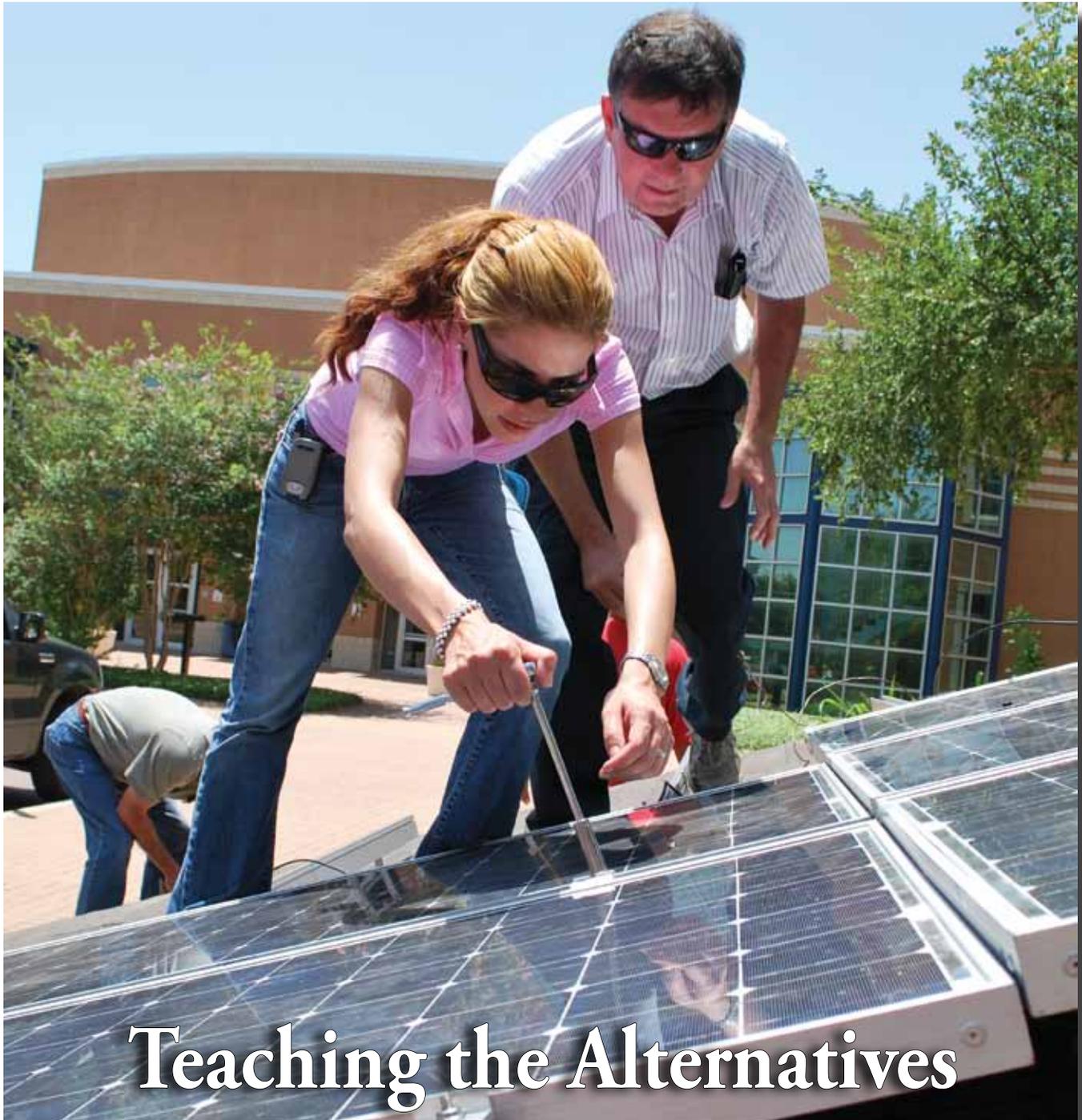


SOLUTIONS

Summer 2011

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Teaching the Alternatives

New training facilities focus on preparation for careers in renewable energy

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On the cover: Students in the St. Philip's College(SPC) power generation and alternative energy program install solar panels at model worksites at SPC-West Campus in San Antonio. *Photo courtesy St. Philip's College*

