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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.

Gas price cloud has silver lining?

By Remelle Farrar, Economic Development in Knox County

While we will publicly continue to moan and groan, along with everyone else, about the price of gas, many rural community leaders are quietly sharing some small private smiles, having discovered a silver lining to this particular cloud. That silver lining is unexpectedly benefiting local business owners. Predictably, the accelerating cost of fuel has increased the costs of many goods and services in rural areas, creating an additional hardship for small business owners who routinely lose local trade to the Wal-Mart or Home Depot 35 or 80 miles down the highway. The surprise? Even with higher freight and delivery costs factored in, local grocery, hardware, auto parts, feed & supply and garden stores are finding themselves more competitive with the box store down the road than they've been in decades. And, as the cost of driving continues to rise with no ceiling in sight, the trend to shop at home appears to be growing steadily.

It seems folks who previously would leave town to save 15 cents on a sack of sugar are now quite happy to pay 30 cents more for that same sack of sugar. Their neighbors, who routinely assumed the water hose at the chain store was cheaper than the one in their home town, are not only comparing before driving now, but much less likely to carp about the extra dollar they have to pay to buy it from the local guy. And, the assumption that you could buy your new tires, get them rotated and have the oil changed cheaper out of town is being questioned. Rural community business owners relate that some of the cost savings over driving is real, some perceived, and some was always there, consumers just didn't look at it until the cost of filling up the Suburban became painful.

Hometown grocery stores saw an increase in business early in the gas crises. First they reported the return of customers they hadn't seen in years, except for the quick loaf of bread or carton of milk right at closing time. Local consumers, whose reason for going out of town was often the bigger selection, seem to be able to get by with fewer brand choices and a smaller frozen food case when disposable dollars are so impacted by the cost of driving. While happy to have the business, most store owners didn't get too excited—people are notoriously fickle and can still stock up on the favored frozen, dehydrated, and canned staples with infrequent trips to “warehouse” suppliers.

The more unexpected and profitable development is in the big business of supplying local cafes and restaurants. One thing our smaller communities have in common with the big city is that no one seems to eat at home anymore. Unfortunately, for the local grocer more and more of those local eateries had over the last few years begun to have all their “food” items delivered from suppliers like Ben E. Keith. Apparently “chefs” don't cook from scratch that much anymore either! Supplier imposed surcharges on their more remote and/or smaller customers are dramatically increasing the costs of this convenience. The 20% increase on the 50-pound sack of flour at the grocery store, compared to the 75-100% increase to have that flour delivered, sure made the local grocer look better. And,

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Economic Indicators

West Central WDA			Texas			West Central WDA			
	May 08	Apr 08	May 07	May 08	Apr 08	May 07	Average Weekly Wage		
Labor Force	158,206	157,740	155,895	11,675,134	11,628,776	11,407,592	WCT	Texas	
Employment	152,413	152,548	150,417	11,174,999	11,179,976	10,952,039	4th QTR 07	\$642	\$910
Unemployment Rate	5,793	5,192	5,478	500,135	448,800	455,553	2007 Avg	\$593	\$871
	3.7	3.3	3.5	4.3	3.9	4.0	2006 Avg	\$560	\$826

West Central Texas Workforce Development Area

May 2008

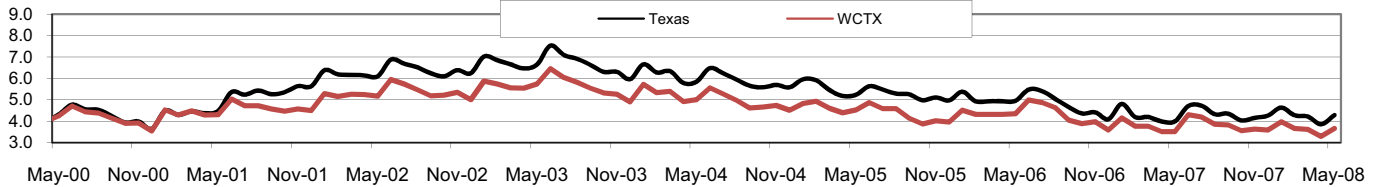
West Central Texas WDA

	CLF	Employed	Unemployed	Rate
May-08	158,206	152,413	5,793	3.7
Apr-08	157,740	152,548	5,192	3.3
May-07	155,895	150,417	5,478	3.5

