



Workforce News Around the State

Lee College opens veterans center as part of College Credit for Heroes initiative

Lee College held the grand opening of its veteran student center in November in Baytown. The center provides a space for student veterans and active service members to receive assistance with their benefits, Department of Veterans Affairs certification, academic advising and referrals, mentoring, tutoring, financial aid, degree planning and career counseling, priority registration, admissions and transferring, and other vital resources.

Lee College received funds from the Texas Workforce Commission's College Credit for Heroes program to repurpose existing building space and hire staff for the center. The center also hosts a computer lab and student lounge facilities that will provide meeting space for academic success workshops and Campus Veterans Student Group meetings.

As part of the College Credit for Heroes program, Lee College is developing individualized education plans for veterans and service members, which will identify, develop, and support methods to maximize college credit and expedite entry into the Texas workforce for veterans and service members using prior learning assessments and credits by examination. Lee College is developing this pilot project with the intent of creating a model that may be easily replicated at other colleges in the state.

TWC sponsors high school robotics competitions

More than 3,400 high school students throughout Texas will have the opportunity to participate in high school robotics competitions this school year thanks to funding from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). The program funds are made available through the agency's contract with the Foundation for Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) in Texas to support FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) and FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) teams.

TWC originally allocated \$1 million to fund efforts to expand statewide student participation in robotics education programs in the fall of 2009.

Last year, funding from TWC supported FIRST in Texas to develop 164 new FIRST FTC teams and 23 FIRST FRC teams. In addition, the funding supported the creation of 11 new statewide or regional competitions.

This school year, 10 Texas high schools will be able to develop 40 new FRC teams and 30 new FTC teams, while existing teams will again receive funding support through TWC. In addition, three new statewide or regional competitions will be created.

The funding represents TWC's ongoing efforts to promote science, technology, engineering, and math programs for Texas students. Texas employers continue to express the need for workers with these skills as critical to their success and job creation now and in the future.

Valley boards partner for regional job fair

Employers and job seekers from across the Valley came together in November at the State Farm Arena in Hidalgo for a job fair—the Economic Resource & Career Fair 2011—hosted by Workforce Solutions Lower Rio Grande Valley (Lower Rio Grande) and Workforce Solutions Cameron (Cameron).

Approximately 4,000 job seekers attended the fair. More than 100 employers from the four-county region (Hidalgo, Willacy, Starr, and Cameron) were in attendance with 3,000 job openings ranging from entry-level to management positions. Participating companies included CBS affiliate KGBT News Channel 4, T-Mobile, and Time Warner Cable.

Job seekers had access to a wide variety of resources at the fair beyond employers and available job postings, including access to more than 30 community and grassroots organizations. A dedicated “Heroes Corner” was reserved for veterans and comprised of specific veteran-affiliated organizations that provide resources to military members and their families in the areas of health, benefits, and education.

“This was a truly regional job fair,” said Victor de Leon, public information officer for Lower Rio Grande. De Leon noted this was the first time Lower Rio Grande and Cameron had partnered for such an event.

Both Lower Rio Grande and Cameron have received overwhelmingly positive feedback about the fair from employers, job seekers, and the community. Employers have reported filling a number of positions with applicants from the job fair.

Small Business Development Information Center opens

Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande now houses the new Small Business Development Information Center in Carrizo Springs, which helps area businesses connect to oil and gas companies in the Eagle Ford Shale region.

Opened in November, the center is the result of a partnership among the University of Texas-San Antonio Institute for Economic Development's Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Rural Business Program, the South-West Texas Border SBDC Network, and the Sul-Ross State University-Rio Grande College SBDC.

Resources available at the SBDC Information Center include consulting for small businesses, workshops for area communities, and a Bid2Biz Pipeline initiative to connect oil and gas companies to area small businesses.

In addition, TWC recently hosted the Eagle Ford Symposium at Northeast Lakeview College in Universal City. The event provided information on assistance with recruiting, hiring, and training for jobs in the Eagle Ford Shale region. Workforce Solutions staff provided an overview of services to employers, including online job search engines and training grant opportunities.

Tyler Workforce programs topic at Tyler Chamber of Commerce breakfast

The Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) Scott Eychner was a keynote speaker at the recent Tyler Chamber of Commerce's 2011 Business Workshop “Sink or Swim: Surviving Employment Issues.” Eychner, manager of employment services and unemployment insurance policy and

WorkInTexas.com, spoke at the Small Business Breakfast on the topic “Understanding Workforce Programs and Getting the Most for You and Your Business.” The business workshop was for East Texas employers dealing with employment-related issues including new disability rules and social media. Approximately 130 employers and community leaders were in attendance.