Texas Workforce Commission

Tom Pauken

Chairman, Commissioner Representing Employers

Ronny Congleton

Commissioner Representing Labor

Andres Alcantar

Commissioner Representing the Public

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Tom Pauken
Chairman
Commissioner
Representing Employers

Texas has weathered the worst national recession since the Great Depression better than most states. In June, the unemployment rate in Texas was 8.2 percent – a significantly lower figure than the national rate of 9.2 percent. From 2001 to 2010, while Texas was adding private sector jobs, every other one of the 10 largest labor market states was losing them.

There are many reasons why Texas has fared better than so many other states have during the downturn. We have no state income tax, a low business tax, and a positive regulatory climate for business. Meanwhile, people and companies based in high-tax, high-regulatory states like California, Illinois, and Michigan are voting with their feet and moving their businesses and employees to Texas.

To accommodate this growth, the Texas Workforce Commission has successfully administered a number of programs to address the concerns of our state's employers and workers. The *Texas Back to Work* program, started in 2009, provides an incentive of up to \$2,000 to employers who hire those who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. With the goal of getting people off the unemployment rolls and back to work, the program has been a win-win for employers, job seekers, and taxpayers. To date more than 16,240 unemployed Texans have been hired by nearly 3,700 employers through this initiative, which received the U.S. Department of Labor's best practices award last fall.

Partnering with the private sector is at the heart of our most successful hiring and training efforts. One way we do that is through the Skills Development Fund, an employer driven job-training program that provides training dollars to community colleges who partner with Texas businesses seeking to remain competitive and viable in this global economy. In 2010, grants from this fund helped more than 25,000 Texans gain valuable training for new or upgraded positions.

Texas is the number one place in America to do business. Let's make sure that we continue to lead the nation in job creation and economic growth.

El Paso-area competition encourages students to explore STEM-related careers

By Debbie Pitts

What better way for students to learn about entrepreneurship and the real world use of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) skills than to actually develop an innovative idea and create a business built around it? That's exactly what 30 teams of high school students did this spring by participating in the STEM Challenge² competition, in which they developed business plans that would address an economic need using STEM-related applications.

"By aligning STEM components into a business plan, STEM Challenge² is intended to capture the innovative, entrepreneurial spirit of students by emphasizing the importance of applying those skills to high demand industries of tomorrow," said Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande (Upper Rio Grande) CEO Lorenzo Reyes Jr. "Now in its second year, this competition is proving to be a valuable opportunity for regional high school youth."

STEM Challenge² was sponsored by Upper Rio Grande, the Bi-National Sustainability Laboratory, the University of Texas at El Paso's Colleges of Engineering and Business, Innovate El Paso, the Collegiate Entrepreneurs' Organization, the SCORE Association (Service Corps of Retired Executives), Cisco Systems Inc., El Paso Electric Co., and Connect a Million Minds. The competition included teams from the six-county Upper Rio Grande Board area. Prizes were awarded for the first-through third-place teams with additional awards for "best presentation" and "best elevator pitch."

Valle Verde Early College (VVEC) High School Math Club took top the top honor at this year's 2011 STEM Challenge² competition with their innovative wastewater reclamation system dubbed 'Grey Water Solutions.'

The five-member team collaborated on the idea to address water shortages and designed the system so that it can be applied on a large scale.

"We each took on a role in the company and made the presentation for that portion of the plan," said VVEC student Mary Fuentes who also served as the chief financial officer for Grey Water Solutions. "As the CFO, I spoke about the financial part. Overall, it was a really good experience."