Texas

	CLF	Employed	Unemployed	Rate
	11,675,134	11,174,999	500,135	4.3
	11,628,776	11,179,976	448,800	3.9
	11,407,592	10,952,039	455,553	4.0

Historical Unemployment Rates



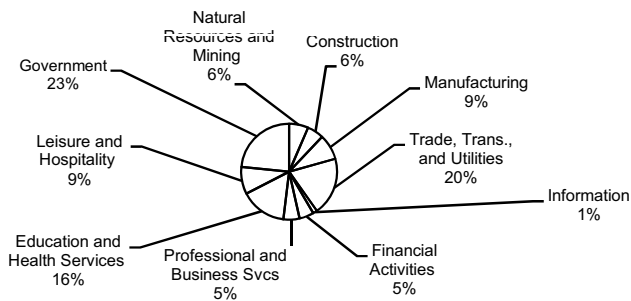
Total Claims

	May-08	Apr-08	May-07	OTY
Initial	618	622	615	3
Continued	2,095	2,242	2,468	-373
Continued Claims for the Week of the 12th				
Continued	591	614	545	46

Average Weekly Wage

	WCTX	Change	Texas
4th Qtr 2007	\$641.48	48.83	\$910.02
2007 Average	\$592.66	32.90	\$871.60
2006 Average	\$559.76		\$826.29

West Central WDA Industry Composition 4th Quarter 2007



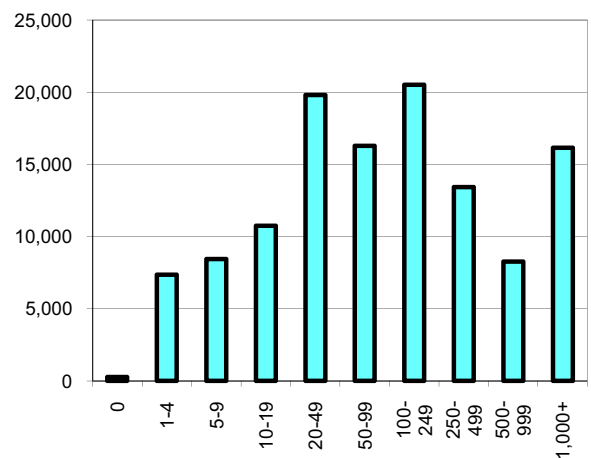
Top 10 Private Employers in the WDA 4th Quarter 2007

3M COMPANY
 ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
 ABILENE REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER
 BRUMLEY PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYER
 GIRLING HEALTH CARE INC
 HEALTH CARE SERVICE CORP
 HENDRICK MEDICAL CENTER
 KOHLER CO
 UNITED SUPERMARKETS LLC
 WAL-MART ASSOCIATES INC

NAICS COVERED EMPLOYMENT QUARTERLY DATA 4th Quarter 2007

SUPER SECTOR	Total	Change Quarter	Year
Natural Resources & Mining	7,613	546	993
Construction	6,549	24	760
Manufacturing	10,155	16	120
Trade, Trans., and Utilities	22,946	499	1,140
Information	1,733	-55	36
Financial Activities	5,736	-91	687
Professional and Business Svcs.	6,431	-182	377
Education & Health Services	18,236	71	-85
Leisure & Hospitality	10,770	-285	186
Other Services	3,419	23	136
Federal Government	1,964	-3	-19
State Government	5,953	-54	-138
Local Government	19,646	1,139	223
Nonclassified & Confidential	65	-8	-300
TOTAL	121,216	1,640	4,116

Size Class Employment Composition 4th Quarter 2007



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retailers tell me, if you're back in the store anyway, that fresh trimmed beef, at the same price as the frozen box you can't see the bottom layer of, looks mighty good. For students looking for summer employment, the local grocer needing an extra sacker, an extra stocker and another checker this year means a 100% increase in the number of kids who get a job.

