, San Jacinto College, Houston Community College, and Temple College. Over a 15-month period, the colleges will develop models for awarding college credit by evaluating military training, including testing and prior learning assessments.

“By fall 2012, our goal is to provide the legislature with an



TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Ronny Congleton educates military service members and health care professionals about the new College Credit for Heroes program at St. Philip's College in San Antonio. Photo courtesy of Office of the Governor Rick Perry

evaluation of the pilot program in order to recommend effective strategies for veterans to receive maximum credit for their military training and experience,” said Apurva Naik, with the TWC workforce business services department.

According to the Texas Veterans Commission, Texas is home to 1.8 million veterans, including approximately 450,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. The College Credit for Heroes program is designed to address high veteran unemployment rates. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that the unemployment rate of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans was 11.8 percent in July, compared to a nonveteran unemployment rate of 9.5 percent.

At Houston Community College, an accelerated certification program

for surgical technicians is currently in development. At present, obtaining the surgical technician certification requires 37 credit hours. Under the College Credit for Heroes model, veterans who are technically qualified from their military experience will be able to gain the same certification with only six hours of additional credit.

“This is the type of program that would have been beneficial after my return from duty in Vietnam,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Ronny Congleton. “Our veterans and service members bring to our communities and employers a wealth of knowledge and experience from their military service. With this legislation, we are able to give our veterans and service members a greater opportunity for a successful transition into civilian life.” ■

Wind energy expanding across Texas, creating jobs in its wake

By Kate Hourin

The availability and accessibility of wind power along the Gulf Coast made the former Naval Station Ingleside a natural location for Texas State Technical College (TSTC) to expand its wind energy technology program. Twenty students started their first semester at the college's new Renewable Energy Education Center this fall.

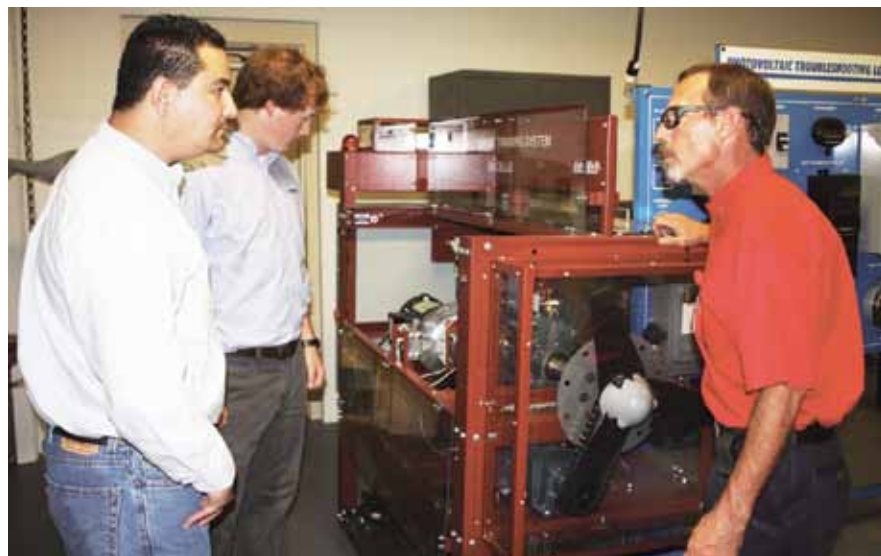
"The infrastructure was in place and the industry is really hungry to hire our graduates," said Adam Hutchison, vice president of Student Learning at TSTC-Harlingen.

TSTC began training students in wind energy technology in 2007 at its West Texas site in Sweetwater, an area where wind energy is now considered a mature industry. The training program expanded last year to the Harlingen campus, and now students are learning these skills in an 8,600-square-foot building on the Ingleside property.

TSTC is the first tenant to occupy space on the former base. More than 2,000 military and civilian workers lost their jobs at the 900-acre facility when the Base Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC) of 2005 fully shut it down in April.

"As we see the renewable energy industry grow, greater employment opportunities exist in this area now," said George Lister, instructor at the new center.