"The innovative ideas that these young people developed were very impressive," said TWC Commissioner Representing the Public Andres Alcantar, who served on the distinguished panel of judges for the competition. "Programs like this help Texas students develop skills that



The Valle Verde Early College High School team claimed first prize at the second annual Stem Challenge² competition. Each first place team member was awarded \$400. Pictured from left to right are: Isaac Bautista, Katherine Carrasco Ramos, Levi Morgan, Mary Fuentes, Willie Silva of El Paso Electric Co. (an event sponsor), TWC Commissioner Representing the Public Andres Alcantar, and Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande Chief Executive Officer Lorenzo Reyes Jr. Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande



employers tell us are in high demand both now and in the future and such initiatives merit replication. I applaud the Board for sponsoring this innovative program that has broad employer and community support."

SCORE, an entrepreneurial education partner with the Small Business Administration, helped participating teams develop business plans and 15 teams selected as finalists received elevator pitch coaching from the Collegiate Entrepreneurs' Organization.

Each member of the winning VVEC team was awarded \$400 and the team will receive professional guidance and assistance from Innovate El Paso to help develop, fund, and eventually commercialize their company.

"These kids really want to get this company started and they are very excited about it," said Robert Trejo, a VVEC teacher and sponsor for the Grey Water Solutions team. "Even the students who graduated this spring are excited and we plan to meet with Innovate El Paso soon." ■



From Start...



(Above) LSC-North Harris broke ground on the Victory Center in October 2010. (Right) Construction is almost complete on Victory Center, which will open to students in the fall of 2011. Photo courtesy Lone Star College-North Harris

...to finish

Lone Star College debuts new academic training facility

By Rachael Pierce

Students will fill the halls of the new Victory Center located on the Lone Star College-North Harris campus for the first time in August. Victory Center, a new 85,000-square-foot facility, has the capacity to educate 3,500 students in additional classrooms, an early college program, and a new 20,000-square-foot construction trades training facility.

Lone Star College (LSC) built Victory Center to help meet the growing demands of Greater Houston-area employers and a growing student population. The number of students taking classes for college credit at LSC-North Harris grew by nearly 48 percent in the last couple of years.

The former training facility in North Harris, the Carver Center, lacked the space and resources to host new workforce training programs. Victory Center will fill this void.

“Our goal was to offer a full-service educational facility with

affordable options for everyone, whether they want to get into the job market quickly, earn an associate degree or start a bachelor’s degree, or just take some leisure learning courses,” said John Luedemann, program coordinator at LSC-North Harris.

The construction trades building will accommodate four training labs—one for welding, one for HVAC training (heating, ventilating, air conditioning), and two flex labs to allow different training programs at different times based on industry demand, said Allen Rice, interim director of continuing education for LSC-North Harris.

Curriculum in the construction trades building will also focus on training students in sheet metal, drywall, and other in-demand construction trades. Students can earn certifications of completion, industry certifications, or degrees for their training programs.

The college will work with local

companies to determine what training they require for employees, and subsequently, train students at Victory Center in areas that meet those needs, Rice noted. The center also will host special training courses for local companies to further the knowledge and skills of their current employees in specific areas.

Additionally, LSC-North Harris plans to market Victory Center training programs to high school students, allowing young students to learn a construction trade like basic HVAC skills.

“Give us your summer and we’ll give you a skill,” Rice said.

Students trained in construction trades are expected to have positive prospects for the future. Construction jobs in the Gulf Coast area, where Victory Center is located, are expected to grow 25 percent by 2018, according to figures from the Texas Workforce Commission’s Labor Market and Career Information Department. ■

North Central's mobile unit offers workforce center services on wheels

By Shannon Thomas

Madeline Ortiz, a 15-year employee of the Plano Independent School District (ISD), never thought she'd lose her job. But that's exactly what happened in April, when she found out her teaching assistant position would be eliminated in June.

