



Shaping the Economy

A Monthly Newsletter from the West Central Workforce Development Board

November/December 2006

Benefits of Hiring Workers with Disabilities

(Article by Randall Presley, Disability Program Navigator, West Central Texas Workforce Development Board)

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MISSION

Our mission is to provide an effective local service delivery system to place Texans in jobs and to equip workers with skills needed to foster economic development.

Last month was Disability Employment Awareness Month. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 1/3 of adults, age 21 to 64, with a disability are employed, compared to over 3/4 of adults of the same age without a disability. Yet 80% of these adults say they want to work. Furthermore, this inequity is unchanged from 16 years ago when the Americans with Disabilities Act became law. Why are so few people with a disability employed? Commonly cited reasons include problems with transportation, inadequate support, and income restrictions imposed by SSI and SSDI. I would like to briefly address two common myths.

One common misconception is that the cost of accommodating a disabled employee is too high. The reality is that most workers do not require significant accommodations and, when they do, the accommodation is usually inexpensive. According to the U. S. Department of Labor, half of accommodations have no cost and another 1/5 cost less than \$500. For example, a desk can be raised using wooden blocks to allow a wheelchair to fit underneath. A trackball can be used along with programs already included in Windows® to allow a worker who has difficulty using a mouse and keyboard to operate a computer. When accommodations are more costly, the IRS permits tax credits up to \$15,000.

The most common misunderstanding is that coworkers or customers may feel uncomfortable around a person with a disability. A recent study from the Center for Social Development and Education and published in the January issue of *Journal of*

Vocational Rehabilitation reports that consumers overwhelmingly support businesses that hire employees with disabilities. About 9 out of 10 felt more favorable toward companies that hire the disabled and prefer doing business with them. An astounding 98% were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” after being served by a worker with a disability. Further, 91% of employees with disabled coworkers said the person’s job performance was “good” or “very good”.

Finally, I would like to make one final point. As the local labor market tightens, businesses cannot afford to overlook disabled job seekers. Most people with disabilities want to work, and many are capable with little or no accommodation. Among those employed, their supervisors tend to rate them as “average” or “above average” employees who are reliable, punctual, and not likely to abuse sick time or vacation time policies. They are generally easy to supervise and accepting of authority. Furthermore, they are loyal. According to Marriott Hotels, workers with disabilities have a 6% turnover rate, compared to 52% for other staff.

The West Central Texas Workforce Development Board recently hired a Disability Program Navigator. The Navigator can be a valuable resource to employers, and is available to answer questions about ADA and accommodations, workforce services for the disabled, Social Security work incentives, and other matters related to employing people with disabilities. If you would like more information, please call Randall Presley at (325) 795-4200.

Economic Indicators

West Central WDA				Texas				West Central WDA		
	Oct 06	Sep 06	Oct 05		Oct 06	Sep 06	Oct 05	Average Weekly Wage		
Labor Force	158,737	159,415	157,175	Labor Force	11,622,409	11,535,540	11,339,714	WDA	Texas	
Employment	152,104	152,832	150,933	Employment	11,088,131	10,995,414	10,780,179	2nd QTR 06	\$544	\$781
Unemployment Rate	6,633	6,583	6,242	Unemployment Rate	534,278	540,126	559,535	2005 Avg	\$536	\$823
	4.2	4.1	4.0		4.6	4.7	4.9	2004 Avg	\$516	\$799

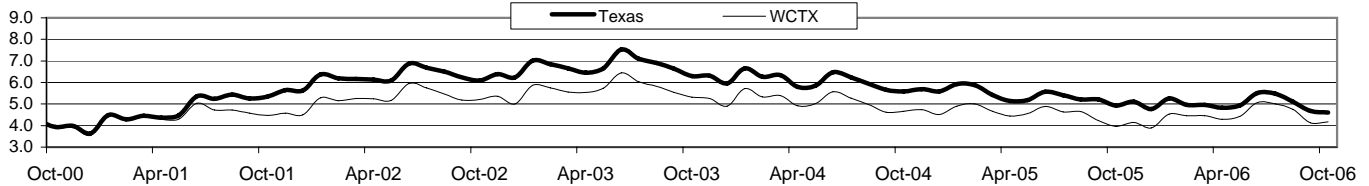
West Central Texas Workforce Development Area