The trend to shop at home first doesn't stop at the grocery store. Local mechanics and auto suppliers have reported increased demand for routine maintenance, interest in buying tires, oil, floor mats, leather cleaner, flashlight batteries and other items routinely purchased for years on trips to discount stores. Beyond cars, calls for service professionals of all kinds are up. With out-of-town firms, even Maytag and Sears, charging higher and higher trip fees, demand for the few small town repair men, plumbers and electricians is overwhelming. The increasing demand coupled with the sheer decline in numbers of these blue collar heroes, as fewer and fewer young people train for technical careers, is driving up the value of service related businesses. Rural citizens are learning, first hand, why *US News and World Report's* new study, on the best careers for the future, suggests that even if you have a college degree you might want to train for a blue collar job. It asks, "The plumber, the air conditioning repair man, the locksmith when you lock the keys in the car, who else can charge a \$100 an hour and have people gladly pay it?" Communities are recruiting technicians the way they used to recruit doctors.

Local feed and seed stores say demand for garden seed and supplies, pots and plants is way up. The rare purveyor of fishing supplies still in business locally, reported traffic is also up with folks talking about staying close to home, fishing, gardening, maybe setting up a sprinkler in the back yard for the kids. Families are filling the ranch lodges and country Bed & Breakfasts as people are spending vacation time in rural areas, either in lieu of traveling cross country or to avoid having to drive many miles from one attraction to the next in larger cities. Numbers are way up at the local swimming pools with rentals for private parties on the increase.

Taken on an individual basis the impacts may seem small, but cumulatively the increased interest in shopping and finding services close to home has had some dramatic impacts. Rural communities, especially those at least 30 miles from any larger town, are showing substantial increases in sales tax and hotel motel tax revenue. More summer jobs are available for students. Service companies are offering long-term employment at competitive wages, for those with technical skills, and even on-the-job training in an effort to meet the growing demand. It won't be politically correct to say so, but, for the small town, the increasing cost of travel to the metro area pays off.

Your 2 cents may be worth 50 Dollars

We at Workforce Solutions value your opinion and are willing to pay for it. Please use the link below to complete an online survey about the newsletter and add your name to a drawing for a \$50 Gift Card. To be eligible for the drawing, you must complete the survey by 4:00 pm on July 11, 2008.

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB227YMKL528U>



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Brown Bag to Address Retiring Workers

The following story was shared at a seminar in Houston last November. A worker retired from a plant in Sweetwater. He was replaced by a much younger worker but his old machine stopped working. The company reviewed the manual but the machine still would not function. The manager called on a repairman but the repairman could not get the machine to work either. Finally, the manager called the now retired machinist who said, "That machine never worked right. You have to reach under it and giggle the wire a little bit. Then it starts right up."

More than 25% of American workers will reach retirement age by 2010. Companies are not just losing workers; they are losing knowledge unless plans are made today to capture that knowledge before it walks out the door. Many businesses try to lure older workers to stay a little longer with flexible schedules or part time work. Others use technology to fill the void. Still other businesses encourage mentoring and apprenticeships. Sadly, however, most companies are unprepared for the loss of knowledge and experience that is inevitably coming.

If you would like more information about capturing the knowledge of retiring workers, you are invited to attend a brown bag lunch on July 24, 2008. Locations for the Brown Bag are Workforce Solutions in Abilene, Western Texas College in Snyder, Winters High School in Winters, the Brownwood ISD Administration Building in Brownwood, and TSTC in Breckenridge. The cost is only \$10. Call Robert Puls or Steve Collins, Business Development Consultants, at (325) 795-4200 for more information.