"My first thought was, 'Now what am I going to do?'" Ortiz said. "I always thought my job in education was secure. I had no clue what to do next."

Fortunately for Ortiz, and the hundreds of other Plano ISD employees affected by layoffs, Workforce Solutions North Central Texas (North Central) is utilizing one of its newest high-tech tools, a Mobile Workforce Unit, to assist displaced workers with Unemployment Insurance (UI) claims and employment services.

"Our new mobile unit allows us to serve workers immediately, get them into our system, and help avoid long lines at some of our workforce centers," said Mark Murtagh, senior workforce planner for North Central. "The unit allows us to handle mass layoffs on the spot, and give those affected access to the resources they need."

The 38-foot-long Mobile Workforce Unit is outfitted with 13 computer stations plus a state-of-the-art video system that allows staff to give presentations to groups. With a satellite Internet system, job seekers can search for jobs, create or improve their résumés, and apply for UI benefits. According to Murtagh, the process to obtain the unit started three years ago; the funding for the unit came from the board's general fund.

"It was worth the wait," said



Workforce Solutions North Central Texas' 38-foot-long Mobile Workforce Unit is outfitted with 13 computer stations plus a top notch video system that allows staff to give presentations to groups.

Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions North Central Texas

Murtagh. "The mobile unit enables us to go to the people we serve."

North Central partnered with the Region 10 Education Service Center to offer information on unemployment benefits and transitional services for employees affected by the Plano ISD layoffs.

For Ortiz, having fast access to Texas Workforce Commission services helped ease the shock of the layoff notice she received.

"The [North Central] staff has been a great support to me, beginning with my first interactions at the Mobile Workforce Unit," she said. "I'm in the process of completing my UI claim, but workforce staff has helped me develop a plan for the future."

The Mobile Workforce Unit was recently dispatched to Waxahachie, where approximately 350 workers were

laid off at a trio of manufacturing companies, which shut down overnight. The Mobile Workforce Unit joined forces with the Waxahachie Workforce Center to assist hundreds of laid off workers.

"It is unfortunate that so many people are now out of a job in Waxahachie, however we are doing our best to assist them in finding new jobs. The Mobile Workforce Unit is a huge asset for us to have in this process," said David Setzer, North Central executive director.

Future events for the Mobile Workforce Unit include visits to area hiring fairs, including ones to be held by local H-E-B grocery stores and Walgreens. Setzer says North Central will eventually use the unit as an onsite training location for local employers. ■



Dennis McDonough, director of the power generation and alternative energy program at St. Philip's College, displays the roof-top solar array at the centers to Russian STEM professionals on a tour in June. *Photo by Laura Ybarra*

Renewable Skills

St. Philip's College addresses need for skilled workers in alternative energy industry

By Laura Ybarra

The faculty and staff of St. Philip's College (SPC) have made great strides to address a local demand for skilled workers with specific training in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math – collectively referred to as STEM.

“We reached out to San Antonio [STEM] professionals and four-year universities to identify the needs of future employers,” said Ruben Prieto, community outreach coordinator for SPC's mathematics department. “Representatives from every industry we spoke to said students just out of college did not have the necessary hands-on experience to succeed

without companies investing in further training. We wanted to make sure that we tailored our STEM programs to meet the needs of those industries.”

SPC's outreach efforts resulted in the college obtaining more than \$15 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Education Title III grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which were used to establish the Centers for Excellence in Mathematics and Science, and the Alternative Energy Laboratory on the SPC-Southwest Campus.

A 56,000-square-foot former military warehouse was renovated to house the new centers, which opened its doors in the fall of 2010. The centers provide classroom

space for 600 students and house a new research library and computer lab. The building is powered by the largest noncommercial rooftop solar power array in San Antonio.

So far, five new academic programs have been established in the centers offering associate degrees in power generation and alternative energy (PGAE), mechanical engineering, environmental science, earth sciences and natural energy resources (ESNER), and statistics with an emphasis in biology.