October 2006

Civilian Labor Force Estimates (Not Seasonally Adjusted)

	West Central Texas WDA				Texas			
	CLF	Employed	Unemployed	Rate	CLF	Employed	Unemployed	Rate
Oct-06	158,737	152,104	6,633	4.2	11,622,409	11,088,131	534,278	4.6
Sep-06	159,415	152,832	6,583	4.1	11,535,540	10,995,414	540,126	4.7
Oct-05	157,175	150,933	6,242	4.0	11,339,714	10,780,179	559,535	4.9

Historical Unemployment Rates



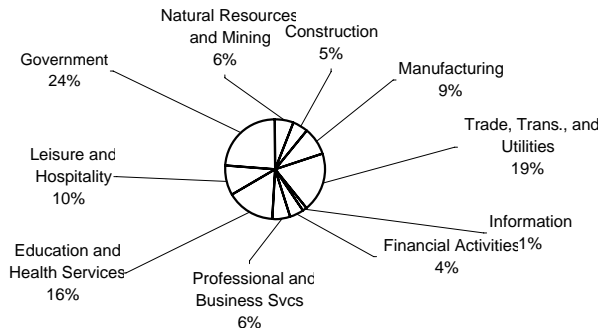
Total Claims

	Oct-06	Sep-06	Oct-05	OTY
Initial	662	412	534	128
Continued	2,215	1,991	3,365	-1,150
Continued Claims for the Week of the 12th				
Continued	519	492	669	-150

Average Weekly Wage

	WCTX	Change	Texas
2nd Qtr 2006	\$544.04	7.84	\$781.37
2005 Average	\$536.20	20.63	\$822.95
2004 Average	\$515.57		\$799.03

West Central WDA Industry Composition 2nd Quarter 2006



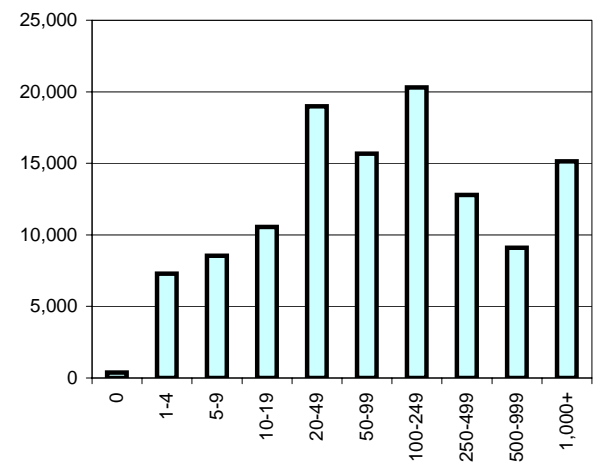
Top 10 Private Employers in the WDA 2nd Quarter 2006

3M COMPANY MANUFACTURING COMPANY
 ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
 ABILENE REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER
 AMS BUSINESS SOLUTIONS & STERLING PERSONNEL
 BROWNWOOD MEDICAL CENTER LLC
 GIRLING HEALTH CARE INC
 HENDRICK MEDICAL CENTER
 KOHLER COMPANY
 UNITED SUPERMARKETS LTD
 WAL-MART ASSOCIATES INC

NAICS COVERED EMPLOYMENT QUARTERLY DATA 2nd Quarter 2006

SUPER SECTOR	Total	Change Quarter	Year
Natural Resources & Mining	7,039	392	1,064
Construction	5,705	-64	364
Manufacturing	10,309	163	437
Trade, Trans., and Utilities	21,968	209	388
Information	1,687	10	-14
Financial Activities	5,161	103	120
Professional and Business Svcs.	6,483	158	502
Education & Health Services	17,994	-444	-231
Leisure & Hospitality	11,226	460	693
Other Services	3,539	100	-46
Federal Government	1,992	56	310
State Government	6,046	80	68
Local Government	19,454	141	143
Nonclassified & Confidential	166	40	49
TOTAL	118,769	1,404	3,847

Size Class Employment Composition 2nd Quarter 2006



Second Welding Class Wraps Up

During the summer of 2006, a consortium was formed, consisting of the City of Abilene, the Workforce Center, Cisco Junior College, and the West Central Texas Workforce Development Board, to address labor shortages in welding by a number of area businesses. A training curriculum was developed by Cisco Junior College in coordination with four local businesses, including Rentech Services, Inc., Hirschfeld Steel, Lauren Engineers & Constructors, Inc., and Robinson Fans. The training included a 120-hour express welding course, which consisted of four weeks of welding at CJC and one week of basic employment skills training at the Workforce Center. The first class of welders successfully graduated in September 2006, and all have subsequently been hired by local businesses.

