



Our Mission is to assist employers in acquiring and retaining a qualified workforce.

October 2001

Health Forum

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Workforce Connection

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▶ Training That's Too Good To Be True? Not So!

While the adage "Too Good to Be True" may be true in most cases, according to local business leaders, the adage does not apply in the case of the Skills Development Fund. Businesses are forming partnerships with local colleges and technical schools in creating customized training for organizations through the Skills Development Fund.



*Pictured left to right back row: David Jones, Shane Schneider, Diana Hartmann.
Left to right front row: Lisa Sanchez, Lisbeth Williams, Linda Thompson.*

"The Skills Development Fund grant serves as an excellent example of business and government partnering for the future. We certainly appreciate the commitment the State of Texas and local colleges have demonstrated to help us ensure that we have the trained employees that are needed to stay competitive in the marketplace," commented Shane Schneider, Communications Administrator, Bandag, Inc.

"I see where it has built self esteem. A happy associate is a good associate. This program is a great value and has addressed some work issues that have benefited and improved our associates' skills, thus improved work. This program is a great value — you can't beat the price. It has been a win-win situation for our company and its associates," Diana Hartmann, CEO, Torco, Inc., explained.

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► Health & Human Services Forum: Finding Common Ground

E ighty-six representatives from local Health and Human Services agencies recently met at the Abilene Civic Center to discuss common issues and challenges. The purpose of the forum was to not only discuss common issues and challenges but also discuss resources available among various agencies.

“It was a great opportunity for us to recognize our common needs. Many of us are dealing with the same issues. It was wonderful for us to help get away from just ‘your issue’ or ‘my issue’ but for us to realize that we could address ‘our issues,’” commented Robbie Plummer, community relations coordinator for the Betty Hardwick MHMR Center. Forum topics included CHIP and other types of insurance, elderly care, adult, and teenage issues.

Other agencies attending the forum included the Area Agency on Aging, Region 14 Education Service Center, ECI/Advancing Babies Chances, Texas Department of Health, Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, Mental Health Association, Texas Commission for the Blind, West Central Texas Council of Governments and the West Central Texas Workforce.

Because of the successful turnout, plans are being made to hold a Health and Human Services forum next year.

■ *For further information, please contact either Robbie Plummer 690-5105 or Kevin Hull 795-4309.*

► Training That’s Too Good To Be True? Not So!

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“This program has helped our employees better equip themselves to perform the vital functions of their job. The Workforce Center has been instrumental in making this so successful,” mentioned David Jones, Human Resource Director, Ab-Tex Beverage Corporation.

“Our people must possess cutting edge technical skills. The technical training provided by TSTC and Cisco Junior College has given us the ability to shape a better future for everyone,” stated Linda Thompson, Human Resources/Safety Manager, Zoltek Industries.

Ab-Tex Beverage Corporation, Bandag, Inc., Torco, Inc., Fehr Foods, and Crown Cork and Seal are just a few companies that make up the Abilene Manufacturing Consortium (AMC). The AMC was created to examine common workforce problems and provide answers for companies in the Abilene area. Earlier this year, the AMC received a grant through the Skills Development Fund to assist in training for specific skills. Training consists of welding, industrial mechanics, painting, related literacy and soft skills, computer skills and identified Work Keys skill levels.

■ *For additional information regarding the Skills Development Fund, contact Evangelina Guerra, 795-4314.*

► At-Will Employment: A Closer Look

The doctrine of at-will employment states that, absent a contractual or statutory provision to the contrary, the employer or the employee may terminate the employment relationship at any time. Employees, however, are not wholly unprotected from an employer's decision to terminate their employment. The employer's right to discharge an at-will employee is limited in several ways, most notably by public policy concerns and various federal and state statutes.

The Texas Supreme Court carved out a narrow public policy exception to the at-will doctrine. Under this exception an employer may not discharge an employee for refusing to commit an illegal act. The refusal must be the sole reason for the employee's discharge, and the illegal act must be one that carries criminal penalties.

Numerous federal and state statutes also regulate the employment relationship. Though they do not specifically restrict employment at-will, these statutes preclude an employer from terminating or taking adverse action against an employee for a variety of reasons. Thus, the applicability of the at-will doctrine becomes less relevant. An illustrative, but non-exhaustive list of commonly raised statutory claims includes discrimination based on: race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy, disability, age, medical conditions, unionization activities, jury service, political activities, or military service. Harassment based on these factors is also prohibited. Additionally, the laws provide extensive protection from retaliation against an employee who invokes one of these statutes or participates in related proceedings, as well as making reports to regulatory agencies such as OSHA, or filing workers' compensation claims.

While employers still enjoy a certain amount of protection under the at-will doctrine, the better practice is to have some documented reason for disciplining or terminating an employee. This documentation is extremely important should the employer have to defend against an administrative or legal complaint from a current or former employee.

■ *Article by Vianei Lopez Robinson and Carolyn Foster
Attorneys, Robinson Law Firm*

► Lessons From Southwest Airlines

As our country begins to rebound from the devastating events of September 11, the airline industry continues to feel negative effects except one -- Southwest Airlines. To date, Southwest has not laid off one person or missed one flight.

"What is it about Southwest Airlines that makes it different from other airlines?" Southwest Airlines has a long history of exceptional customer service, cost effective rates, and employee loyalty. Employee retention is no accident. Southwest has uncovered the key elements of retaining a quality workforce. Actually the factors that lead to retaining a quality workforce can be measured by way of an instrument created by the Workforce Center in Abilene, Texas.

■ *If you would like to know more about workshops that help employers find ways to retain a quality workforce, contact Ben Gray 795-4221.*

► Workforce Connection

Workforce Connection is a quarterly publication distributed the second month of each quarter for employers in our region at no cost. *Workforce Connection* is a publication of the Workforce Business Solutions Team, part of the Workforce Center of West Central Texas. The views and articles presented herein do not necessarily represent the policies or the endorsement of the Texas Workforce Commission, the Workforce Center of West Central Texas, or the Workforce Development Board. Articles appearing in the legal section are intended only as a discussion and overview for employers. Material in *Workforce Connection* is not copyrighted and may be reproduced.

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