The programs prepare students to enter STEM fields upon graduation or continue their education at a four-year university. More programs are planned for the future.



Dr. Jo Dee Duncan, director of the Center of Excellence in Science at St. Philip's College, demonstrates the center's new equipment. *Photo by Laura Ybarra*

Student Successes

Lawton Smith had already earned a bachelor's degree and had been working at a music shop when he was laid off in 2009. Soon after his layoff, Smith saw a photo of a wind turbine in a *San Antonio Current* article featuring the PGAE program. By August he had joined the program's inaugural class.

"I've never been with another class of students so motivated and willing to be in class at 8 a.m. every single day," Smith said. "Everyone participated and genuinely enjoyed being there."

Dennis McDonough, chairman of the PGAE program, said he hasn't seen a better class of students.

"These students have a commitment to making energy

greener," McDonough said. "They aren't just looking for a job; they are looking to make a difference."

Smith, who interns with a solar power contracting company in San Antonio, plans to attend Texas State Technical College in Sweetwater to become a certified wind energy technician.

In May, Ashley McCullin became SPC's first student to graduate with an Associate of Science in ESNER degree. She also received a second associate degree in environmental science. McCullin was out of school for 10 years prior to enrolling at SPC

in 2007.

"The quality of teachers at [SPC] is why I chose this school," McCullin said. "The teachers are truly there for the students. They helped change my life. They introduced me to



St. Philip's College hosted the second annual Women in Nontraditional Occupations conference at the centers in March. *Photo courtesy St. Philip's College*



Lawton Smith discusses solar power at the centers' grand opening event in April. *Photo courtesy St. Philip's College*

new interests and helped me find scholarships to help pay for my education."

McCullin completed an internship with a geothermal energy company in June. Her next step is to earn a bachelor's degree. She has enrolled at The University of Texas at San Antonio, where she will begin studying geology in the fall.

News of the centers has reached international ears as well. In June, a group of Russian STEM professionals visited the centers to gather information on how to establish similar programs in Russia.

"The need for a skilled workforce in renewable energy fields is a truly international issue," McDonough said. "The [Russian] professionals visiting [SPC] recognize a need for similar programs in their country, and we are happy to assist in their efforts." ■



Sofia Chavira (fourth from left) told Career Ready Training Facilitator Gene Vargas (center), “You gave me the confidence to walk into an interview and get the job,” she said of her new job at Macy’s. “I was dressed for success and I was more confident than I have ever been. As soon as I get the chance I’m going back to school so I can finish what I started many years ago.” *Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions of the Coastal Bend*

Working hard to earn soft skills

Training enables participants to meet employer needs

By **Kate Hourin**

Employers in the 12-county Coastal Bend area reported that they needed workers with more “soft skills” to be successful and improve productivity. Workforce Solutions of the Coastal Bend (Coastal Bend) responded by establishing Career Ready Training classes for dislocated, unemployed, and underemployed workers this past spring.

The term “soft skills” describes a broad set of attributes needed to function in a typical work environment. They include: communication proficiency, teamwork, analytical and problem solving ability, interpersonal effectiveness, computer/technical literacy, leadership/management tools, learning skills, academic competence in reading and math, and strong work values.

“It’s amazing to see the transformation in the trainees between Monday and Thursday,” said Monika De La Garza, communications and outreach coordinator for Coastal

Bend. “Many of the trainees start off not wanting to be there. But after the four-day class, they often give testimonials about how the training has changed their lives.”

Of the 153 clients who have taken the class so far, De La Garza said 51 have accepted new jobs.

Coastal Bend solicited curricula for soft skills training using \$57,345 in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Statewide Activity funds. The Del Mar College-accredited program is delivered using digital media, which allows customization to meet employers’ specific needs.