According to Hutchison, jobs in the industry start at \$15 an hour and climb upwards to nearly \$100,000 a year. He explained that the two-semester program will earn its graduates a Level 1 Certificate to attain a service and maintenance entry-level position. The five-semester



From left, Site Manager Denim Roberts of Vestas Americas, Field Service Engineer Evan Smith of Siemens Energy, and Wind Energy Instructor George Lister of Texas State Technical College (TSTC) discuss training for entry-level technicians at the new Renewable Energy Education Center in Ingleside. Photo courtesy TSTC

associate degree program, which can lead to managerial opportunities in the industry, includes an academic component offered at nearby Del Mar College.

A \$1.9 million grant awarded through the Governor's Office Military Preparedness Commission and a \$500,000 grant from the Texas Workforce Commission enabled TSTC to install state-of-the-art renewable energy training equipment. TSTC will lease the property from the Port of Corpus Christi for five years. The port also is negotiating with Canyon Supply & Logistics LLC to build an offshore oil and gas facility at the site.

Lister indicated that much of the training involves lessons learned from the oil and gas industry, including electronics and hydraulics.

"We're not doing anything new – we're just doing it at 80 meters above the ground," he said. "Offshore

renewable wind energy is going to explode in Texas."

That expansion also may include a partnership among TSTC, Texas A&M University, and Vestas Americas to develop an offshore wind turbine testing area, leading to an expansion of renewable energy training programs at Ingleside. Vestas is a European wind turbine manufacturing company that recently moved its research and development workforce to Houston and already has wind turbines operating in the Coastal Bend area.

"We are targeting people who lost their jobs when the base closed," said Hutchison. "The beauty of this renewable energy skills training program is that it puts people back to work."

For more information on the Wind Energy Technology program at TSTC, call (800) 852-8784. ■

Burgeoning Borders

Study reveals in-demand occupations, workforce challenges in border regions

By **Rachael Pierce**

In a state as large as Texas, each region's workforce faces unique challenges to providing opportunities for both employers and job seekers. With the assistance of a \$250,000 Regional Cooperation Capacity Building for Targeted Industries program grant from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), Workforce Solutions Lower Rio Grande Valley (Lower Rio Grande) embarked on a regional study to identify high-demand occupations, available resources, and workforce issues along the Texas border.

Yvonne 'Bonnie' Gonzalez, CEO of Lower Rio Grande, emphasized the importance of broadening the scope to include a partnership with Workforce Solutions Cameron, since challenges and opportunities across different border regions are often similar.

Study results revealed seven high-demand industries across the region: healthcare, energy, construction/skilled trades, advanced manufacturing, criminal justice/border security, education, and business services. Additionally, the research indicated a renewed interest in entrepreneurship, which aligns with Lower Rio Grande's focus.

"Neighborhood mom-and-pop shops are everywhere – restaurants, graphic artists, flower shops. We hope to be able to cultivate [entrepreneurship] regionally," said Gonzalez.

The study found entrepreneurship as a potential driver of local economic growth, as people may be more likely to start a business than to take a more traditional employment



A study funded by the Texas Workforce Commission identified several high-demand industries, including healthcare, across the Texas border region. *Photo by Creatas/Thinkstock*

route given the current economy. By developing resources to support entrepreneurial growth, established small businesses, which constitute the majority of regional businesses, will also reap the rewards.

Victor de Leon, public information officer for Lower Rio Grande, cited the need to continue building an entrepreneurial spirit in the Valley given the area's youthful population.

"Our area has one of the youngest populations in the state and that generation is starving for new ideas on how to build a business," said de Leon. "Filling that need by providing tools and resources is critical for entrepreneurs in developing that workforce and our economy."

The grant-funded study provided a series of strategies to develop entrepreneurship along the border, including: arranging a network of

mentors; maintaining initiatives to develop entrepreneurship among youth; coordinating industry-specific support groups; and organizing training workshops.

Lower Rio Grande will host the State of the Workforce: A Call to Action event November 3-4 on South Padre Island to present the study's findings in a comprehensive overview. Business and education partners, training providers, and economic and industrial developers are invited to attend.

"Lower Rio Grande is inviting key community stakeholders that will bring something to the table, help us interpret the information provided, collaboratively formulate strategies, and do something with it," said de Leon.