Due to the success of the first class and the continual need for welders, a second class was quickly recruited, and training began on October 9th with fifteen welding students. In addition to the welding and employment skills training, a safety training component and certification has been added to the training package. Students participated in a graduation ceremony on Thursday, November 9th, at the CJC-Abilene Campus.

Interviews for graduates with Rentech Services, Hirschfeld Steel, Lauren Engineers, and Robinson Fans began on Friday, November 10th. A third class is expected to begin in mid-January. Individuals interested in a career in welding should contact the Workforce Center at (325) 795-4200. In addition, business representatives with employment opportunities for skilled welders should contact the Workforce Center Business Services Unit.

Training Funds Presented to Area Businesses

The West Central Texas Workforce Development Board is pleased to announce that Karsten Homes in Breckenridge, Transcend Services, Inc. in Abilene, and Better Machines and Manufacturing in Snyder have been named recipients of grant funds offered through the Workforce Investment Fund (WIF). The WIF was created by the Workforce Board to provide funds for customized training, upgrading skills of current employees, developing new training programs, creating new high-skill or high-wage jobs, or retraining employees for new or emerging occupations. Both Karsten Homes and Transcend Services have expanded operations into our region within the past two years, and both have previously received WIF funding for the training of new employees. The upgrade of precision machining skills required to operate state-of-the-art computer driven equipment is the focus of the \$28,000 grant awarded to Better Machines and Manufacturing, a machine shop in Snyder that services the oil industry.

Primary applicants for grant funding through the Workforce Investment Fund include small and medium-size businesses, chambers of commerce, economic development entities, or labor organizations. Grants of up to \$50,000 are awarded quarterly through a competitive application process, and the deadline for the next grant cycle is December 31, 2006. Interested individuals may download funding criteria and application forms from the West Central Texas Workforce Center website at <http://www.workforcesystem.org/business.htm>. Questions regarding the Workforce Investment Fund may be directed to Robert Puls, Business Services Coordinator for the West Central Texas Workforce Board, at 325-795-4330. E-mail requests should be sent to workforce@workforcesystem.org.

Manufacturing Skills Standards Project Launched

On November 15, 2005, the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC) launched a new certification system designed to prepare a generation of American workers to meet the challenges of globalization. The system will assess worker skills and knowledge based on industry-validated standards for all manufacturing sectors, leading workers to the nationally recognized certification of "Manufacturing Production Technician." Assessment is provided in four modules: manufacturing processes and production, safety, quality practices and continuous improvement, and maintenance awareness. Workers may be trained and certified in each of the individual modules, as well as the 4-module assessment, which results in the "Manufacturing Production Technician" designation.

Benefits of the MSSC skills certification for employers are numerous. The certification process will enhance the attractiveness and professionalism of manufacturing jobs, thereby aiding manufacturers in recruitment and retention efforts. In addition, recruitment and training costs for employers are diminished, as workers exhibit higher levels of productivity and responsiveness. As increased numbers of workers are certified, a stronger national pipeline of motivated and qualified workers is built. Additional information on the skills certification may be obtained by visiting www.msscusa.org.

The West Central Texas Workforce Development Board is working with area manufacturers to implement a pilot project, utilizing the MSSC certification process and curriculum, to train and assess entry-level workers in basic foundational skills required to enter a career in manufacturing. A survey process is currently being conducted to determine worker demand in manufacturing, interest levels of local employers, and specific training requirements. If the pilot is successful, the Board will explore additional funding sources for expansion of the project. For more information, contact Nancy Smith, Community Relations Coordinator, West Central Texas Workforce Development Board, at (325) 795-4306 or by e-mail at nancy.smith@workforcesystem.org.



WEST CENTRAL TEXAS WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT BOARD
400 Oak St. * Abilene, Texas 79602

The Workforce Center is an equal opportunity employer. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request in individuals with disabilities. For TDD call 1-800-735-2898 or voice accessible communication at 1-800-735-2988