“We are taking it to the next level for employers,” added De La Garza. “For example, the plant manager at Sherwin Alumina Company (a refinery located in Gregory) wants company engineers to take the training to become more communicative.”

Trainees are recruited based on basic WIA eligibility. Referrals also come from local independent school districts and workforce partners such as the Department of Assistive and

Rehabilitative Services, and employers. Youth also are enrolled in the training. The average class consists of 25 students ranging in age from 18 to 70.

Gene Vargas, a Career Ready Training facilitator, said that he is there to position trainees for success.

“I teach that failure is not an option,” he said. “I tell them that certain skills will get you the job but I emphasize that character and integrity will keep you there.” Vargas added that several of the students were ex-felons, and the job skill levels of his clients range from manual laborers to corporate executives.

“One student told me that he thought he knew it all,” Vargas said. “At the end of the class, he came up to me and said ‘I did not know anything; I did not have a winning attitude. Now I can sustain myself.’”

That student is now making close to \$100,000 annually at his new job as a pipeline designer.

“These students are getting jobs,” said De La Garza. “That’s the real success of this program.” ■

Young controllers take flight at air traffic control school

By Rachael Pierce

Commercial aviation is a \$40 billion industry in Texas, according to the Texas Department of Transportation. With more than 700,000 employees and \$18.1 billion in payroll output, there are plenty of opportunities for future air traffic controllers in the Lone Star State.

The first graduating class of air traffic controllers from Texas State Technical College-Waco (TSTC-Waco) will take center stage in April 2012. These 35 students hope to be part of the future workforce of air traffic control.

More than 15,000 federal air traffic controllers are employed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The FAA estimates that approximately 5,000 controllers will retire by 2020. Graduates of TSTC-Waco's air traffic control program will be among those vying to fill these vacancies to direct aircraft across the skies.

TSTC-Waco's air traffic control program consists of five semesters, where students earn 72 credit hours and graduate with an Associate Degree of Applied Science with a major in Air Traffic Management. Program instructors, like Ramon Claudio, TSTC-Waco's air traffic control assistant department chair, are retired FAA-controllers with decades of real-world experience teaching students everything they need to know to safely orchestrate hundreds of flying aircraft.

"Students are learning from people who have done it," said Claudio. "We go beyond book knowledge and teach them the realities of the system."

A typical day for Cory Vanderpool,



TSTC-Waco students Channing Belford and Brittney Watson practice their skills on a low fidelity trainer, known as the table-top simulator. TSTC-Waco instructor Al Culp provided guidance to the students as they completed their exercise. *Photo courtesy of Texas State Technical College-Waco*

a second-year student, consists of a mixture of lectures and hands-on work with simulators—tools that allow students to practice real life situations faced by controllers.

Fellow classmate Brittney Watson most enjoys her time spent on the table-top simulator, where she manually practices instructing aircraft as if she were at an actual airport.

"Since our instructors were air traffic controllers, they are sharing techniques and experiences that train us for a smooth transition into the workforce," said Watson.

TSTC-Waco prepares students for the AT-SAT, the pre-employment test administered by the FAA and taken prior to graduation. Claudio said a high score on this exam gives students a better opportunity for

getting hired by the FAA.

After being selected for a job with the FAA, students enter the FAA Academy, where they will begin their initial training before moving on to their assigned facilities. The waiting period to get hired and attend the FAA Academy can last 12 to 18 months depending on when the FAA hiring boards select qualified applicants and assign applicants to their posts, Claudio noted.

TSTC-Waco students enjoy healthy job prospects in the growing industry. According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job forecast for air traffic controllers is strong with 13-percent job growth expected between 2008-2018. ■



Patrick Newman is the new executive director of Workforce Solutions Alamo. Photo courtesy Workforce Solutions Alamo

Alamo board names new executive director

Workforce Solutions Alamo (Alamo) has a new executive director. The Board appointed Patrick



Newman to run the operations of the San Antonio-area workforce development agency.