To learn more about the State of the Workforce, visit www.wfsolutions.org or call (956) 928-5000. ■

NOWHIRING



Good-paying jobs
are available
in a variety
of industries
throughout Texas



Employment Focus

By Debbie Pitts

Good-paying jobs are available in a variety of industries throughout Texas. Despite national economic trends, Texas continues to experience positive job growth. From July 2010 through July 2011, Texas gained nearly 270,000 jobs.

In some cases, workers must be willing to relocate or invest in training to acquire needed skills, but recent hiring indicates that employers in Texas are continuing to create jobs.

For example, Hewlett Packard's (HP) business expansion meant the company recently posted openings for more than 170 workers in El Paso. Job fairs organized by Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande (Upper Rio Grande) helped the company find application service developers, project managers, information developers, information testers, customer project/program managers, and software configuration managers.

"The HP El Paso location is dedicated to the delivery of Information Technology services to various clients throughout the U.S.," said Annabelle Baxter, worldwide media relations manager for HP. "We recently added these positions to meet existing and forecasted demand for applications development services in the U.S."

In some cases, the employees needed are not readily available within the local workforce and efforts are made to attract workers who are willing to relocate. Upper Rio Grande held a job fair in August in El Paso to help recruit 40 workers for jobs with GEO Group Inc., which runs the Big Spring Correctional facility. The company needed correctional officers, cook supervisors, licensed vocational nurses, registered nurses (RNs), and maintenance technicians.

"We are always ready to assist employers with their hiring needs," said Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande CEO Lorenzo Reyes Jr. "A number of employers come from outside our region to recruit after not finding the candidates they need in their home base. We help make that match for them, and in turn, provide additional opportunities for our job seekers."

New facilities springing up in Texas have created a need for large numbers of workers to staff them.

Caterpillar Inc. is in the process of hiring workers in Victoria to operate its Hydraulic Excavator Facility, currently under construction. The company will ramp up hiring in January for the facility, which will employ 500 to 700 workers at full capacity.

One of Caterpillar's suppliers, Texas Power Systems, also is hiring a significant number of workers for its Seguin facility, located northeast of San Antonio. With assistance from Workforce Solutions Alamo, more than 550 individuals have already been hired, and the company plans to employ a total of 1,400.

Healthcare professionals continue to be in demand statewide, particularly RNs. CARENET Healthcare

Services, based in San Antonio, hired 100 RNs to provide telephone medical triage work from home and plans to hire 50 more. These nurses assess a patient's medical needs and provide expert care instructions over the phone. American HomePatient, a patient support center, is recruiting customer service representatives for its new call center in Longview, which will employ 200 when fully operational.

In the Panhandle area, Halliburton is hiring 150 entry-level operator assistants for its cementing, wire line, and well completions tools product divisions.

"We have been experiencing phenomenal growth," said Jaime Lopez, senior human resource generalist for the Halliburton Pampa District Office. "This is an indication of the growth in the market."

These are just some of the businesses in Texas who are searching for new employees. Many more are continuing to hire. Employers who need assistance finding skilled workers should contact their local Workforce Solutions Office to learn more about available services. In addition, job seekers and employers can take advantage of WorkInTexas.com, TWC's powerful online job-matching website, that connects employers of all sizes and industries with qualified job candidates. ■

Recent hiring indicates that employers in Texas are continuing to create jobs.

‘Dancing Backwards in High Heels’

Business women tap into their potential at El Paso conference

By **Laura Ybarra**

Former Texas Gov. Ann Richards popularized the saying, “Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did. She just did it backwards and in high heels.” Inspired by this concept, more than 200 women and men attended the Seventh Annual Women’s Business Symposium, “Dancing Backwards in High Heels,” held this summer in El Paso.

“The title of the symposium figuratively addresses what women go through every day as professionals, parents, spouses, volunteers, etc.” said keynote speaker Lt. Col. Karen Wrancher, commander of the First Armored Division’s Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion at Fort Bliss. “Women face a variety of challenges and it’s a balancing act in many ways. They are usually the caregivers in their homes while also meeting professional demands – with excellence I might add.”



**Lt. Col.
Karen
Wrancher**

Sponsored by the Women’s Business Border Center of the El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (EPHCC) and the U.S. Small Business Administration, the symposium was dedicated to educating and empowering women in the workforce, particularly those interested in starting their own business. Seminar topics included best practices for corporate and small businesses, identifying co-worker/employee strengths and personalities, male and female communication in the work place, and mental health awareness to assist employers on how best to address these needs in the work environment.

Roxie Samaniego, partner and co-founder of the accounting firm White + Samaniego + Campbell LLP, attended the symposium and served as a local panelist.

“The Hispanic Chamber has done so much both for my firm and for my personal growth,” Samaniego said. “The chamber provided us resources when we were trying to get started and spotlighted our business. They really helped us grow our firm through word of mouth, which is better than anything we could have paid for.”

According to Samaniego, the EPHCC is the premiere group in El Paso focusing on women in the workplace.

“Women in El Paso really want to learn from other women, and the Hispanic Chamber is the tool allowing that to happen,” said Samaniego. “They often host



Katia LeMone, certified health coach, participates in the El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Women’s Business Symposium in July. *Photo courtesy of El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce*

professional luncheons for women, and their Women’s Business Border Center provides excellent resources for women in business who either own or want to own a business.”

Griselda Oaxaca, marketing director for El Paso Cosmetic Surgery and advisory board member of EPHCC’s Women’s Business Border Center, said the event exceeded her expectations.

“The biggest problem women face is fear. Fear gets in the way of the steps needed to start a business,” said Oaxaca. “The great thing is that help is out there, and the symposium educated us about the options.” ■

Future is bright for Taylor

City holds summit to address economic development process

By Shannon Thomas

Long regarded as a sleepy little country town nestled north of the Austin metro area, the city of Taylor is working to change its image to a community poised to compete in the 21st century global economy.

With that goal in mind, the Taylor Economic Development Corporation (TEDC) sponsored the Taylor Economic Summit in June.

Key business and community leaders attended the summit to learn more about the economic development process, the stakeholders, and tools necessary to bring economic growth to Taylor, a city of approximately 15,000 residents.

“We need to start planting the seeds today for the shape of the community we want in the future,” said James Satterwhite, executive director of Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area. “We really challenged attendees to get involved in selling Taylor and made them aware that they can be involved in steering the community’s destiny and shaping the kind of economy they want.”

Representatives from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) participated in the Summit, which attracted more than 100 people, providing information on workforce services and other available TWC programs that can help spur economic development.

“Economic development is not just about recruiting,” said Doug Ridge, TWC director of Employer Initiatives. “You have to establish, retain, and attract more businesses to your area.



TWC Director of Employer Initiatives Doug Ridge (right) addresses the audience at the Taylor Economic Summit held in June. Photo courtesy of TEDC

This is where resources like our Skills Development Fund can play a crucial role.”

The Skills Development Fund is Texas’ premier job-training program providing training dollars for Texas businesses and workers.

The city’s efforts to attract business investment are already paying off. Recently, Durcon Inc., a Taylor-based manufacturer of work surfaces for laboratories, moved all of its U.S. operations to Taylor, resulting in an expansion of its facility’s capabilities, more capital investments, and the addition of 65 local jobs. The largest single-sort recycling center in the area, Wilco Recycling, plans to bring 40 jobs to the city as it ramps up operations at its new Taylor facility.

According to TEDC President and CEO Jason Ford, Taylor offers businesses a host of assets, including the largest available manufacturing building space in Central Texas, a bustling municipal airport, and quality-of-life amenities such as regional parks.

“We offer a distinct cost advantage to businesses, especially smaller start-ups, because of our location,” Ford

said. “In Taylor, you can access high-tech talent without the big city prices.”

Ford says city officials are already making plans to hold another summit next year.

In order to grow and retain talent in Taylor, Satterwhite emphasized the importance of focusing on education goals as a way to bring better-paying jobs to Taylor. Satterwhite said clean energy and advanced manufacturing are two industries where Taylor could flourish.