Newman most recently worked as the workforce administrator for the Mid-Region Council of Governments of New Mexico. Previously, he has held executive-level positions for Resource Consulting Inc. and the New Mexico Department of Labor.

“Patrick has 37 years of experience in employment and training,” Alamo Board Chairman Ray Romero said. “We are looking forward to making use of that experience as we move forward in developing the area’s future workforce. Our goal is to position the Alamo area as the most desirable place to work and grow a business. Patrick’s extensive experience in program management, policy and program development, program mentoring, fiscal operations and requirements, and contract management and negotiations will be key to helping us reach that goal.”

The Board serves the 12-county Alamo workforce development region, overseeing a network of service providers and contractors through one-stop career centers

available to the 40,000 businesses and more than two million residents in the Alamo region.

Workforce Solutions Cameron awards grant to United Way

More than 1,500 children in Cameron County are benefitting from a \$500,000 grant awarded to the United Way of Southern Cameron

County’s *Success by 6* program by Workforce Solutions Cameron. This United Way early childhood literacy initiative prepares children under the age of six for elementary school.

One of the grant’s beneficiaries is Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, a non-profit organization that promotes early childhood literacy. Children living in Brownsville, Los Fresnos, Olmito, Port Isabel, San Benito, and South Padre Island are participating in this program and receive a book each month until their fifth birthday. Another program benefitting from the grant is the Children’s Book Club that offers a monthly bilingual reading session by a local celebrity reader. The Breakfast Club is the third program to receive funds from the grant. It offers parents, grandparents, and guardians the opportunity to network and share ways to educate the children at home.

Training dollars available in Upper Rio Grande

Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande (Upper Rio Grande) has funding available for its On-the-Job Training initiative. Through this program, an employer can receive reimbursement for the training that results in permanent employment for the trainee.

“The goal is to place participants in occupations that will enhance their

prospects for long-term employment, maintain or increase their wage levels, and ultimately permit them to become self-sufficient,” said Upper Rio Grande CEO Lorenzo Reyes Jr. “Grants like these have helped us put dislocated workers back to work successfully by helping them gain new skills. They were a key component when El Paso was heavily impacted by the loss of the garment industry.” The training enables workers to gain specific skills and employment competencies through exposure to an actual work setting. A total of 143 slots are available through an \$815,000 grant secured by Upper Rio Grande from the Texas Workforce Commission.

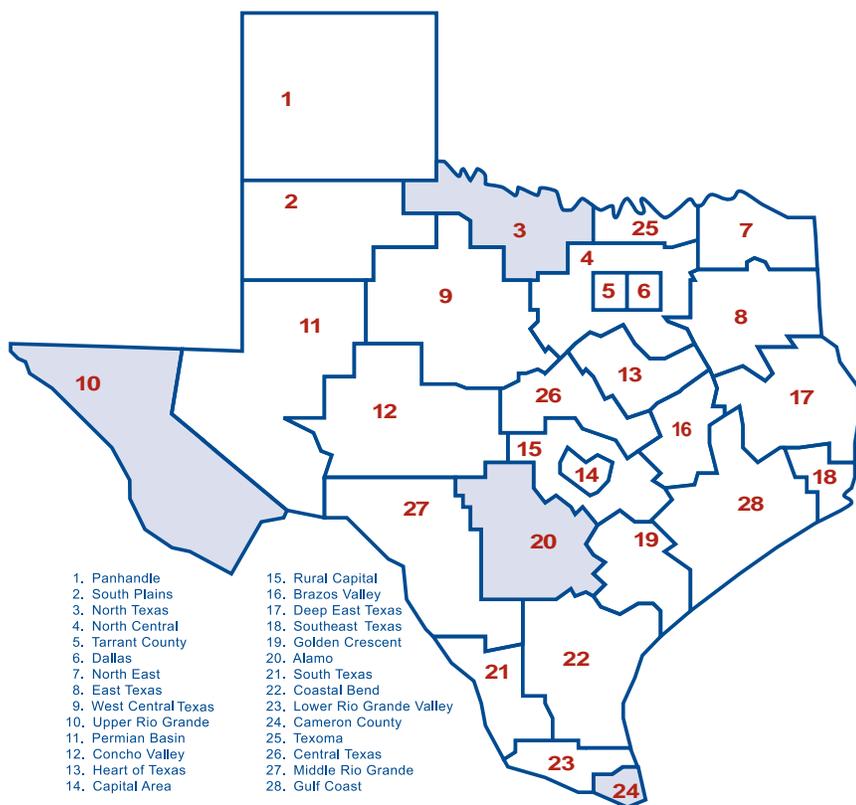
Individuals must be eligible as dislocated workers and fall into one of three priority categories: prolonged unemployed, long-term unemployed, or those who have exhausted their unemployment insurance benefits. The employer reimbursement must be based on employer size as follows: 90 percent for employers with 50 or fewer employees; 75 percent for employers with between 51 and 250 employees; and 50 percent for employers with 251 or more employees.