“Temple College is located here and key economic development leaders are working to create even more local educational opportunities,” said Satterwhite. “As far as talent retention goes, we all know retail jobs aren’t necessarily going to keep kids in Taylor. Our economic development group sees what needs to be done in these changing times to make sure we have talented and skilled workers on hand.

“Taylor is on the precipice of a huge explosion of growth,” Satterwhite continued. “I feel we will be wildly successful in our education, recruiting, and efforts to retain talent. It’s just a matter of time.” ■

New workforce center has grand opening in McKinney

Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas (North Central Texas) recently celebrated the grand opening of its new McKinney Workforce Center, located at 1701 W. Eldorado Parkway, Suite 250. On hand for the ribbon-cutting ceremony were Congressman Sam Johnson, Collin County Judge Keith Self, and McKinney City Councilman Roger Harris.



“The new McKinney Workforce Center will enable us to serve twice as many customers as our previous center,” said North Central Texas Executive Director David Setzer. “This will be a huge benefit to getting people in McKinney and surrounding communities back into the workforce sooner.”

The 9,000 square-foot center provides more space to help customers including a high-tech conference room. The center’s two presentations rooms will be used for resume writing and interviewing skills workshops. Employers also will be able to utilize these rooms to interview potential job candidates. In addition, the center’s resource room houses 18 computer terminals where customers can search for jobs, apply for unemployment benefits, and update their resumes.

West Central connects workforce with local training providers

Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas (West Central) recently helped connect workers and job



seekers with training providers and colleges at the Vocational Training Provider Fair. The fair’s goal was to help educate the local workforce about available training programs related



Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas Executive Director David Setzer, flanked by local, state, and federal officials, cuts the ribbon to formally open the new McKinney Workforce Center on W. Eldorado Parkway. The 9,000 square-foot facility is one of 15 workforce centers serving the North Central Texas Workforce Development Area. Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas

to regionally in-demand occupations. Attendees learned about specific training opportunities, and about available financial aid while speaking directly with training providers.

Representatives from Texas State Technical College West Texas, Cisco College, Western Texas College, Action Career Training, and the West Central Texas Law Enforcement Academy attended the fair hosted by West Central. Training programs highlighted everything from automotive technology and nursing to welding and truck driving.

The event held at the Abilene Civic Center attracted approximately 100 attendees, according to Steve Collins, public information officer at West Central. Collins noted the fair was a great opportunity for individuals looking to begin a new career or to upgrade their skills.

Greater Dallas partners with Men's Wearhouse for drive

This year, Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas (Greater Dallas) partnered with the Men’s Wearhouse National Suit Drive to



provide approximately 500 Dallas County men with clothes appropriate for job interviews.

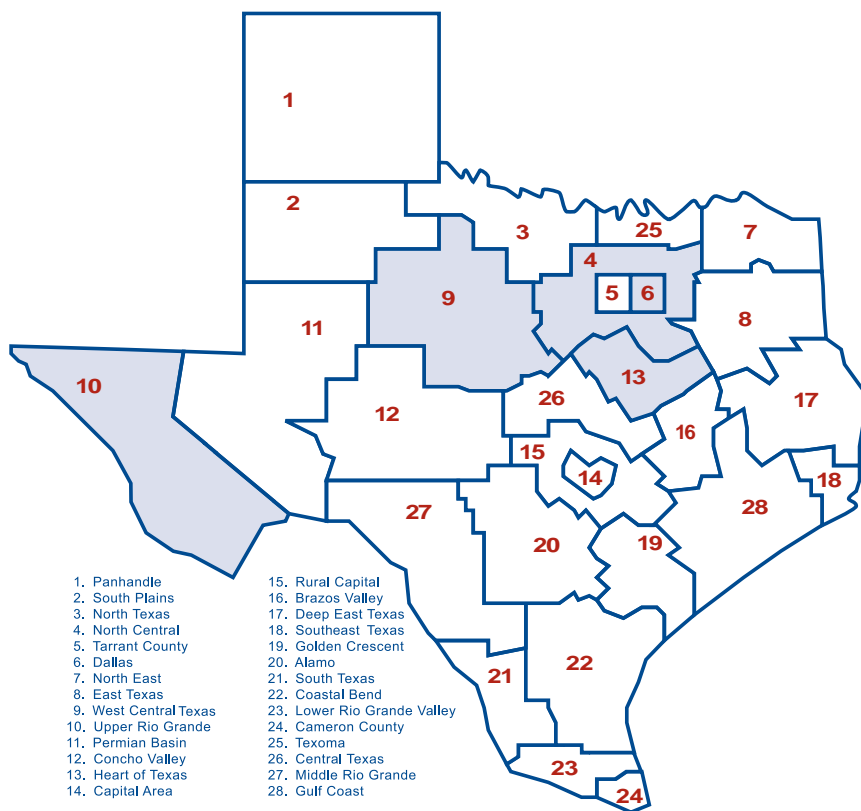
More than 3,600 donated items were given to the Men’s Clothes Closet, operated year-round by Greater Dallas.

“Making a good impression on a new business contact is essential,” said Dee Johnson, program manager for Greater Dallas. “This project has provided our clients with the tools they need to project the positive image and self-confidence necessary to find employment and achieve self-sufficiency.”

The suit drive, held in August, allowed customers to receive a 50 percent discount on new purchases from the Men’s Wearhouse in exchange for donating gently used professional attire including dress suits, slacks, dress shirts, and accessories. Additionally, Men’s Wearhouse donated a new dress shirt or tie for each suit donation they received.

“Each man leaves ready to meet prospective employers not only looking his best, but also radiating the self-confidence needed to get the job,” Johnson said.

Clients of the Men’s Clothes Closet are referred by counselors, case



managers, workforce staff, and community partners. Greater Dallas staff members help provide clients with an interview outfit and other necessities, and coached them on interviewing skills and techniques.

Greater Dallas refers female job seekers to a similar program operated by a nonprofit organization, Attitudes and Attire.

Limestone County employers help students gain job skills

Students from 10 high schools, east of Waco, have the opportunity to begin gaining the skills they need for a career in the energy industry. Dual-credit coursework, in which students receive high school and college credits, is available through Navarro College at the NRG Energy Inc. (NRG) Limestone Electric Generating Station facility. The high school



students learn alongside high school graduates at the Navarro/NRG Training Center and gain real world experience in an actual workplace. The completed training can lead to a Power Plant Operations and Maintenance Certificate by the time the students graduate high school.

Concerned that many employees at the Limestone Electric Generating Station near Jewitt were reaching retirement age, NRG partnered with the college and local school districts to develop the privately funded program. This program will help ensure that a pipeline of skilled workers is available in the future. NRG and other partnering employers donate money to a scholarship fund, which pays half of each student's tuition.

"We do this primarily as a community service to help give these students some valuable job skills," said John Fry, training specialist for NRG. "The program also provides us with the opportunity to have a ready local

workforce."

Workers who complete this training can earn good wages and set themselves on a solid career path in the energy industry. At NRG, an apprentice can enter a three-year program earning approximately \$24 per hour with anticipated pay raises over the apprenticeship period. After completion of that program, the employee can become a journeyman and earn more than \$33 per hour.

Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande awards 48 scholarships

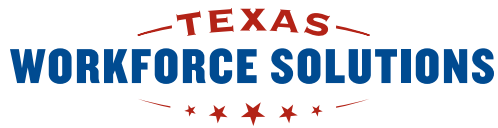
Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande (Upper Rio Grande) has awarded 48 University of Texas-El Paso (UTEP) students scholarships to continue their pursuit of a college degree in early childhood education and development.



Each recipient will receive nearly \$1,200, funded by an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Quality Expansion Grant. The scholarship is intended to help students reach their educational goals and can be applied toward any education-related costs, including textbooks, lab fees, and other expenses associated with their studies.

"We are truly grateful to Upper Rio Grande, one of our most valued community partners, for this generous gift to benefit many highly deserving and hard-working students," said UTEP President Diana Natalicio. "Scholarships such as these help UTEP achieve its mission to provide access and academic excellence to all talented students."

UTEP and Upper Rio Grande have an ongoing partnership and shared mission. Last year, the board established a workforce satellite office on the UTEP campus.



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



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