Interested employers should contact Upper Rio Grande at (915) 887-2600 or Job Developer Luz Romo at (915) 313-3044 or luz.romo@urgjobs.org

Work Hard-Work Smart in Workforce Solutions North Texas

A work-readiness initiative of the Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce & Industry called Work Hard-Work Smart has been funded through a \$241,000

Wagner-Peyser grant distributed by the Texas Workforce Commission. The initiative is a collaboration among Workforce Solutions North Texas (North Texas), NORTEX Regional Planning Commission, Vernon College, Wichita County, Wichita Falls ISD,



Burkburnett ISD, Iowa Park ISD, City View ISD, Electra ISD, Vernon ISD, and the chamber.

The funds will cover the salaries of a program coordinator and a clerk position who will be located at Vernon College as well as the assessment fees for participants. North Texas will provide training and support for the program. The goal is to help graduating seniors, the unemployed, and the underemployed in Wichita County to obtain the WorkKeys' National Career Readiness Certificate. The program determines work readiness by assessing skills in applied math, reading for information, and locating information.

TWC provides health careers training to GED students

This spring, Community Action Inc. launched the Foundations in Health Careers (FHC) GED program in San Marcos in partnership

with Austin Community College (ACC) and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). The 15-week program is designed for students to complete the requirements for their GED and to transition into medical training programs.

"When a student gets their GED, there is subject matter they miss by not having a four-year high school degree," said Kelly Lochman, a career counselor with Community Action. "The unique thing about this program is we provide coursework in subjects like medical terminology to firm up their content knowledge to succeed in medical training programs."

Students who successfully complete the FHC GED program receive CPR/First Aid certification, a \$200 voucher for tuition at ACC, and a \$150 cash award and then may begin a college-level training program in a career field of their choice.

Through Community Action's partnership with TWC, students also receive career development training such as résumé building, interview preparation, and understanding business culture.

The first FHC GED class finished their coursework in May and the next class will begin in August. Those interested in the program may contact Kelly Lochman at (512) 392-1161 ext. 319 for more information.

TWC Employees Recognized for Outstanding Service

Two Texas Workforce Commission employees were recognized for Outstanding Information Technology (IT) Service and Support at the Center for Digital Government's Best of Texas Awards ceremony at the Government Technology Conference Southwest in Austin in May. TWC Deputy IT Director Lisa Richardson and Project Coordinator Woody Gill received their awards at the ceremony that annually spotlights the best of state and local government IT, including re-procurements, in-house developed applications, green IT, and applications addressing internal needs.



Texas Workforce Commission Deputy IT Director Lisa Richardson (right) and Project Coordinator Woody Gill were recognized at the Government Technology Conference Southwest in Austin. Photo by TWC staff



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



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